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CULTURAL CHINA 2020

The Contemporary China Centre Review

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Edited by

Séagh Kehoe and Gerda Wielander

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Contents

Introduction	1
<i>Séagh Kehoe and Gerda Wielander</i>	
1. Fashion, Beauty, and Nation	5
1.0 Introduction	
<i>Séagh Kehoe</i>	5
1.1 Beautifying Uyghur Bodies: Fashion, ‘Modernity’, and State Power in the Tarim Basin	
<i>Timothy Grose</i>	9
1.2 Karaoke Bar Hostesses and Japan-Korea Wave in Postsocialist China: The Politics of Fashion, Class Hierarchy, and Transgression	
<i>Tiantian Zheng</i>	15
1.3 Punk Culture and Its Fashion in China	
<i>Jian Xiao</i>	18
1.4 Cosmetic Surgery, Flower Boys, and Soft Masculinity in China	
<i>Wen Hua</i>	21
2. Religion and Spirituality	25
2.0 Introduction	
<i>Gerda Wielander</i>	25
2.1 Religion, Economy, and the Social Good: Reflections from Tibet	
<i>Jane Caple</i>	29
2.2 Names from God: The Power of Protestant Names in China	
<i>Mark McLeister</i>	32
2.3 Migration, Faith, and Belonging in Urban Hui Communities	
<i>David R. Stroup</i>	36
2.4 Out of the Margins: The Rise of Religious Charity in China	
<i>Caroline Fielder</i>	40
3. Music, Identity, and Community	45
3.0 Introduction	
<i>Paul Kendall</i>	45

3.1 Performing Devotion: Revitalised ‘Red Songs,’ Choral Flash Mobs, and National Identity <i>Sheng Zou</i>	48
3.2 Rethinking Hong Kong Identity through Cantopop: The 1980s as an Example <i>Yiu-Wai Chu</i>	52
3.3 Tibetan Popular Music: Politics and Complexities <i>Anna Morcom</i>	54
3.4 Music in the Disciplinary Regimes of Xinjiang’s ‘Anti-Extremism’ Campaign <i>Rachel Harris</i>	59
4. Representations of ‘China’ in Britain	65
4.0 Introduction <i>Cangbai Wang and Gerda Wielander</i>	65
4.1 Representations of China in Historical Children’s Texts <i>Shih-Wen Sue Chen</i>	68
4.2 Dire yet Diverse: Desperate Diaspora in Jenny Lu’s <i>The Receptionist</i> (2016) <i>Flair Donglai Shi</i>	72
4.3 <i>The Silent Traveller</i> and Sadlers Wells (1942) <i>Anne Witchard</i>	76
4.4 Representations of China in <i>The Penguin New Writing</i> (1940–1950): How Chinese Writers Shaped Responses to China <i>Tessa Thorniley</i>	79
5. Heritage and Memory	85
5.0 Introduction <i>Giulio Verdini</i>	85
5.1 Grassroots Values and Local Cultural Heritage in China <i>Harriet Evans</i>	89
5.2 ‘When It Comes to Intangible Cultural Heritage, Everyone Is Always Happy’: Some Thoughts on the Chinese Life of a UNESCO Convention <i>Philipp Demgenski</i>	92
5.3 Ruins on Ruins: Forgetting, Commemorating, and Re-Forgetting the Third Front <i>Paul Kendall</i>	96
5.4 Complex Collections, Contentious Memories: Reflections on the Jianchuan Museum Cluster <i>Lisheng Zhang</i>	99

6. Language Politics	103
6.0 Introduction	
<i>Séagh Kehoe</i>	103
6.1 China's Minority Language Rights: No Bulwark Against Upcoming Change	
<i>Alexandra Grey</i>	107
6.2 Linguistic Hierarchies and Mandarin Promulgation: An Excerpt from <i>Dialect and Nationalism in China, 1860–1960</i>	
<i>Gina Anne Tam</i>	112
6.3 The Hidden Language Policy of China's Research Evaluation Reform	
<i>Race MoChridhe</i>	117
6.4 War of Words and Gender: Pronominal Feuds of the Republican Period and the Early PRC	
<i>Coraline Jortay</i>	122
7. Covid-19	129
7.0 Introduction	
<i>How Wee Ng and Séagh Kehoe</i>	129
7.1 Celebrity Politics in Covid-19 China: 'Celebrities Can't Save the Country'	
<i>Jian Xu and Elaine Jeffreys</i>	132
7.2 Mediated Menstruation: A Gender Perspective in the Time of Coronavirus	
<i>Fan Yang</i>	137
7.3 The 'Wounded Weanling': An Introduction to Daofu, the Epicentre of the Coronavirus Epidemic in the Tibetan Regions of China	
<i>Sonam Lhundrop</i>	140
7.4 Reflections on the Racialised Discourse Surrounding Covid-19	
<i>Sam Phan</i>	144
8. Chinese Propaganda Posters	149
8.0 Introduction	
<i>Harriet Evans</i>	149
8.1 The Chinese Visual Arts Project: Graduate Work in Records and Archives	
<i>Freja Howat</i>	154
8.2 Women Model Workers and the Duty of Happiness in Chinese Propaganda Posters	
<i>Maria-Caterina Bellinetti</i>	159

8.3 A Throw Back to School Days

Cassie Lin

162

Editors and Contributors

167

Introduction

Séagh Kehoe and Gerda Wielander

Welcome to *Cultural China*, a unique annual publication for up-to-date, informed, and accessible commentary about Chinese and Sinophone languages, cultural practice and production, and its critical analysis. *Cultural China* is published by the Contemporary China Centre at the University of Westminster and builds on our weekly blog, launched in October 2019. It is structured around a selection of articles that speak with particular relevance, originality, and insight into the year under review, and that collectively provide an annual snapshot of what we refer to as Cultural China.

For many readers, our reference to Cultural China will call to mind philosopher Tu Weiming's famous essay *Cultural China: The Periphery and the Centre* (1991). Cultural China, according to Tu, comprised of three symbolic universes; the first consisting of societies predominantly populated by ethnic and cultural Chinese, such as mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Singapore; the second of Chinese diaspora, or Chinese communities who have settled throughout the world; and the third of individuals, such as scholars, journalists, businesspeople, and writers (implicitly understood as non-Chinese by Tu at the time), trying to understand China intellectually and bringing their conceptions of China to their own communities. In Tu's conception, mainland China constituted the centre of a Sinocentric order, while all other elements of his symbolic universes made up the periphery. Writing in 1991, Tu claimed that 'the Centre no longer has the ability, insight, or legitimate authority to dictate

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the agenda for Cultural China.’ However, in his understanding, all constituent elements of the symbolic universes shared an interest in and commitment to reviving a declining cultural core.

Cultural China is a much critiqued and justifiably contested concept. Scholars have drawn attention to the concept’s essentialising and hegemonic qualities given its foundation in Confucian ideals, ‘common awareness’, ‘common ancestry’ and ‘shared cultural background’, and its subsequent wholesale inclusion or rejection of all those who are deemed to fall inside or outside those parameters (Ang 1998; Chow 1998; Chun 1996; Choy 2007; Lo 2005; Shih 2007). They further critique Tu’s image of a periphery, unaffected by its embeddedness in multiple and distinct grounded contexts around the globe (Chun 2017; Dirlik 1996) that might rescue and revive a declining Sinocentric cultural core. Thirty years since the publication of Tu’s essay, much has also changed in geopolitical terms, not least the People’s Republic reaffirmation of its position of centrality through vastly enhanced economic and military power. Tu’s observation, in 1991, on China’s often ‘negligible’ position in the international discourse no longer applies. Not only has ‘the centre’ reasserted its position in relation to the ‘periphery’, not least through controversial legislation that attempts to extend the PRC’s arm beyond its borders, but China has also shifted from the periphery to the centre of international power constellations.

Other terms to describe and analyse the various transnational flows, networks, and interconnectivities amongst Chinese peoples and communities around the world include ‘Overseas Chinese,’ ‘the Chinese diaspora,’ ‘China, broadly defined,’ ‘chiglobalisation’ (Jia 2009), ‘Greater China’ and ‘the Sinophone.’ Among these, Shu-Mei Shih’s concept of the Sinophone has been the most embraced in the Humanities. It critiques what Shih argues to be the homogenising orders underpinning other terms, which base themselves on notions of fixed identity, China-centrism, and the hegemonic call of Chineseness that ‘bind[s] the diasporic to the so-called homeland’ (2011, 713).

Our use of ‘Cultural China’ is a critical rather than deferential reference to Tu Weiming. Taking a cultural studies-based approach, it is a term we choose to express our focus on Chinese and Sinophone languages, cultural practice and production, and its critical analysis, from geographical areas, societies, groups, and individuals not confined by the borders of a nation state. Focusing primarily—though not exclusively—on the less attention grabbing, less hyperbolic, less over-powering developments and considerations across Chinese and Sinophone worlds, our use of ‘Cultural China’ signals our critique of all kinds of hegemonic discourse while acknowledging the now inescapable orbit of the PRC, whether discursive or otherwise. Taking our cue from Ien Ang (1998), Rey Chow (1998), Shu-mei Shih (2007, 2011), Deborah Madsen (2011) and Alvin Wong (2018), our ‘Cultural China’ is informed by a diverse range of positions including feminism, post-colonialism, communitarianism, and religious pluralism, to name but a few.

Cultural China is unique and distinctive in its approach. Our aim is to promote interdisciplinary dialogue and debate about the social, cultural, political, and historical dynamics that inform life in Cultural China today, offering academics, activists, practitioners, and politicians a key reference with which to situate current events in and relating to Cultural China in a wider context and to better inform their associated engagements and policy-making practices. Given the importance of the PRC, as a state and geopolitical power whose position has ramifications across the world, it is perhaps understandable that so much writing and analysis on China and the Sinophone emanates from the social sciences, and certainly the type of research that finds its way to audiences beyond academia appears preoccupied with the dominant and by now unoriginal question around the continuity or sustainability of ‘China’s rise’. We offer a different perspective. With this annual collection we want to aid the critical understanding of Cultural China from the field of the Humanities, concerned, by definition, with what it means to be human and expressions of this human-kind in different social and cultural contexts.

2020 was an unprecedented year for Cultural China. It started with the outbreak of Covid-19 in Wuhan, which soon spread around the world and led to a surge of racism and xenophobia against people of pan-Asian heritage (Yeh 2021). Beyond the headlines of Covid-19, 2020 will be remembered for much more. It was the year of in which the mass detention, surveillance, and everyday violence against the Uyghurs and other Muslim minorities across China’s northwest continued, and of major protests in Inner Mongolia against proposed changes to language rights. In Taiwan, it was the year of Tsai Ing-wen’s landslide election win against the Kuomintang, while in Hong Kong, the brutal National Security Law came into effect, making it easier to punish protesters and reducing the city’s autonomy. And perhaps less remembered, 2020 was also the year of Taiwan hosting the world’s biggest in-person Pride parade, Singapore’s ‘hawker culture’ being added to the UNESCO list of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, the death of acclaimed writer Yu Lihua, who was known for her nuanced portraits of Chinese émigré in post-war America and the PRC’s first independent Mars mission. And the list goes on!

The articles in this Review speak to this turbulent year that was 2020 as it unfolded across Cultural China. They are organised across eight sections, each of which is introduced by academics from the University of Westminster’s Contemporary China Centre. Thematically, the sections range from celebrity culture, fashion, and beauty, to religion and spirituality, via language politics, heritage, and music. The sections on representation of China in Britain and the Westminster Chinese Visual Arts Project reflect our particular location and home. The special introductions contextualise each section and speak to the articles’ significance to contemporary Cultural China in 2020. The disproportionate focus on the PRC in this year’s Review, in contrast to our stated aims, reflects in large part the original intention of the blog, which sought to

contribute to ongoing discussion and promote interdisciplinary dialogue about the social, cultural, political, and historical dynamics that inform life in the PRC today. As the blog evolved and the idea for this book began to take shape, we realised the importance of probing into what we mean by ‘China’ and our own critical positionality as researchers in relation to this. Many of the articles in this book demonstrate the inescapability of the PRC, but they also draw attention to the multiple Chinese and Sinophone cultural practices that exist within, across, and beyond national borders.

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CHAPTER I

Fashion, Beauty, and Nation

1.0 Introduction

Séagh Kehoe

2020 was the year of ‘China Chic’ (*guochao* 国潮). Coined by social media users, ‘China chic’ literally translates as ‘national tide’ and refers to the rise of domestic fashion and cosmetic brands that incorporate ‘traditional Chinese elements’ into their designs. The term, which for a while even appeared in lists as the 2020’s ‘word of the year’, originally referred to homegrown streetwear brands but has since been applied to fashion products more broadly. It reflects, as Chinese state media frequently mention, a growing enthusiasm for ‘national culture’ and, in direct reference to Xi Jinping’s exhortations, ‘a stronger cultural confidence’ (Chen 2021).

As part of the shift from ‘Made in China’ to ‘Designed in China’, ‘China Chic’ follows a series of similar trends in recent years across the PRC. In 2018, for instance, models for sportswear brand Li-Ning paraded down the catwalk at the New York Fashion Week in the colours of the PRC’s national flag with ‘China Li-Ning’ (*Zhongguo Lining* 中国李宁) emblazoned across their tracksuits (Hales 2018). In November 2019, hundreds queued for hours in Guangzhou to purchase a pair of Air Force 1 ‘Black Silk’ sneakers by Hong Kong-based fashion brand CLOT. The sneakers, produced in collaboration with Nike and Fragment Design, featured ‘traditional Chinese-style patterns’ and followed a similar style from the year before in a Terracotta Warriors design (Xinhua

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2019). Meanwhile, the *Hanfu* 汉服 movement, which started in 2003 as an online craze with the aim of revitalizing the wearing of Han Chinese ethnic clothing, continues to boom (Dzidzovic, Zhou, and Leung 2019).

The emergence of such trends draws our attention to the various ways in which fashion, beauty, and nation intersect. Whether in the case of clothes, hairstyles, or make-up, sartorial and cosmetic practices have played an important role in the production, maintenance, and projection of ‘normal’, idealised and/or improved national subjects, often in deeply gendered, classed, and ethnicised ways. In Chinese Studies, this has been richly explored in several recent studies across a range of contexts, including the beauty economy (Yang 2011), Mao-era clothing (Chen 2001), fashion-making in the diaspora (Ling and Segre-Reinach (Eds.) 2018), and online fashion cultures (Liao 2019). Work of this kind offers an opportunity to consider how, as Maxwell (2019) explains, individuals may be forbidden, permitted, or even obliged to wear particular forms of clothing or cosmetics, and can reveal much about how the ‘Chinese nation’ is imagined. However, fashion and beauty practices can be more than simply top-down directives, and can work to negotiate, resist, and remake national norms and ideals.

The articles in this section explore these issues in the case of the PRC. Across a wide range of contexts, they examine the everyday practices of wearing, discarding, producing, consuming, and designing fashion and beauty, with particular attention to how these issues variously construct, contest, and negotiate a national Chinese identity.

In 2020, nowhere was the intersection between fashion and nation more acutely illuminated than in the case of Xinjiang. In July 2020, human rights campaigners issued a statement criticising many of the world’s biggest fashion brands for purchasing cotton from the region, which the coalition argued made them complicit in the forced labour of and human rights violations against the Uyghur people (Kelly 2019). This was strenuously denied by the Chinese state and dismissed across state media as an attack by ‘anti-China forces’ (Liu and Zhang 2020). These claims resurfaced in April 2021 and resulted in an enormous outpouring of support for Xinjiang-produced cotton across social media in the PRC, calls for a boycott of western apparel brands, and a number of PRC fashion brands and designers proudly confirming the use of Xinjiang cotton in their products (Friedman and Paton 2021).

Consumer nationalism is one way in which the intersection between fashion and nation in the case of Xinjiang manifests, but there are many others. As Leibold and Grose (2016) have argued, the Islamic veil has been at the heart of many of the Chinese state’s campaigns to control and standardise Uyghur dress and has also become an important symbol of ethnonational resistance, religious faith, and global Islamic haute culture. As explored by Tim Grose’s article in this section, the state’s attempts to use fashion and beauty norms as a way to discipline and transform the appearance of Uyghur women through legislation, campaigns, staged public fashion shows, and even a ‘Beauty Parlour

and Hair Salon' initiative to promote particular ideas about modernity while also identifying pious and Turkic standards of beauty as deviant.

Across the PRC, the regulation of bodies through fashion and beauty ideals upholds and promotes the state's political and economic objectives in many ways. While in Mao's era, beauty and fashion were frowned upon as frivolous and decadent, in contrast, today they are key sites in the development of consumer capitalism. As Yang (2011, 335–6) argues, this is particularly true for female bodies, youth, beauty, fitness, and slimness, all of which have become important 'tokens of class and status distinctions' in post-Mao China. All of this is evident in Zheng's article in this section, which examines sartorial practices among rural migrant karaoke bar hostesses in the PRC. She shows how migrant karaoke bar hostesses, often derided for their rural origin and assumed unstylish, rustic aesthetic, perform fashion in such a way as to imagine a sense of global belonging and citizenship, staking a political claim to the cosmopolitan through their foreign 'ultra-fashion.'

Zheng's article draws our attention to another recent fashion trend in the PRC: 'Too Cool' (*tuku* 土酷). *Tu*, which is literally translated as soil, usually denotes rural, outdated, or tasteless. However, Too Cool, in contrast, celebrates rural aesthetics as a disruption to the top-down authority of fashion and manifesting instead through a tongue-in-cheek style and pride in grassroots culture. While similar in some ways to the emphasis on pride and confidence described above in the case of 'China Chic,' Too Cool styles itself as a subcultural challenge to mainstream aesthetics (Jiang 2020). In her article in this section, Jian Xiao examines similar dynamics in the case of the punk movement in the PRC, describing the various symbols and processes of constructing the 'punk look' as a visual defiance to the aesthetics of mainstream lifestyles.

Discussions of fashion and beauty often focus on the regulation and manipulation of female bodies in the pursuit of national goals, but since the 1980s, masculinity has also become a topic of considerable attention in the PRC. This 'masculinity crisis,' as Geng (2010, 406) explains, goes hand in hand with the replacing of Confucian and Maoist-based models of manhood with 'productivist and consumerist values.' These fears are perhaps best captured in the official hand wringing over the rise of *xiaoxianrou* 小鲜肉, literally 'little fresh meat,' which refers to handsome male stars who do not conform to traditional gendered style guidelines and are characterised in Chinese state media as emblematic of a broader 'feminisation of Chinese boys' and as 'a threat to the development and survival of our nation' (Du and Chen 2021). These developments are examined by Wen Hua in her article in this section, where she describes why cosmetic surgery and beauty practices have become increasingly popular among Chinese men in recent years and how this presents an alternative masculinity that defies the gendered ideals that otherwise informed 'the national character.'

These articles illuminate the myriad ways in which fashion, beauty, and nation converge in the PRC today. They also interrogate, in implicit and explicit

terms, how national trends are entangled within, informed by, and respond to issues that extend far beyond the national borders of the PRC. Indeed, at various points, whether in the case of Turkic beauty norms in contemporary Xinjiang, the consumption of Korean and Japanese fashion trends, punk aesthetics or masculinity ideals, the boundaries of ‘Chinese fashion’ and ‘China’ often blur. Notions of any single or compartmentalised ‘Chinese fashion’ is further complicated by articulations of ‘Chineseness’ from outside the PRC. Transnational beauty pageants organised for the Chinese diaspora, such as Miss China Europe, are a notable example of this. Here, as Chow (2011) describes, various forms of ‘Chinese selves’ are performed, all of which negotiate complex expectations and ideals of a ‘Chineseness’ rooted in ancestral connection and linguistic ability. Then, there are designers from Taiwan, Hong Kong and the diaspora who eschew the title of ‘Chinese’ designer and use of ‘Chinese’ aesthetics in their work (Ling 2018). What does it mean in the case of Cultural China, then, to speak of ‘Chinese’ fashion and beauty, and who does it refer to? Even within the PRC, as we see in this section, the answers to these questions are far from straightforward.

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1.1 Beautifying Uyghur Bodies: Fashion, ‘Modernity’ and State Power in the Tarim Basin

Timothy Grose

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) routinely stages public fashion shows in Uyghur communities of the Tarim Basin (present-day Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region). In Yopurgha County (Yuepuhu 岳普湖), Kashgar

Prefecture, young girls, teenagers, and middle-aged women sit patiently as Uyghur beauticians dab face whitening cream, draw perfectly symmetrical eyebrows, and paint lush red lips on their faces. Meanwhile, groups of Uyghur women, organized by age and dressed in either blue jeans, mini-skirts, or pencil skirt-business coat ensembles, are paraded on stage to display age-appropriate attire. *Usma, henna*, braided hair and other (secular) grooming habits typical to Turkic Muslims of the Tarim Basin and Fergana Valley (Nalivkin and Nalivkina 2016, 89–102) are notably absent from the stages.

These events represent the CCP's recent efforts to transform the appearance of Uyghur women; yet, the party began disciplining the Uyghur feminine body in earnest nearly a decade ago. In 2011, officials unrolled Project Beauty (Grose and Leibold 2015), a five-year, US\$8 million dollar multi-media initiative that encouraged piously-dressed Uyghur women to 'look towards modern culture by removing face veils and *jilbāb*' (*Tianshan Net* 2012). Throughout southern Xinjiang's rural villages, officials organized fashion shows, beauty pageants, longest-hair contests as well as lectures on ethnic policy, ethnic attire, and social etiquette to persuade Uyghur women to 'let their hair down and show-off their pretty faces.' By 2015, lawmakers in Ürümqi introduced legislation that outlawed *hijab*, *lichäk*, *chumbäl*, and *jilbāb* as well as 'abnormally long' beards and clothing featuring star and moon insignia in any public area (*ChinaFile* 2014). These measures effectively discouraged Uyghur women from donning many veiling styles. During my visit to Ürümqi and Turpan, June–July 2017, two years after the veiling ban, I did not observe any women covering their faces with veils or hair in *hijab*. Some, mostly older, women continued to don a scarf or *yaghliq*, which they either knotted behind their heads or tied loosely under their chins.

In 2017, the CCP rolled out the 'Three News' campaign (*Haiwai Net* 2017). This package of study sessions, cultural programs, and workshops organized by local-level governments aims to 'advocate a new lifestyle, establish a new atmosphere, and construct a new order' (*changdao xin fengshang, shuli xin qixiang, jianli xin zhixu* 倡导新风尚, 树立新气象, 建立新秩序). Buried beneath the campaign's jargon is the 'prohibition against wearing strange clothing' (*chuandai qiguai* 穿戴奇怪). Although the language is ambiguous, it signals the CCP's recommitment to standardizing and Sinicising sartorial practices among Uyghurs, especially women.

Officials are carrying out this campaign by farding the complexion of Uyghur feminized beauty with ostentatious glamour. Representatives of the All-China Women's Federation (*funü lianhehui* 妇女联合会) have organized step-by-step makeover tutorials in several southern counties. During one such event in Qaraqash County (Moyu 墨玉), Khotan, a Uyghur beautician taught her peers how to style hair and apply cosmetics (Qaraqash County Government 2018). A May 2018 cosmetology training course in Atush called 'Let your beautiful long hair down and show your pretty faces,' which 'drew on the influence of "Project



Fig 1.1.a: Photo taken by author in Ürümchi, June 2015; captions by Darren Byler.

Beauty” provided instruction on fashion and cosmetics to over two hundred women. A report on the event featured dramatic before-and-after photographs of women who underwent makeovers. After her beauty treatment, a woman named Amangül Alim celebrated her new look: ‘I’ve never been as beautiful or confident as I am today. We used to have to go to the city for these services, which was a long way from here and expensive. So, we hesitated to go. Now we’ve learned to apply cosmetics and style our hair ourselves. We don’t have to spend money, yet we look great!’ (*Fanghuiju zhi sheng* 2018).

To provide rural Uyghur women with access to these new fashion trends, county-level governments launched the ‘Beauty Parlor and Hair Salon’ (*liang-fawu* 靓发屋) initiative. This campaign has funded the construction of salons across rural Uyghur villages. In 2018 alone, the government boasted 2889 new beauty parlours (each equipped with facial steamers, shampoo chairs, styling chairs, and disinfectants (People’s Daily 2018) and 7954 newly certified Uyghur beauticians in Xinjiang’s southern four districts—i.e., Kashgar, Khotan, Aqsu, and Qizilsu (CRI Online 2018). To put these numbers into perspective, government officials built a new beauty parlor for approximately every 3,600 people or one facility per 1800 women in these districts. Residents of Qaraqash County alone can visit 252 newly built salons; every village operates at least one business (Sina 2018).

Uyghur women are often coerced into cosmetology careers. For instance, over one hundred women from Ulughchat County (Wuqia 乌恰) in Qizilsu Prefecture completed a twenty-day ‘closed-door’ (*fengbi shi* 封闭式) course, which required them to live and study, ‘without charge,’ in a vocational facility. In addition to learning the ropes of cosmetology, these women also studied *Putonghua* and Chinese law (CRI Online 2018). Therefore, their curriculum resembles that of women ‘studying’ cosmetology and hairdressing in the region’s concentration re-education centres (The State Council Information Office of the People’s Republic of China).

The Three News campaign provides an illuminating example of what Michel Foucault called ‘biopower.’ Foucault observed that the state saw human bodies through a crude coloniser or colonised binary. He introduced this concept to describe the subtleties of power and its ‘calculated management of life’ (Pylypa 1998, 24). Foucault argued that political order cannot simply be imposed on a population; it has to be taught, replicated, and self-inflected to effectively regulate human behavior. Power, therefore, functions to control life—not end it—through ‘continuous regulatory and corrective mechanisms’ (Foucault 1978, 144). In other words, biopolitics need to work in tandem with discipline, which Foucault conceptualises as a type of physical and mental subjugation imposed to increase human efficiency.

To be sure, Foucault introduces ‘biopower’ to describe the types of power that permeate neoliberal societies; however, his theory may have utility in understanding how CCP power targeting Turkic Muslims operates outside the concentration re-education centers. In the case of setting new standards of beauty, the impulse to look a certain way is not forced upon an individual through threats of violence; rather, power ‘constructs normality and deviance’ and creates the *desire* to conform (Pylypa 1998, 22). A young Uyghur woman from Qaraqash remarked, ‘Since our village opened a salon, I’m able to maintain a beautiful hairstyle, attend to my skin, and apply make-up. I feel as pretty as a city girl’ (Qaraqash County Government 2018). Her statement exposes the CCP’s biopolitical intentions. The Party is inscribing ‘modernity’ and urban beauty on cosmetics, permed hair, and casual dress, thus normalising these practices, while it is identifying pious and Turkic standards of beauty as deviant.

Officials confidently predict that this campaign will transform Uyghur women into docile Chinese subjects. A representative from the XUAR’s Women’s Federation explained that ‘the Beauty Parlor and Hair Salon initiative will bring forth three transformations in the lives of women. First, women will transform their body image. Then, they will transform their way of life. Finally, they will transform their way of thinking’ (Sohu 2019). Certainly, the beauty parlors introduce new beauty standards. Dozens of photographs depict newly trained beauticians dying hair, styling it in curlers, applying face whitening cream, and putting thick layers of cosmetics on their clients. However, according to Foucault’s theory, the practices required to maintain this manicured

countenance at home—i.e., mimicking a stylist's techniques and repeating this process daily—inscribe the body with state-produced knowledge and sustain their own subjugation (Pylypa 1998, 24). A work team member in Yopurgha County, Kashgar Prefecture claims to have noticed a significant change among women: 'Now, women in the village have changed from shy and old-fashioned to cheerful, lively, and generous' (China Women's Paper 2018).

To be sure, this tactic to impose new beauty standards and, more importantly, teach them to ethnic and racial minorities is reminiscent of colonial methods to control indigenous bodies. Federal boarding schools for Native Americans provide instructive examples. Students at Haskell boarding school were forced to adopt 'white' appearances: boys were forced to cut their hair and keep it trimmed while women were required to wear blouses and dresses (Child 2000, 30–31). Strict dress and appearance codes at Chilocco were part of the federal government's efforts to train domesticated and subservient women (Lomawaima 1993). Six hundred miles north, the Native boarding school children in Flandreau, South Dakota trained as beauticians and barbers and learned how to wash, style, and cut hair in the Euro-American fashion (Child 2000, 81).

The US example not only provides us with a lens to understand the 'Three News' campaign, it also portends its potential failure. Indeed, the US government could not completely uproot Native Americans from the land and disassociate them from their cultures. This history provides a gleam of optimism for Uyghurs: as long as they remain committed internally to their cultural, linguistic, and spatial roots—both individually and collectively (Lomawaima 1993)—they will insulate a space wherein Uyghurness can blossom and flourish, on their own terms, again.

Note

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1.2 Karaoke Bar Hostesses and Japan-Korea Wave in Postsocialist China: The Politics of Fashion, Class Hierarchy, and Transgression

Tiantian Zheng

Fashion has always been the key for me in noticing a rural migrant karaoke bar hostess during my research with them in Dalian, China (Zheng 2009). On the street, it is hard not to spot a hostess wearing exotic fashion and with a distinct appearance. Indeed, they are fashion trendsetters and bright components of the human landscape in Dalian. Their fashion ensembles challenge traditional Chinese sartorial practices in a myriad of ways, including exposing large portions of the body, combining ostentatious and outlandish colours, and featuring irregular styles and unfamiliar cuts. Their attire is derived from foreign or foreign-inspired fashion products.

From head to toe, rural migrant karaoke bar hostesses are covered in Korean and Japanese fashion. These fashion products include, but are not limited to, plastic hair trinkets, scarlet hair dye, fake second eyelids, fake eyelashes, fake tattoos, cosmetics such as whitening cream and black lipstick, bracelets, clothes, and pointed-toe shoes. Almost all hostesses’ feet are sheathed in pointed-toe, high-heeled shoes which were first introduced from Korea and later produced and manufactured in China. Their black or other dark-shaded lipsticks are also produced and manufactured in Korea, inspired by Korean movie and music celebrities. Their cell phones are adorned with Japanese Hello-Kitty-emblazoned transparent plastic baubles that flash blinking lights upon every incoming call.

Rural migrant karaoke bar hostesses' fashion practices embody the Japan—Korea Wave in the context of global cultural flows (Zheng 2011). The Japan—Korea Wave first rippled into China in the early 1990s, with a deluge of Japanese and Korean commodities and a rising popularity of Japanese and Korean popular culture across the country. Just one decade after China opened its door to the outside world and began to play an increasingly significant role in the global market, this Wave grew into a full-fledged tidal wave, enveloping Chinese youth in the conspicuous consumption of Japanese and Korean products.

The Japan—Korea Wave can be seen in the popularity of Japanese and Korean products either directly imported from Japan and Korea or copied and manufactured in China. These products include, but are not limited to, comic books, DVDs of film, TV series, and singing idols. Many Chinese youth adore and follow the Japanese popular looks of bleached white or blond hair streaks, white eye make-up, tubular-front elevated shoes, or Hello-Kitty embellishments. However, this pursuit of Japanese popular culture was stymied by the nation-wide anti-Japanese boycott movements in the 2000s (Gerth 2003).

In contrast, the popularity of Korean cultural products in China continued without animosity, mainly because both China and Korea were victims of Japan during World War II and an affinity between the two countries was felt by many. Korean popular movies, TV dramas, and singing idols flooded the Chinese consumer market and were consistently the highest rated nation-wide for many years. Under the Korean influence, many Chinese youth copied the Korean style and started Chinese Hip-Hop and R&B bands. Young people also pursued Korean-style plastic surgery and Korean-style scarlet red long hair, fake stick-on tattoos, drawn-on thin eyebrows, fake double-eyelids, black or dark shades of lipstick, pointed-toe high-heeled shoes, and other lace embellishments. A fervour developed toward Korean fashion that eschews simple colours in favour of juxtaposed, outlandish colours and features a tight, transparent, and skimpy style that exposes skin, irregular skirt opening, vests or bellybands exposing the whole or half of the back, and single-shouldered style.

Chinese popular media compared the Korean Wave to rural migrant karaoke bar hostesses. For example, as one piece published by *Shenzhen Weekly* (*Shenzhen Zhoukan* 深圳周刊) noted, 'Korea almost seems like a young country girl who suddenly arrives in the city. She sees all kinds of strange and novel things and doesn't wait a second to try them out on herself. The result is an odd-looking mess of colours. It seems to be ultra-extravagant (*chaoxuan* 超炫) and ultra-modern (*chaoxiandai* 超现代), but in fact it cannot cover up her country air (*tuqi* 土气). Country air goes hand in hand with Korea's astonishing rise to wealth (*baofu* 暴富). We can see the same sort of cultural mentality reflected in those Chinese youth who hold the Korean Wave in highest esteem' (Wang 2002, 41).

Anthropologists Sandra Niessen and Ajun Appadurai have pointed to attire as a class-signifier (Appadurai 1996; Niessen 2003; Wilson 1992). In China, the anti-peasant derogatory term ‘*tuqi*’ applies the concept of *qi* 气 an essence or energy, to all peasants, to reify them as country bumpkins whose bodies are seen as radiating a rustic and unstylish essence. Indeed, many urbanites claim that, even though rural migrants in the city shed their countryside clothing and refashion themselves in new clothes, the *tuqi* essence of their rural origin can never be concealed by this disguise, instead seeping through their dark skin and ‘ultra-flashy’ and ‘ultra-modern’ fashion to give away their rural origin. In other words, their rural origin impedes them from being perceived as capable of fully grasping the ‘true’ aesthetic sensibility of modern fashion, a foil against which urban women’s mastery over fashion is staged. Since fashion is perceived as an embodiment of urban women’s membership in a global, modern community (Johansson 1998; Schein 1999), the alleged fashion ineptitude of peasants denies them this membership.

The opposite term of *tuqi* is *yangqi* 洋气- sea, ocean essence. *Yang* signifies a foreign world outside China, and *yangqi* represents a foreign, stylish essence, associated with urban women. Rural migrant hostesses employ an ‘ultra-fashion’ strategy to perform fashion by avoiding *tuqi* 土气 and striving for *yangqi*, thus resisting the ‘rural *tuqi* - urban *yangqi*’ hierarchy and imagining a sense of global belonging and citizenship. They appropriate the Japan–Korean fashion as the most visible hallmark of social status to claim their legitimate membership in the global community and destabilise, subvert, and transgress the rural–urban class hierarchy. They deride urban women’s conservative, parochial fashion sense and stake a political claim to the cosmopolitan, global community with their foreign, ‘ultra-fashion’ that heralds them trendsetters at the forefront of China’s fashion landscape (Zheng 2011).

Note

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1.3 Punk Culture and Its Fashion in China

Jian Xiao

Possibly the first punk musician in China, He Yong, arrived on the scene in 1994 in Beijing, and the first two punk bands, Underbaby and Catcher in the Rye, emerged at the same time. Only a few years later, 1998 witnessed the explosive growth of punk bands in China. At that time, there were several influential bands, such as 69, Brain Failure, and Anarchy Boys, which inspired the younger generation to sport mohawks and leather jackets. Another landmark event occurred that year: a punk club called the Scream (*haojiao jùlebu* 嚎叫俱乐部) opened in Beijing, which would soon become a significant cultural space for the punk musicians of the day, such as Wuliao Contingent (*wuliao jundui* 无聊军队). One important performance took place on April 8th, 1998, when more than 200 people came to this club, which was only supposed to house a maximum of 100. The founder, Mr. Liao, commented later: ‘Just as Tang Dynasty [*Tang Chao* 唐朝, a Chinese band] showed us what a heavy metal scene could be like, people began to understand what hardcore, ska, or Oi! punk were [...]. I can still remember the intense punk atmosphere – it was strong, simple, straightforward, and powerful, while also full of happiness and exciting anger.’ Further to this, Yang (2012) has used the term ‘youth restlessness’ to describe this atmosphere, especially in the case of Underbaby performances.

Adopting a similar style to punks in the West, Chinese punk musicians can be recognised as skinhead punks by their bald heads, Doc Martens boots and belt trousers, or as street/metal punks by their Mohawk and studded leather jackets. Following the unprecedented economic growth and new cultural spaces that emerged after the Reform and Opening-Up, being a punk became



Fig 1.3.a: Punk show. Photo by the author.

a way to speak and act against commercialisation. Moreover, because of commercialisation, Chinese punks have had greater access to resources. This differs from the punk scene in Portugal, for example, where, as Guerra and Xiao (2018, 178) describe, ‘the present context of economic crisis and social precariousness has accentuated a recourse to punk (and its DIY ethos) both as a word and as praxis pertinent to everyday concerns such as housing, work, and urban sociability and conviviality’. Comparatively speaking, the Chinese punk musicians have not been driven by necessity to apply a DIY attitude to fashion—it has been entirely possible to purchase the punk-type clothing items they desire, such as black leather jackets or Doc Martens boots, in China.

The DIY ethos is still important to Chinese punks, particularly for overcoming challenges relating to actualising other aspects of punk activity—for example, music performances or punk media (music videos, publications such as zines, etc.). For punks to ‘dress like punks’, they needed to resort to various expedients for dressing in accordance with their stylistic code; for example, whenever they needed a belt, they had to customise it with spikes purchased from hardware stores as there were not yet any shops selling punk belts. The musicians would also make their own labels and craft their own hairstyles. Those creative, enjoyable and entertaining moments have also become culturally significant, allowing the musicians to integrate into the punk community in a global sense.

The meaning of punk fashion is often associated with resistance. Researchers at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, which was established at the University of Birmingham in 1964 and examined various aspects of youth, subculture, and resistance, assigned great relevance to style. Cohen (1972) described style in terms of four central characteristics: clothing, music, rituals, and language. However, he also noted that style is not a quality inherent to subcultures but something that is constructed over a long period of time. Hence, what creates a style is the stylisation—the active organisation of objects alongside different activities and perspectives, which, in turn, produces an

organised group with a coherent identity and distinctive ‘being-in-the world’ (Guerra 2010, 416).

In the Chinese social context, subcultural resistance in individual practice occurs in a more intimate environment and on a smaller scale. It manifests in various forms, such as insisting on dressing in a distinctly punk fashion, living a lifestyle of attempting to resist the mainstream, joining and staying in punk groups to resist peer pressure and parental expectations, and seeking alternative forms of employment and income to maintain a state of expressing one’s true self and opinions, and of resisting what is interpreted as a phenomenon of widespread ‘blindly following’ in mainstream society. In fact, the conflict between punk musicians and the mainstream can evolve from being just an alternative visual style at variance with ‘normal’ fashion into an alternative lifestyle against that of the mainstream.

The behaviour of dressing as a punk in a group can appear especially offensive and threatening to the public since their visual look can be associated with gangs. For instance, one punk musician’s decision to adopt a skinhead Oi! punk visual style in public was criticised by teachers, neighbours, and peers early in his life. As a consequence, he developed a form of visual resistance—insisting on his particular punk visual style specifically as defiance to the mainstream visual style—despite constant pressure from the surrounding mainstream. At this stage, the mainstream response to his visual resistance played a role in his construction of his punk identity, but did not immediately influence his life in other significant ways. It was at a later stage that this musician’s visual resistance caused problems at work, prompting him to leave his job.

Generally speaking, the state responds to the Chinese punk scene in a negative way. Punk events can often be stopped by the government for reasons of political sensitivity relating to some of the messages contained in the lyrics. For those events that are not shut down, the state intervenes through strict surveillance to prevent punk musicians from expressing alternative political opinions. This intervention, which is usually led by government officials, can sometimes turn into a violent one.

While variations are hardly noticeable in terms of punk style across different Chinese regions, internal differences within punk groups still exist and are related to concerns about punk authenticity. Punk musicians in Wuhan, for instance, believe that the Beijing punk circle is full of small subgroups and issues of hierarchy, possibly due to the difference between punk musicians born and raised in central Beijing, and those who grew up in the suburbs. Thus, they create their own intimate groups based on ideas of equality and existing without a hierarchical approach, such as supporting newcomers. By doing so, Wuhan punks regard themselves as being more authentic. In this sense, being a punk is never just about dressing like a punk.

Ultimately, fashion is a means of expression, and the choice of style is a process of identity-building. One Chinese punk musician once commented: ‘We

started to learn about skinhead culture, then the clothes. We like boots, braces, Levi's trousers, and a simple working-class style. It suits us.' In this sense, dressing in a particular style is not only symbolic of cultural and musical resistance to a troubling status quo, but also a concrete expression of an urban movement focused on music, fashion, and a particular lifestyle, sometimes bohemian, sometimes working-class, and in this case, punk.

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1.4 Cosmetic Surgery, Flower Boys, and Soft Masculinity in China

Wen Hua

SoYoung, one of the biggest Chinese cosmetic surgery mobile apps, released a report in 2017 stating that the Chinese cosmetic surgery market was developing at six times faster than the global average in terms of the number of people undergoing non-surgical and surgical procedures. It also noted that Chinese consumers accounted for around 41% of the global total cosmetic surgeries, among which about 10 percent of consumers were men (SoYoung 2017).

Compared with their female counterparts, beautification practices for men constitute new territory. To participate in the improvement of one's appearance through daily grooming, let alone through surgery, men need to overcome their entrenched perception of beautification practice as women's domain. Who are these men and what procedures do they opt for? What does the new trend of male beauty in China look like, and how do beautification practices affect constructions of masculinity?

It has been widely reported (Wang and Cai 2016) that entertainers, young white-collar workers, successful career men in their 40 and 50s, and college

students are the main customers of male cosmetic surgery in China. Male entertainers such as models, actors and TV hosts are generally more concerned about appearance, in all its aspects, because appearance is particularly important for their career development. Although male and female public figures seldom admit they have undergone cosmetic surgeries, Hu Ge, one of most influential Chinese male celebrities appearing on the covers of most fashion magazines, admitted that he underwent a number of procedures to restore his looks after he had a serious car accident in 2006.

Young white-collar workers normally opt for small operations rather than going under ‘the big knife’; typical procedures include nose jobs (rhinoplasty), jawline recontouring, and ‘double-eyelid surgery’. For successful middle-aged men, they are more concerned with aging, the signs of which they combat by having eye bags reduced, sagging cheeks, jowls, and necks restored, hair implanted, and excess fat removed by liposuction. Less invasive procedures such as injections of Botox or hyaluronic acid, which reduce wrinkles and help the skin look younger, are also popular. Young students who ask their parents to pay for their surgery sometimes go to cosmetic surgery clinics and hospitals armed with pictures of movie stars and pop stars. Genmei (2016), another influential cosmetic surgery app, reported that the most desirable facial features of China’s male cosmetic surgery trend were the eyes of Huo Jianhua, nose of Hu Ge, face of Yang Yang, and mouth of Lu Han. Popular procedures for this group included ‘double eyelid surgery’ (to make their eyes appear larger), together with operations to sculpt their noses or shave their jawbones to produce a softer face.

The increasing popularity of male cosmetic surgery shows the rise of aesthetically conscious men in China. In the past decades, the media, soap operas, and lifestyle magazines have been saturated with messages about men discovering their ‘feminine’ sense of beauty. A new type of male beauty idol, ‘flower boys’, or in a new catchword, *xiaoxianrou* 小鲜肉—literally, ‘little fresh meat’—has become extremely popular as a label of a new type of Chinese male icon, who are known for their flawless, boyish appearance, exemplified by the cute-faced TF Boys, one of China’s most popular teenage boy bands. Although there are different ranking charts for the most popular *xiaoxianrou*, celebrities such as TF Boys, Lu Han, Wu Yifan, and Yang Yang appear in most charts. These male idols are shaping new images of male beauty, which is in contrast to the macho stereotype tough guy image which dominated the Mao era. The rise of ‘flower boys’ and *xiaoxianrou* is not limited to China. Something very similar has also taken place in other Asian countries, especially Japan and South Korea (Holliday and Elfving-Hwang 2012; Jung 2011; Miller 2003). The rise of ‘flower boys’ and men’s growing interest in their appearance challenges conventional macho masculinity and presents an alternative soft masculinity, or ‘metrosexual’ in Simpson’s term (1994).

The term ‘masculinity’ in Chinese today, *yanggang zhi qi* 阳刚之气, implies ‘macho’. However, scholars (Louie 2002; Song 2004) have argued that the

configurations of Western hegemonic macho masculinity are not applicable to *wu* 武 masculinity in China. In Chinese history, sometimes soft *wen* 文 masculinity was superior to macho *wu* masculinity because it was the literary skills and cultural attainments conceptualised as *wen* masculinity that was more closely associated with social status than *wu* macho masculinity. Of course, there is never just one kind of masculinity and masculinities change over time. As Connell and Messerschmidt (2005, 836) argue, masculinities are ‘configurations of practices that are accomplished in social interaction and, therefore, can differ according to the gender relations in a particular social setting.’

Under the revolutionary ideology of the Maoist China from the 1950s to the later 1970s, the traditional predominance of *wen* masculinity over *wu* masculinity was overturned when intellectuals were labelled as ‘bourgeois rightists’ and workers, peasants, and soldiers (*gong* 工, *nong* 农, *bing* 兵) as the proletariat central to the power of the state. The hegemonic macho masculinity was exemplified by strong and muscular ‘iron girls’ (*tie guniang* 铁姑娘) who were supposed to look and act like men.

Wen masculinity made a comeback following China’s reform and opening-up in the 1980s. With consumerism becoming increasingly important during this time, *wen* masculinity came to embody not only scholarly attainment, but also an ability to consume. It also became associated with metrosexual traits, as vividly exemplified by the rise of aesthetically conscious ‘flower boys’ or ‘little fresh meat’ and beauty products advertised by those influential androgynous male idols. As part of this consumer culture, an attractive and groomed male body has come to represent a new form of sophisticated identity and consumerist masculinity.

The rise and popularity of ‘little fresh meat’ challenges representations of masculinity in contemporary China and has received a strong pushback from powerful state media. The state news agency Xinhua published an editorial denouncing ‘sissy pants’ (*niangpao* 娘炮) or those who are ‘slender and weak’, warning of the adverse impact of this ‘sick’ culture on teenagers (Xing 2018). The editorial stressed that ‘what a society’s pop culture should embrace, reject and spread is really critical to the future of the country’. While some fear the popularity of effeminate male idols may threaten the country’s future (see Teixeira 2018), others believe in an open and diverse society. Aesthetics can be varied and there is plenty of room for diversity.

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CHAPTER 2

Religion and Spirituality

2.0 Introduction

Gerda Wielander

In the People's Republic of China, the year 2020 started with a new set of regulations for the management of religious groups, which came into effect on 1 February. These regulations only confirmed what has been a clear trend under Xi Jinping: the ever-tighter control of all religious activity in China. While in 2020 international attention mostly focused on the Chinese state's repressive measures in Xinjiang with its religious and ethnic aspects, all religious faiths have seen the scope and range of their activities severely curtailed in recent years, with many religious leaders sentenced to long prison sentences.

The new set of regulations is designed to ensure further progress in the 'sinicisation' of religion which started in 2016 when Xi Jinping chaired the National Working Meeting on Religions. In his speech he emphasised the need to 'build a socialist theory of religion with Chinese characteristics', insisting that 'religions must adhere to the direction of sinicisation, and interpreting values and dogmas in a way that corresponds to the needs of China' (UCA News 2018). The need for 'sinicisation' is not confined to belief systems which have historically been considered foreign like Christianity and Islam—and indeed Marxism. Even Chinese religions need to 'sinicise' in order to follow up the developments of China in the New Era and to dig into religious elements in line with core socialist values.

The Central Institute of Socialism—headed up by Ye Xiaowen who from 1995 to 2009 led China's State Administration of Religious Affairs (SARA)—

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provides lectures on religious ‘sinicisation’ and has issued five-year plans for all major religions setting out planned developments from 2018–2022. For Islam, this includes the so-called ‘four entries:’ entry into mosques of the national flag, the Chinese Constitution, love of socialist values, and the teaching of traditional classical literature. For Christianity, this means promoting a ‘Chinese Christianity’ and plans for a retranslation and annotation of the Bible to find commonalities with socialism and a ‘correct understanding’ of the text (Kuo 2019). What we have learnt since 2015 is a clear determination on the part of the government to bring all religious activity into the realm of the state and to redefine it within the parameters of state ideology. The government’s systematic attempts to control and ‘re-educate’ Muslim Uyghurs in large-scale detention camps is the most extreme example of this control. The destruction of religious statues of all faiths (Wang 2019) and the detention and subsequent sentencing to nine years of prison of well-known house church figures like Wang Yi of Chengdu’s Early Rain Church (Johnson 2019) are further signs of the severity of the crackdown on religious activity outside the state-defined realm.

By starting this piece with a focus on religious repression, I follow the well-established pattern of emphasising the repressive measures and curtailment of religious freedom which many observers and academics adopt. In the remainder of this introduction, however, I want to focus on additional facets of Chinese religious life and its interaction with other sectors of society which the pieces in this section of our Review invite us to think about.

The first is wealth. Religion used to be mostly associated with the rural population, often with low levels of education, feudal values, and a lack of development. But religion and spirituality in China are no longer predominantly associated with the poor or destitute. A 2017 survey found that more than one third of all surveyed stated that they engaged in some form of religious practice across all religions (Lu and Gao 2017). The appeal of religion and spiritual practices to middle class audiences is well documented. This ranges from a growth of Christian believers in urban areas to the romanticisation of Tibet as a spiritual place by China’s urban middle class (Yeshe Lama 2018) and a whole raft of spiritual practices often originating in Asia but reimported in westernised forms through the forces of globalisation (Borup 2017). That wealth has become a factor in Chinese religion is also recognised in the new regulations which set out clear rules on accounting practices and tax regulations, a change that signals awareness of the change in the demographics of religious believers in China in the twenty-first century and the amount of funds now available to some of them.

This leads to the issue of how best to spend this money? Caroline Fielder’s and Jane Caple’s pieces provide examples of the different views on how best to support religion through donations, or, conversely, how to spend one’s money in a religiously inspired way. Charity lies at the heart of this debate. The first nationwide week of religious charity in China took place in 2012, organised by China’s State Administration of Religious Affairs, which signalled support

for religious groups' involvement in charitable services. This event came a few years after the Wenchuan earthquake, which is seen as the true turning point in China's charity activities. For social groups trying to prove that their values are compatible with the state's and a state keen to tap into social resources to provide essential services, charitable work appeared to be the perfect area of activity for religious groups. Until recently, religious organisation could only carry out charitable work of a very limited scope, relying on 'religiously inspired organisations' (as Fielder puts it) such as the Amity Foundation (which many would consider an entirely secular organisation), now China's largest charity, to plan and implement projects to which they might contribute funds and volunteers.

Amity Foundation is the lead organisation in the type of work which the Chinese government considers desirable activities for social organisations, including religious organisations, with a specific focus on areas like poverty alleviation, education, and health care. Amity's and many other social organisations' charitable activities fall into what Weller et al. (2018) refer to as NGO facilitated industrial philanthropy. But Caple's article shows that not all agree on this type of philanthropy. In the case of the Tibetan Buddhist donors she has studied, investing in ritual and temple construction is seen as a preferable way to show support for their religion. Indeed, religious communities in China, Taiwan, and SE Asia and their leaders aren't all willingly drawn into the compulsion to engage in charity. Among the alternative public goods provided by religious communities are community ritual, cultural heritage and community identity, spiritual goods, and solving life's problems (Weller et al. 2018), all services that fall more into the realm of psychological support and thus also contribute to the well-being of the community and society more widely.

Networks are hugely important in Chinese business culture and society and belonging to a religious or spiritual congregation or community constitutes membership of an important in-group that can bring tangible benefits. David Stroup's piece highlights the importance of such networks when in need of social support as a result of migrating to a different part of the country. Many migrants will seek out faith-based communities or networks in their new place of residence to get help with both the mundane challenges of everyday life like filling in forms or applications, but also with the psychological challenges of being a stranger in a new place. Different religious groups have different ways of signalling their belonging to a faith-based network. In a climate where overt signalling like particular dress, hairstyle, or regularity of prayer has become problematic or even dangerous, more discrete ways of signalling one's belonging to a certain faith can become important. Naming is an overt yet invisible signal of belonging to a particular group, as in the Christian names Mark McLeister's informants have adopted. While these names sound foreign—and provide a degree of anonymity when used in writings (Wielander 2013)—they are also a sign of inculturation and follow the tradition of expressing one's hopes and aspirations (in this case spiritual aspirations) through the naming of a child.

Finally, the pieces remind us that intra- and inter-faith relations remain an under-researched issue in the Chinese context. David Stroup's article gives us a glimpse of what dynamics come into play when members of the same faith but from different geographical areas get the chance to interact, a process in which both sides stand to benefit and learn about themselves and each other. More interestingly still would be studies that explore inter-faith relations. Where do Chinese Buddhists and Chinese Muslims find common ground? How do urban middle-class spiritual fantasies about Tibet hold up when experiencing Tibet first hand? What are other faith groups' positions on the treatment of Uyghur Muslims?

The new regulations which came into effect in February 2020 stipulate that religious groups must 'follow the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party' and 'shall publicise the Communist Party of China's directives and policies;' they also make a statement about research. Article 22 stipulates that religious groups 'shall carry out research on religious culture and religious texts... thoroughly uncover content in religious teachings and rules that are conducive to social harmony...and in line with the outstanding traditional Chinese culture' (China Law Translate 2020). It seems we will need to frame our writings on Chinese religion and spirituality within the context of regulation and suppression for some time to come.

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2.1 Religion, Economy, and the Social Good: Reflections from Tibet

Jane Caple

As China has got richer, more funds have flowed to monasteries on the Tibetan plateau. Growing interest in Tibetan Buddhism among affluent urban Chinese has been an important factor, but there has also been an upsurge in local religious giving. This has paralleled the dual processes of accelerated development and increased securitisation of Tibetan areas following widespread unrest in 2008 and a subsequent series of over 150 self-immolations. In the part of north-east Tibet (Amdo/Qinghai) where I have been working, Tibetans have poured resources – in some cases the equivalent of hundreds of thousands of pounds – into a wave of new religious construction and escalating levels of expenditure on rituals and the sponsorship of monastic events.

Supporting the monastic community and building temples and other religious structures have historically been among the most common forms of Buddhist generosity practice in Tibetan and other societies heavily influenced by Buddhism. Yet, in northeast Tibet the dynamics and scale of these practices have been the subject of debate. It is not surprising that criticisms have been voiced by those Tibetan intellectuals critical of Buddhism or Buddhist institutions, but concerns have also circulated among monks and laypeople across social strata who have themselves participated in these practices. In exploring and thinking through the terms of these debates, I have been reflecting on what they might be able to tell us about conceptions of wealth, virtue, and the social good in Tibetan communities in China experiencing break-neck socio-economic development as well as political uncertainty.

It is clear that contemporary debates about the ethics of religious giving are enmeshed in Tibetans' participation in and experiences of economic transition and state-led development. Over the period 2008–2015, I witnessed rapid urbanisation through conversion of land for urban development, as well as voluntary, state-sponsored and forced migration. A general increase in disposable incomes was accompanied by rising levels of consumption and a growth in highly visible wealth disparities. These transformations were reflected in practices of religious giving. For example, when the members of one village pooled



Fig 2.1.a: Rongwo Monastery, northeast Tibet, 2013. Photo by the author.

over four million yuan (around £444,000) for the reconstruction of a temple in 2014, individual pledges ranged from 2,000 to 200,000 yuan (roughly £22,000). A local businessman I met in 2013 said he had readily spent roughly 280,000 yuan (over £30,000) to fund a spectacular one-day religious event for monks without needing to save or get into debt. This kind of spending power was far beyond that of most of the people I knew – not to mention myself.

In the West—as indeed among many Chinese—Buddhism and Tibetan culture are often imagined to be other-worldly and anti-materialist, representing the antithesis of today’s ‘global’ consumer society. In reality of course, even those Tibetans who are ambivalent about marketisation and openly aware of the politics of state-led development enjoy more comfortable lifestyles and aspire to greater prosperity. This does not in itself pose any inherent contradiction with Buddhist values: wealth is positively associated with virtue in Buddhist discourse, which makes explicit a connection between virtuous action (like generosity) and wealth, status, and personal efficacy and power. Nevertheless, this has all sat uneasily with a popular feeling that an increasing economic-mindedness and a weakening of faith and virtue are undermining the very grounds of Tibetan communal well-being, morality, and identity.

On the one hand, people are concerned that contemporary practices of religious giving reflect and exacerbate this broader shift in minds and values. The cynical view is that a lot of giving is primarily prestige-oriented and motivated by competitiveness or social pressure. As such it risks contributing to community breakdown, as well as creating difficulties for households that struggle to keep up with escalating expectations. On the other hand, these are clearly



Fig 2.1.b: A new temple under construction in northeast Tibet, 2015. Photo by the author.

moral practices. As I have dug deeper into the histories and affective dynamics of specific cases, I have started to glimpse a more complex picture in which practices of religious giving are experienced and received as (sometimes exemplary) practices of and expressions of faith and virtue. It is precisely from this – as well as from the flashing of cash – that prestige is derived. But can we go as far as saying that the dynamics and scale of contemporary religious giving is (sometimes?) oriented towards countering the very societal shift in values for which it is being critiqued?

This would certainly seem to fit with observations made by other scholars about the ethics of an emergent ‘Tibetan’ entrepreneurialism: ideally, profits from business should be used for the benefit of both self and others (contrary to Christian notions of charity, self- and other-interest are not dichotomous in Buddhism). But the debates circulating in relation to religious giving take us further, showing what seem to be (newly emerging?) fault lines in ideas about how that ideal should be realised. Leaving to one side the question of mind and motivation, a key area of contention concerns what people should do with new-found wealth. Is it better to build a temple or to give money to monks? Or should people instead fund hospitals, local education, or vocational training? What makes someone an exemplary Tibetan and a good Buddhist – and what brings the greatest benefits and best serves the social good?

The recent controversy prompted by the outpouring of donations for the reconstruction of Notre Dame Cathedral indicates that such questions about religion, economy, and value are of global relevance. They are imbricated in a politics of value and can provoke strong moral-emotional responses grounded in common sense understandings of benefit, virtue, and the social good. Many commentators were outraged that a burning cathedral in Paris prompted people to give a total of nearly one billion euros in days when systemic poverty in France was not being addressed, black churches were being burnt down in racist attacks in the US, the planet was facing extinction... and the list goes on.

It might seem obvious to a tertiary-educated Tibetan schoolteacher that spending hundreds of thousands of *yuan* to sponsor a one-day religious festival for monks is excessive and wasteful. How could this possibly compete with the good of giving compassionate aid to poor neighbours or school students? But for his brother it might be equally self-evident that sponsoring such a festival is the most virtuous way to spend his money – or that rebuilding the village temple is of greater collective benefit than spending money on education. These divergent ideas about benefit and the social good can tell us something about the different ways in which Buddhism has been mediating people's engagements with accelerated development—as well as the different ways in which Buddhism and Buddhist values are understood, felt, and engaged with in contemporary Tibet.

2.2 Names from God: The Power of Protestant Names in China

Mark McLeister

Zheng Shengjie (郑圣洁), a second-generation Christian, is a young preacher and one of the leaders of a growing Three-Self-affiliated congregation in Huanghaicheng. Shengjie was originally named Zheng Xinkai (郑新开) by his mother, a clear reference to Deng Xiaoping's 'reform and opening policy' (*gaige kaifang* 改革开放) of the early 1980s. His mother's reasoning for choosing such a name was due to 'her strong patriotic feelings' (*ta dui guojia de re'ai* 她对国家的热爱, lit. 'her strong love for the country') and the hope that her son could contribute to the reform process. Shengjie's mother converted to Christianity when he was five years old, and when he was seven, his mother changed his given name from Xinkai to Shengjie, having sought advice from her church leaders. Shengjie means 'holy and pure' and is a term which appears frequently in the biblical text. Her prayer was that Shengjie would be a 'clean person' (*ganjing de ren* 干净的人). Beyond the literal meaning is the idea that when something is pure and holy, it is 'separated' (*fenli* 分离) for God's use. The change in name was a clear signal that Shengjie's mother now had a love for God which superseded her patriotism, although she insists that she is still patriotic and is a better citizen now than she was before becoming a Christian.



Fig 2.2.a: One of Huanghaicheng's churches. Photo by the author.

As a preacher, Shengjie is now an embodiment of his mother's aspiration (and prayer) that he would contribute to the building of the church. According to Shengjie, when he was young, he didn't really understand the meaning of his name. Now, in his thirties, he sees the 'deep spiritual meaning in his name' (*tai da de shuling de hanyi zai qizhong* 太大的属灵的含义在其中). His name, he believes, is something which he needs to follow, and has a real impact on his life as a 'binding force' (*yueshu li* 约束力).

Broadly speaking, personal names in Chinese societies have much more social and political significance than in Western societies. In contemporary China, it is common for people to have two names, and not uncommon for people to have multiple names, with each name signalling something about the holder's position within a given social setting. Shortly after birth, many children are given a diminutive or 'milk name' (*ruming* 乳名, aka 'small name' *xiaoming* 小名), generally used by family members and close friends, and a formal-legal name (*xingming* 姓名 aka 'big name' *daming* 大名), registered

with the state. Nicknames, ‘online’ or ‘cyber’ names, and ‘English’ names are also common, but we won’t consider these here. Formal–legal names (and milk names to some extent) are particularly important because they typically belong to the bearer for life. Parents and family elders often consider in depth the meaning, sound, and form of the characters when naming a child. There has been something of a revival in recent years of diviners and professional name-givers being consulted.

Protestant Christianity is the fastest-growing religion in the People’s Republic of China, with adherents numbering an estimated 70 million (Stark and Liu 2011). However, despite Protestant Christianity’s remarkable growth, the everyday lived religion of Christian adherents is under-researched. I have been conducting ethnographic research in a group of Three-Self-affiliated churches (which are registered with the state) in a coastal city in northern China for the past decade in order to further understand the everyday lives of Chinese Protestant Christians.¹ I am currently examining formal-legal and diminutive names in this Three-self-affiliated Christian community.²

Many of my research participants who are Protestant adherents have personal names which are recognisably ‘Christian’, and these can be divided into different name-types. The three main name-types are names composed of Christian concepts such as ‘grace’ or ‘holiness’, e.g., *Qi'en* 起恩 or *Shengjie* 圣洁; names borrowed from the biblical narrative such as ‘Joseph’ (*Yuese* 约瑟) or ‘John’ (*Yuehan* 约翰); and names made of a combination of characters which represent a verse from the biblical narrative, e.g., ‘Manna’ (*Mana* 吗哪) from Exodus 16:31. It is common for Christians to explain their given names when they meet new people or for parents to explain their child’s Christian-themed name to others, revealing that these names are much more than a personal label.

Born in the 1980s, Zheng Shengjie was one of the first to receive a Protestant name in his church community. Having experienced the excesses of the Cultural Revolution era, many Christian parents in Huanghaicheng in the 1980s and early 1990s were reluctant to choose overtly religious names for their children because they ‘did not have a sense of security’ (*meiyou anquangan* 没有安全感). Now, however, it is much more common for people who have grown up in these church communities to have a clearly defined Protestant name.

As was the case with Shengjie, church leaders play a central role in the naming process and some are regarded as such adept name-givers that they are approached by people from outside of the church to name children. I have examined in some detail in previous research the role of the Holy Spirit in Huanghaicheng congregations (McLeister 2019). Some church leaders I interviewed believe that the Holy Spirit gives names to children through them. All name-givers in the churches spend time reading the Bible and praying before making a final decision on a name. The Holy Spirit gives them ‘an insight’ (*yi ge kanjian* 一个看见) or ‘moves’ (*gandong* 感动) them so they choose an appropriate name. Many Christians in this community believe that the ability to bestow names on children is a special spiritual gift (*teshu de enci* 特殊的恩赐).



Fig 2.2.b: A Christian grave in Huanghaicheng. The personal name of the Christian is Yongjie 永杰, which means ‘forever pure’. Photo by the author.

Some parents believe that the names given by church leaders are more ‘effective’ (*youxiao* 有效) than names which lay Christians choose themselves. Just as Shengjie believes that his name has an impact on his life, many Christian parents believe that a Protestant name can have a powerful positive influence on the behaviour of their child, and the name will serve to guide the bearer through their life. Some parents talked to me about their child’s name as a ‘reminder’ (*tixing* 提醒) of the Christian message. Sometimes, when calling their child’s name, these parents explained that they would reflect on the idea that God had bestowed the name on the child and that the child would one day learn about the fuller and deeper meaning behind it.

From this brief overview, we can see some aspects of the power of Protestant names in this Christian community. In seeking such names for their child, Christian parents are making a conscious choice about their religious identity and their aspirations for their child. As bearers of parental aspirations, the

names protect and guide the child. As markers of a shared religious identity, the names help to foster community ties.

Notes

- ¹ To protect the anonymity of my participants, I use the pseudonym Huang-haicheng for my fieldsite.
- ² This research project has been generously supported by funding from The Carnegie Trust and The Royal Society of Edinburgh.

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2.3 Migration, Faith, and Belonging in Urban Hui Communities

David R. Stroup

On a cold, grey day in early December 2015, I sat in a booth in a restaurant in Jinan's Hui Quarter. Specialising in the famous *halal* hand-pulled noodles (*shou gong la mian* 手工拉面), the staff of the restaurant all hailed from the rural suburbs of Xining, in far-away Qinghai Province. Over a heaping plate of piping hot stir-fried cumin and mutton noodles (*zi ran yang rou gai jiao mian* 孜然羊肉盖浇面), I talked with my interviewee, one the restaurants' cooks, an 18-year-old man recently arrived at Shalndong from the west. In between mouthfuls I asked him about his impressions of Jinan after only a month of living in the city. Glumly, he replied 'Jinan's okay'. Pressed for further details he explained, 'It's not as good as back home. The Hui here just aren't as faithful'.

Later, a lifetime resident of Jinan who worked as a baker in the Hui Quarter echoed these sentiments. He explained 'The Hui from the northwest go to pray more often than a lot of locals. For them, Islam is absolutely a part of their daily

lives. But, we local Hui are very business-minded (*shangye hua* 商业化). We're really concerned about work, and don't have a lot of time to go pray'. Throughout my time in Jinan, responses like these became common. Time and again, respondents told me about how the arrival of migrant Hui from outside the city changed the neighborhood's social landscape.

Jinan's experiences hardly stand alone in contemporary urban China. Cities across the country currently struggle to incorporate the millions of in-country migrants who leave home in search of economic opportunity. The challenges members of this 'floating population' (*liu dong ren kou* 流动人口) face are numerous, and well documented (Zhang 2001; 2005; Zheng et al. 2009; Loyalka 2012). For *shaoshu minzu* 少数民族 (ethnic minorities) like the Hui, migration may pose even more acute difficulties in the form of cultural barriers and local prejudices (Iredale and Guo 2003; Côté 2015). Such shifts in cultural landscape may prove especially difficult for the Hui, whose in-group cultural heterogeneity, may cause feelings of alienation even within their own community (see, especially Erie and Carlson 2014). As they attempt to find a place in their new environs, these Hui migrants often feel forced to decide between maintaining tradition and meeting the demands of the usually marketised, secularised, Han-dominant local culture (Burgjin and Bilik 2003).

In part, these difficulties stem from the gap in economic status between Hui migrants and locals. As one respondent, a Hui engineer and lifelong Jinan resident explained, '(migrants) are still integrating. They still face some discrimination. They are not as educated or economically well off'. Another Jinan resident, a local member of the clergy, remarked that migrants from rural western China exhibited different priorities in education. He claimed, 'some of them, in places like Ningxia, when they're young can speak and read Arabic but can't even write their own names in Chinese'. An educator in Xining, himself a transplant from a rural community, argued that moving to cities provided a positive opportunity for migrant children to become better educated, claiming '(Migrants') children also see so much more of the world. At the very least, their *Putonghua* 普通话 (Mandarin) is standard'.

More frequently, though, respondents argued that gaps in literacy and custom prevented rural migrants from fully integrating into their new communities. These difficulties even trickled down into an inability to access public services, respondents argued. A man in his thirties who worked as a salesman in Jinan argued that, 'For People from the northwest (*Xibei* 西北), religion is the centre of their whole life. Not only that, they frequently ask the *ahong* 阿訇 (*imam*) to be a mediator for their life's conflicts. So, when conflicts arise in their lives, when they need an intermediary between people, they go find the *ahong*'. A member of the local clergy echoed these assertions, lamenting that unfamiliarity in dealing with civil services led so many migrants to depend upon the mosque to resolve their problems.

Conversely many of those Hui who move from the rural countryside to cities like Jinan, or Yinchuan (the capital of the Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region)

express frustration with their urban ethnic and religious counterparts. As one academic in Yinchuan explained ‘A lot of migrant Muslims who come here find Yinchuan to be very *danhua* 淡化 (‘watered down,’ or secular)’. A cab driver in Xining who had spent time living in east China grouched, ‘Muslims from the east like in Shandong don’t know anything about Islam.’ Incredulous, he added ‘They smoke, and drink and everything!’ Others made similar remarks. An electronics salesman, originally from Gansu, but living in Beijing listed the ways in which Beijing’s Hui were different from those in his hometown. Citing everything, from manner of dress, to diet, and attitudes no marriage, he complained, ‘Beijing Muslims’ way of thinking is just more *kaifang* 开放 (used negatively to imply permissiveness or libertine behavior)’.

Despite these tensions, however, the engagement between different segments of the Hui community that migration causes does stimulate transformations in how Hui communities negotiate boundaries of ethnic identity. Daily practices like those of diet, dress, or religious observance are key markers of an ethnic identity (Fox and Miller-Idriss 2008; Goode and Stroup 2015). Continued negotiation and debate over which practices should stand as the ‘correct’ manifestations of identity may trigger shifts in the boundaries of ethnic identity, or subdivide communities along cross-cutting identity cleavages (Chandra 2012; Wimmer 2013). In Hui communities, renewed conversations concerning the content of Hui identity stimulate change on many levels.

In some cases, secular Hui rediscover faith after engaging with more pious migrants. A respondent in Xining beamed with pride at the positive example provided by northwestern migrants, boasting ‘the people who live in East China, they’re very *danhua*, but when people from Qinghai go to the cities they start to pray more often, and believe more deeply’. A woman who operated a corner shop in Jinan’s Hui quarter also attributed changes in mosque attendance to migrants, stating ‘I think they’re a big influence on the neighbourhood. They go to pray every Friday. Local Muslims aren’t this observant’.

Likewise, experiences in the predominantly secular environments change the outlooks of migrants. The socioeconomic and political consequences of migration are not only evident at the destinations at which migrants arrive, but also in their places of origin (Bastia 2011; Brubaker 2010; Redclift 2016). A Hui scholar in Yinchuan remarked, ‘It works both ways; (migrants) adapt to Yinchuan but they also spur locals to think about being more active’. A young woman who worked as a teacher in Xining, herself having grown up as a migrant in Zhejiang, remarked ‘Because (migrants) go out to work, they also widen their horizons, open up their worldview, meet different people. This will also make changes. Some learn new things and transform their hometowns’.

The impact of these exchanges is wide ranging. Not only does this re-engagement of disparate parts of the Hui community serve to draw internal boundary lines that cross-cut ethnic identities with competing class, age, gender, sectarian, and other identities, it also forges new understandings of what it means to be Hui. Especially for the young people who understand migration

first-hand, the experience of living around and with Hui from other backgrounds opens up opportunities for a new, broader negotiation of the cultural markers which denote group membership.

Thus, the changes wrought by shifts in population demographics forge new conceptions of Hui ethnic identity. As one lifelong Hui resident in Yinchuan mused, 'Maybe these (migrant) people's children, the next generation, they can become residents of a New Yinchuan (*xin de Yinchuan ren* 新的银川人). This includes residents of Old Yinchuan's children's children also becoming a part of New Yinchuan. Maybe it could be like that.'

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2.4 Out of the Margins: The Rise of Religious Charity in China

Caroline Fielder

China has enjoyed a long and rich history of religious charity and philanthropy with some of the earliest forms of Chinese charity inspired by Confucian, Buddhist and Daoist teachings promoting the values of benevolence and compassion and focused on mutual assistance and charitable giving between kinship lines. Since the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, however, both religion and charity became viewed with suspicion and over time events and practices waned until the mid–late 1980s when it became possible once again for religiously inspired organisations to become involved in social welfare and development work. A decade later, following deliberate efforts by the state to rehabilitate the concept of charity within wider society, religiously inspired charitable organisations (RICOs) began to re-emerge in earnest.

Today, after a period of marginalisation, we can see that religious charities from a number of traditions are once again on the rise. This year's annual charity fundraising event held by Chinese internet giant Tencent (the 'Tencent 99 Giving Day') saw the Nanjing-based RICO, the Amity Foundation, become its 10th biggest beneficiary. Given that religion and charity have been sensitive spheres of influence in China's recent history and have therefore been tightly managed, the exposure given by the event was doubtless extremely meaningful in bringing Amity's work, its vision and mission to the fore of the general public's imagination. The 435 projects that Amity put forward for support must have resonated with a lot of individual donors as they managed to raise a total of almost 66,520,000 RMB (approximately £7.3 million) over the course of three days.

For any organisation this would be considered a major success, but as one considers Amity's religious heritage it is worth spending a moment asking what the rise of Amity, and the emergence of the wider RICO sector, can teach us about contemporary Chinese society. Scholars like Durkheim and Troeltsch have long-since argued that religion can mirror wider society and I would suggest that RICOs such as Amity present us with a particularly interesting lens through which to explore developments in wider Chinese society.

Firstly, as organisations created at a specific time and for a specific purpose, their very existence, organisational values and ideals can help us appreciate changes in Chinese society, including shifts in rhetoric, modifications in social

behaviour, and changes in political focus. The growing presence of RICOs in wider society reflects a much-changed social and political reality compared to that of the 1950s to early 1980s, when both charity and religion were viewed with suspicion. Charity, once seen as a marker of a feudal society and a means of keeping the poor in their place is now no longer seen as a challenge to the Party or a critique on its ability to provide for its citizens. Similarly, although differing voices can still be heard, religion has morphed from being viewed as a ‘drug’ which should be eradicated, to a ‘medicine’ with the potential to bring about social stability and provide healing for the nation. Christianity, previously viewed with disdain, as summed up in the old adage ‘One more Christian, one less Chinese’ (*duole yige jidutu, shaole yige Zhongguo ren* 多了一个基督徒, 少了一个中国人), has seen a considerable change in fortunes since the period of reform and opening up. A renewed openness in both policy circles and society has allowed for Christianity to now be seen by some as a potentially progressive force with a distinctive and growing Chinese voice.

From the outset Amity has taken a lead in challenging stereotypes and initiating positive forms of dialogue between religious groups and wider society, including those outside China. In Chinese its name is made from two characters ‘爱德’ (*ai de*) meaning love and virtue (or virtuous deeds). In 1984 one of the founding fathers of the organisation, Bishop KH Ting, wrote a letter to international friends where he laid out his vision for Amity to be an organisation which promoted love and virtuous deeds, emphasising the positive contribution of Chinese Christians to society. No longer should they be seen as foreign lackeys or traitors, instead Amity would be a vehicle for Chinese Christians to come together to do their part ‘as citizens in nation-building’ in order to ‘make the fact of Christian presence and participation better known to our people, without in any way weakening the work of the church proper’ (Amity Foundation n.d.).

Established formally in 1985, the Amity Foundation has grown from a three-man organisation with limited resources to a multi-million-pound foundation, headed by a woman and which now serves as an incubator to aspiring young charities within the wider sector. Since its inception Amity’s work priorities have echoed and reinforced patterns from wider Chinese society. These include a mirroring of the reform and opening process through the re-establishment of links with international ‘friends’ in the 1980s (including the establishment of a new model for overseas relationships which focused on people-to-people sharing based on mutual respect, comprising an understanding of the changing realities of local church life rooted in new China and led by Chinese); a focus on social changes and the need to mitigate against growing inequality within Chinese society through the rehabilitation of charity within Chinese society in the 1990s (taking up the call to ‘Go West’; facilitating technical knowledge exchange and the sharing of best practice with grassroots communities within impoverished sectors of Chinese society; building trust across social divides and channelling funds and help to where they were most needed); building social resilience in the 2000s, including the rebuilding of communities following a

number of natural disasters, and recognising the need to develop a Chinese funding base so as to become more self-sufficient (the financial crisis had a big impact as 98% of project funding still came from overseas in 2008); and undertaking a process of internationalisation in the 2010s (acting as a conduit for Chinese volunteers going overseas, and the transmission of Chinese ideas of development and charity to the world through the opening of Amity offices in Ethiopia in 2015, in Geneva in 2017, and in Kenya in 2019).

Alongside this mirroring of social changes, RICOs such as Amity have also acted in the cognitive sense of allowing society to see itself, and in that process to become more self-conscious and open to change. As such it has more subtly served as a catalyst of socio-cultural change. In a society which has sought to privatise religious thought and confine religious activities to within the physical walls of religious institutions, such as churches, temples, and mosques, RICOs have sought to extend religion's scope by taking their work firmly into the public sphere and working with faith communities and those with no religious belief. The process of taking religion into the public sphere has not only been a challenge to forces in support of secularisation but also questions more conservative elements from within the church who see charity, social welfare, and development as the work of the state and criticise RICOs for diverting important resources away from what they see as 'real' religious work. Such challenges bring to mind C. K. Yang's (1961) distinction between what he saw as institutional and diffused religion, emphasising the fluid and dynamic potential of the cultural role of religion, as opposed to the more restrictive traditional institutional embodiment as emphasised in both policy circles and traditional church structures.

In many ways the appeal of the Amity Foundation is simple and lies in its ability to connect people and to build trust across communities, religious and ethnic divides. It is also in its ability to present a form of religion which echoes Bellah's (1967) notion of a civic religion—drawing inspiration from a particular religious tradition, in Amity's case working alongside Protestant churches both inside China and globally, and yet at the same time being independent of those same churches or indeed any other recognised religious institution. As such Amity draws on particular teachings and yet remains religiously 'distinctive', and is therefore able to develop its own character and cultivate its own sense of integrity. Not being rooted in the church structures and hierarchies frees it from many political and doctrinal constraints and broadens its appeal to wider sectors of society.

This more nebulous, non-doctrinal approach does not necessarily align with organised religion but should not be seen as a weakening or a rejection of religious values. As its popularity in recent fundraising events also shows, this form of religious expression arguably has an appeal to wider sectors of society who themselves are more fluid and questioning in their approach to religious and other issues of concern. RICOs such as Amity are becoming

increasingly a more active and vocal sector of society, not just within China but now also internationally. As such these organisations, which have historically had relatively little attention paid to them, deserve to be much better understood and scrutinised.

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CHAPTER 3

Music, Identity, and Community

3.0 Introduction

Paul Kendall

Academic research on China and the Sinophone world has largely dismantled the Orientalist conceptualisation of a ‘traditional’ Chinese music existing in threatened opposition to ‘Western’ music by means of research on genres as diverse as Cantopop, revolutionary opera, silk-and-bamboo (*sizhu* 丝竹) instrumental music, and Tibetan hip hop. Such genres are not only diverse in relation to each other, but also internally complex, drawing on various regional, national, and global influences. In the following paragraphs, I examine another type of diversity, which is the ways and the extent to which the experience of music contributes to a sense of self and/or community. I examine this diversity of musical experience from three perspectives: as a simultaneously shared experience of organised sound; as integral to the imaginings of wider national, regional, ethnic, political, and generational ‘communities’; and as superficially heard amid the sensory overload of contemporary cities.

From the first perspective, musical performance constitutes an intimate shared experience which can create or reinforce strong emotional bonds among participants. A classic example from recent PRC history is the performance of the rock singer Cui Jian in May 1989 in Tiananmen Square. Peng Lei (2019) describes how this performance, taking place in the nation’s ‘symbolic central space’, carried an ‘explicit political message’ of support for its audience of student protestors. Indeed, much has been written of early Chinese rock music’s involvement

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in the production of a politically aware, questioning youth culture in the late 1980s (e.g. Jones 1992). Since those heady days, rock music in China has increasingly refrained from involvement in collective political statements. However, its performance still plays an important role in the production of identities, which are not necessarily grounded in a sense of either the political or the collective. For example, Peng Lei also describes the more individualist rock bands and identities of the 2000s, particularly those associated with the venue D-22 in Beijing's university district. Moreover, non-mainstream music does not have a monopoly on the ability to produce a sense of identity or community. Thus, in this volume, Zou Sheng examines the recent patriotic singing of 'red songs' by flash mobs throughout the Sinophone world. Whereas these revolutionary (and post-revolutionary) songs have continued to be performed by the elderly in parks and other urban spaces during the post-Mao era (see Kendall 2019), these 'choral flash mobs' are notable for bringing together young groups of nationalists. Zou understands these gatherings as providing an occasion for what the ethnomusicologist Thomas Turino refers to as 'sonic bonding', as participants perform their sense of belonging to a national community through singing and movement.

In none of these examples is the sense of self or community solely restricted to the experience of music as a shared moment in space. This brings the article to a second, interrelated perspective on the modern experience of music. Revisiting two of the examples above, Cui Jian's album, *Rock 'N' Roll on the New Long March*, would have been heard by many students on cassette players prior to his performance in Tiananmen Square, just as participants in flash mobs might brush up on their renditions of 'red songs' via online streaming before singing in public. Looking to earlier technologies, the invention of the gramophone in the late nineteenth century enabled the separation of musical sound from time and space, so that a performance could be frozen and then reproduced far beyond the geographical and temporal limitations of its acoustic space. The invention of the radio, in turn, reproduced across vast spaces the previously local experience of musical sound as simultaneously heard, so that music came to play an important albeit sometimes underestimated role in the construction of 'imagined communities' (Anderson 1983).

These imagined communities are not just of the nation, but also of region, ethnicity, generation, and political orientation, among others. For example, Yiu-Wai Chu (this volume; 2017), has argued for the importance of Cantopop in reflecting and defining a specifically Hong Kong identity, with lyrics about not only (a sometimes distanced) Chineseness but also the city itself. Elsewhere, Anna Morcom (this volume; 2015; 2018) has written of how Tibetan popular musics have created proud representations of Tibetan geography and culture. The social groups that shape – and are shaped by – these musics are not necessarily the cuddly, bounded states of collective existence that the term 'community' typically (and uncritically) implies, but rather exist in complex and sometimes antagonistic relations with other imagined communities. For Morcom, Tibetan popular musics' representations of ethnic identity partially align with the PRC's own colourful representations of the Tibetans as a distinct

ethnic group within the imagined multicultural community of Chineseness, but sharply diverge when accompanied by political demands. In neighbouring Xinjiang, the state has actively encouraged certain Uyghur musical practices but as secularised, staged performances of PRC heritage, rather than as more local, religious expressions of identity (Harris 2020). Moreover, in recent years, even state-sanctioned, sanitised Uyghur musics have been treated with suspicion and replaced by genres more associated with the Han Chinese (Harris, this volume; Anderson and Byler 2019).

There is also, of course, conflict over music within the narrower boundaries of an acoustic space, particularly in cities, where the ubiquity of music can create the perception of music as noise (see Frith 2002). For Beijing, Caroline Chen (2010) has shown how folk dancing amid the city's architectural and demographic density has led to generational conflict, as elderly dancers (and their music) irritate parents trying to maintain a quiet study environment for their children. For Hong Kong, Winnie Lai (2018) has described how pro-democracy demonstrators sang *Happy Birthday to You* to drown out, confuse and embarrass their opponents during the Umbrella Movement. Face-to-face (or ear-to-ear?) communities of musical sound are not necessarily warm and cuddly either.

Focusing on the dense soundscapes of urban spaces also suggests a third perspective on the experience of music, as an ubiquitous but relatively unheeded element of everyday life that does not significantly contribute to a sense of community or even self. My own research on a small city in Guizhou province explores this aspect of music, as struggling to exert significant influence amid a dense, high-decibel soundscape (Kendall 2019). Georg Simmel ([1903] 1997) famously argued that the city dweller becomes indifferent as a defence mechanism against the sensory onslaught of the metropolis. In the contemporary world, even a small Chinese city presents an aural onslaught, so that, unless played at particularly high levels, music may simply be tuned out by urban residents.

In the city of Wuhan, Samuel Horlor (2021, 25) finds that street performances 'exude a mundane quality, manifest not only in their settings and circumstances, but also in the underwhelming collective responses...that they provoke'. These loosely-bound collections of individuals may be more typical of everyday urban musical life than the 'exceptional, underground or minority cases' of music-making that scholars tend to prioritise (Horlor 2021, 90). And for these mundane musical gatherings, the notion of community needs to be radically conceptualised, away from the idea of 'a community' that denotes a 'collection of people to which individuals belong, enduring bodies defined by the duality of insiders and outsiders' and towards 'community' as an uncountable noun 'evoking a descriptive quality of a situation or strip of activity' (Horlor 2021, 11). Only then does it become possible to grapple with the full extent of music's relationship with senses of self and community, as sometimes a powerful force—amid close interactions of bodies and sound, as well as in the wider production of social belonging—but also as sometimes fleetingly and superficially experienced amid the complexities of contemporary urban space.

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3.1 Performing Devotion: Revitalized 'Red Songs', Choral Flash Mobs, and National Identity

Sheng Zou

As nationalist sentiment climaxed in Mainland China in the wake of the Hong Kong protests and amid the celebrations of the 70th anniversary of

the founding of the PRC, new life has been breathed into a number of classical propagandistic songs, or ‘red songs’ (*hong ge* 红歌), which were both broadcast and performed *en masse* across the country. One of the revitalised songs is ‘My People, My Country’ (*wo he wo de zuguo* 我和我的祖国), a propaganda anthem from 1985 that has recently been covered by Chinese pop diva Faye Wong with a new musical arrangement for a hit Chinese movie of the same name. The song is included in the catalogue of 100 red songs released by the Central Propaganda Department to celebrate the anniversary.

The revival of classical red songs has taken a participatory and performative turn, as patriotic singing competitions and choral flash mobs spread across Chinese communities at home and abroad. In August, patriotic Chinese students around the world took to the streets, waving national flags while singing together to defend and honour their homeland. In September, pro-Beijing demonstrators in Hong Kong gathered in malls to sing China’s national anthem and classical red songs such as ‘Ode to the Motherland’ (*gechang zuguo* 歌唱祖国), which constituted a counter-voice to ‘Glory to Hong Kong,’ an anthem adopted by Hong Kong protesters to foster internal solidarity. Meanwhile, organisations and communities across China, large and small, held singing competitions where citizens performed patriotic songs live.

This fervent wave of choral flash mobs and singing competitions constitutes a re-emerging sonic infrastructure grounded in local and identity-based communities where music is circulated and practiced in the service of national cohesion. Over the past decades, from loudspeakers and radios, to tapes and CDs, and further to digital devices and apps, practices of music making and listening have been radically decentralised and personalised; yet these recent flash mobs signify a return of the collective in people’s everyday experience with music. In the following, I will discuss how music could be deployed to consolidate national identification; how choral flash mobs allow for a kind of sonic and bodily bonding (Turino 2008; McNeil 1995) due to their distinctive participatory and performative properties; and how these flash mob performances relate to cultural/national identity formation.

Much attention is paid to the ways music is deployed as a means of political resistance, such as the iconic protest song ‘March for the Beloved,’ which, since South Korea’s Gwangju Democratisation Movement, has inspired other social movements in Asia. Nonetheless, music can also be harnessed as a medium of political and ideological control. In China, political and ideological control via music is achieved through appeals to people’s nationalist sentiment and identity. Since the late 1970s, patriotic red songs, sung by a few professional singers employed by state troupes, often featured metaphoric terms such as ‘home’/‘homeland’ (Baranovitch 2003), in order to blur the line between political nationalism and cultural nationalism, or to transfer people’s love for the nation to the Party–state. However, with the market-oriented reforms in China’s media and cultural scenes and the influx of foreign music genres, many of these red songs gradually lost their grip on people, especially younger generations. On

the one hand, other music genres, such as hip-hop, have been incorporated into propaganda campaigns (Zou 2019). On the other hand, attempts have been made to revitalise the red songs through new renditions and covers.

The power of music in evoking nationalistic tendencies should be analysed in terms of both its sonic and symbolic qualities. Music is often seen as a vehicle for lyrics, but as Revill (2000, 602) observes, the ‘physical properties of sound, pitch, rhythm, timbre’ work on and through the body, granting music ‘a singular power to play on the emotions, to arouse and subdue, animate and pacify’. Therefore, the sonic, rhythmic, and melodic qualities of music that give rise to particular sensory, somatic, and mental experiences should be examined in their own right. In this sense, the ideological power of patriotic red songs stems largely from their rhythmic and melodic qualities that induce particular emotional orientations, such as solidarity, solemnness, or conviviality.

The symbolic quality of music—realised through meaningful lyrics or associated memories and tropes—constitutes another major source of musical power. Music is made at a particular time in a concrete place; its specific temporal and spatial dimensions allow it to carry memories and mark spatial boundaries. Bohlman (2004), for instance, argues that nationalistic music not only contributes to ethnic consciousness, but also serves nation-states in their struggle over contested territory. Likewise, red songs such as ‘My People, My Country’ and ‘Ode to the Motherland’ not only give people access to a symbolic past, but also invoke ‘cultural geographies of exclusion and inclusion’ (Revill 2000, 598). Such terms as ‘people’, ‘country’ and ‘motherland’ have definitional boundaries that demarcate the in-group from the out-group, reinforcing a sense of national sovereignty and integrity.

Memories, however, are not just ‘transmitted’ by these songs to new generations; they are also reconstructed, reformulated, and re-inserted into contemporary structures of feeling. The symbolic open-endedness of these patriotic songs makes this reformulation possible. Faye Wong’s cover of ‘My People, My Country’ manifests another technique to re-insert memories of the past into the fabrics of contemporary life in ways legible to the contemporary audience.

The choral flash mobs as an embodied sonic infrastructure further contribute to the consolidation of national identification. Different from the top-down Red Culture campaign operative from 2008 and 2012 in Chongqing, the latest wave of patriotic flash mobs appears to be spontaneous and self-organised. The participants, as both singers and listeners, gather together to make collective sound, live. The liveness of flash mob performances—manifested in the acts of singing, cheering, or moving together in synchrony—has the potential to create ‘strong emotional links between the individual and the group’ (Eyerman 2002, 450). Group singing as a participatory and performative ritual leads to a sense of unity and intersubjective connection, similar to what Victor Turner (1991, 96) calls ‘communitas’, namely a state of ‘homogeneity and comradeship’ among individuals in rituals. In the context of nation-states, Benedict Anderson (2006,

145) observes that people singing national anthems on national holidays share an experience of simultaneity that he characterises as ‘unisonance’—a sonic and embodied experience of an imagined community.

In these choral flash mobs, people also have a similar embodied experience of simultaneity as they sing the same verse to the same melody. During a flash mob taking place at a shopping mall in Hong Kong on September 12, pro-Beijing demonstrators sang the ‘Ode to the Motherland’ in unison, while facing toward a large national flag hanging from the second floor. Many of them were also waving small national flags while singing. In much the same way individual voices converged into one, the individuals merged into a homogeneous group where particularities were temporarily cast aside. Choral flash mobs provide an occasion for ‘sonic bonding’ (Turino 2008), where people make collective sound, move in synchrony, and experience a sense of togetherness. Participants perform not only music, but also their devotion to the nation-state, when their sense of national identity and pride is challenged by the ideological and discursive battles of the latest geopolitical crisis. Characterised by liveness, embodiment, participation, and performance, choral flash mobs enable a spectacular and aesthetic representation of national identity, where top-down ideological governance coalesces with bottom-up nationalist sentiment.

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3.2 Rethinking Hong Kong Identity through Cantopop: The 1980s as an Example

Yiu-Wai Chu

'Music, like identity, is both performance and story,' argued by Simon Frith in his often-cited essay 'Music and Identity': it 'describes the social in the individual and the individual in the social' (Frith 1996, 109). In the context of Hong Kong where more than 90 percent of the population speak Cantonese, Cantonese popular songs (Cantopop) have functioned as a major source of the city's cultural identity by connecting the individual and the social. I have argued elsewhere that the story of Cantopop, the voice of the city, was also the story of Hong Kong identity (Chu 2017, 40–41). While it is widely believed that Cantopop has been declining in the past two decades or so, it is not surprising that Hong Kong identity has also been waning. In June 2019, the anti-extradition bill movement opened a Pandora's Box that the Hong Kong government has still failed to nail shut. Arguably, the diminishing Hong Kong identity and its relation to China is one of the important controversies related to the saga. Given the limited scope, the 1980s will be used as an example to explain the cultural politics of identity (trans)formation in Hong Kong when Cantopop played out across society in that decade of changes.

It is well known that 'Below the Lion Rock' (1979), originally the theme song of a Radio Television Hong Kong (RTHK) television drama, is the unofficial anthem of the city. The song written by the Cantopop godfathers Joseph Koo (melody) and James Wong (lyrics) signalled the dawning of a new era of local identity. As astutely noted by David Faure in 'Reflections on Being Chinese in Hong Kong,' 'If the Hong Kong Chinese up to the 1970s were Chinese sojourners in Hong Kong, the generation of the 1970s [were] Hong Kong people of Chinese descent' (Faure 1997, 104). Cantopop turned a new page in the history of Hong Kong identity by singing the city in the subsequent decades. If the recent anti-extradition saga had pit Hong Kong against the Mainland, the crises in the early 1980s brought forth various imaginaries between the former British colony and its motherland. In 1982, the then British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher fell on the stairs in front of the Great Hall of the People in Beijing, which stirred up a confidence crisis among Hong Kong people. Hong Kong's relationship with China was somehow a major issue shortly before and after that infamous slip. It was argued by Esther Cheung (1999), my late dear friend, that Hong Kong popular music (including Cantopop and Mandopop) has generated intensely vigorous imaginations of homeland, nation, and 'Chineseness' in that special context.

Notwithstanding the fact that the Cantopop industry has long been dominated by romantic ballads, mainstream songs did present various national allegories. For example, Cantopop diva Liza Wang's big hits 'Always Love across Ten Thousand Waters and One Thousand Mountains' (1981) and 'The Brave

Chinese' (1981) expressed Hong Kong diasporic and national sentiments respectively in the early 1980s. It should not be difficult to tell from the titles that 'Ode on the Great Wall' (1983) and 'Call of the Yellow River' (1983) (sung by the then leading Cantopop singers Roman Tam and Adam Cheng respectively), among others, are good examples of rethinking if not glorifying Chineseness as the cultural root of Hong Kong identity. Besides 'Below the Lion Rock,' interestingly, Roman Tam also sang 'The Chinese Dream' (1983)—almost three decades before President Xi Jinping's version of the Chinese dream of national rejuvenation. The song was so popular that Tam was invited to perform the Mandarin version on the 1985 Spring Festival Gala of China Central Television (CCTV, state television broadcaster), the immensely popular show watched by countless Chinese families on Chinese New Year's Eve. Meanwhile, Hong Kong's root-searching stories were perfectly summarised by the Side A of Teddy Robin's vinyl disc *Extraterrestrial Man* (1984), which was a medley comprising of five songs sharing the motif of longing for home. Not just to be found in the north, home could also be constructed locally, with conceptions of the past, present, and future. Agnes Chan's 'Hong Kong Hong Kong' (1982) was a lavish praise of the then Hong Kong as a home as well as an energetic city. 'Fond Memories of Hong Kong' (1983), theme song of the RTHK television programme bearing the same title, was nostalgic as well as forward-looking at once, trying to imagine a new future for Hong Kong through the examination of its history of developing from a small island into a world city.

Alongside mainstream pop songs, Hong Kong folk songs were also good examples of creative hybridisations. Different from the highly commercial mainstream Cantopop, the wave of folk songs generated across the territory in the early 1980s represented the visions of young literary hipsters back then. Not unlike the examples mentioned above, however, many Hong Kong folk songs were root-searching, and Ivy Koo's 'My Home My Land' (1982), as implied by the title, is a convenient example. *Suite of Hong Kong City* (1982), a concept album masterminded by Armando Lai, was a pioneering attempt to use different districts of Hong Kong as the setting-cum-theme of all the songs except '1997,' which is a bold reflection of Hong Kong youngsters' bewilderment toward the future after Hong Kong's reversion to China. Besides folk songs, band songs also imagined different futures for Hong Kong at that critical historical juncture. Shortly after the official signing of the Sino-British Joint Declaration in December 1984, Hong Kong music industry witnessed the advent of band music, which continued to hybridise different imaginaries toward the future beyond 1997. The group 'Island,' the forerunner of this wave of band music, released its debut album entitled *Island* in 1985. Similar to 'Fond Memories of Hong Kong,' the main plug 'Legend of the Island' retold the story of how Hong Kong developed into a metropolis. While the legendary rock band 'Beyond' targeted the establishment with their pointed critiques of social issues, the duo 'Tat Ming Pair' voiced out the concerns of the lost generation of Hong Kong youngsters when facing an unknown future. In short, the

cultural identity of Hong Kong was an intricate hybridisation of the national, the local, and the global.

Hong Kong people's sense of belonging was fostered, according to Gordon Mathews, Tai-lok Lui and Eric Ma (2008, 146), 'through the "bottom-up" experiences of ordinary people's everyday lives'. Back in the 1980s, Cantopop was one of the most important sources of those kinds of Hong Kong everyday experiences. To borrow Frith's terminologies, Cantopop was a beautiful example of how popular music, like identity, is both performance and story of the city during times of uncertainty. Its decline in recent years has inevitably exerted negative impacts on the sense of belonging of Hong Kong people.

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3.3 Tibetan Popular Music: Politics and Complexities

Anna Morcom

In today's Tibet, popular music is showcased vigorously by the state on television and in festivals, and in fact, popular music emerged in Tibet from state institutions. At the same time, it is widely seen as subversive or patriotic for Tibetans, or at least assertive of Tibetan identity. Here, I explore some layers of complexity in the politics of music in contemporary Tibet.

A deeply-loved song of 2012 that exemplifies how Tibetan pop music powerfully embodies Tibetan identity is Tsewang Lhamo's 'Glory of the Ancestors' (2012). The lyrics praise the distinct Tibetan language, writing, culture, and



Fig 3.3.a: Still from Glory to the Ancestors' music video.

customs, and the video showcases the beautiful landscape in particular. I focus here on the video.

Rather than a land that is worked and is the basis of life, the Tibetan scenery, animals and clothes in the video evoke *aesthetic beauty*. Tsewang Lhamo is pictured mostly in grasslands with sheep and yak, yet is clearly not a herder, and the person herding is a small dot in the background who appears momentarily (see Fig 3.3.a.). The three sumptuous Tibetan outfits she wears are a long way from what Tibetans who live on the land wear.

Such a view of the land is a vision from a distance, one that shows a fundamental separation from the land, and belies a modern and urban viewpoint, as I have explored (Morcom 2015). It is in fact a classic example of what has been termed the 'landscape idea' by the geographer Denis Cosgrove (1998 [1984]), a way of looking associated with the rise of capitalism, the transformation of land into a commodity, the movement of people from subsistence living off the land, and a shift to urban rather than rural centres of power.

This vision in Tsewang Lhamo's song is particularly clear when we compare it to the way land and nature are portrayed in the lyrics of pre-modern oral folk songs. For example, this is a housebuilding song, from a book by Dawa Dolma (2012):

*The rammers resembling southern dragons built a wall, resembling the blue sky.
The rammers resembling white-chested eagles built a wall, resembling a white
rocky mountain.*

...

The rammers resembling fierce tigers built a wall, resembling a forest.

In seven lines (three shown here), the humans working are compared to ordinary, rare, and mythical creatures, and similarly, the wall they build, intertwining people, animals, and environment. The parallel lines (an age-old characteristic of Tibetan oral poetry) outline a 'vertical' hierarchy of cosmos, religion, society, where land and animals and nature and environment are an integrated part, rather than contemplated in and of themselves as beautiful. In pop songs, in contrast, we have a 'horizontal' view of the land as territory, the Tibetan land. This is ultimately a nationalist vision of ownership. But it is also a fundamentally ambiguous one, as it could be seen as 'China's Tibet', or a 'Tibetans' Tibet'.

It is crucial to note that the celebration of Tibetan identity *per se* is not restricted and cannot be said to be resistant or subversive *in and of itself*, as I have explored (Morcom 2018). Tibetans as a distinct people with distinct culture is not denied, but rather, is core to the structure of the Chinese multi-cultural nation, the *minzu* 民族 system. Assertions of Tibetan identity are not fundamentally subversive (unless this framework changes, which it may).

The pristine landscapes and glossy representations of Tibetans and their culture in music videos are often equivalent to what we see in tourist magazines and publications produced by the state to showcase Tibet as an exotic, beautiful paradise that they nurture. Tibetans in these videos look well-to-do, wealthy and successful, and, crucially, not dirty, and not embedded in rural life and work. This encapsulates the process of development, urbanisation, and transformation of Tibet under China in recent decades.

The gloss and high production standards of pop music are also a key part of the larger ideology of modernisation and development led by the state. As I have argued (Morcom 2007), the ballet-based, Sinicised dance style of state troupes aesthetically embodied socialist progress; it then surfaced in popular culture, its polish and professionalism utterly salient for market- or capitalist-based development too. The song 'Tibetan' (*Gangchanpa*), by the singer Dolma Kyab, for example, is seen as extremely powerful and subversive in its description of the Tibetan people and their primordial history, yet the dancing and costumes as performed here in a festival are entirely that of the state troupes, born of the socialist era (2006) (see Fig 3.3.b.).

In Tibet, rapid development and its ideologies subsume life, and people naturally seek to do well in this climate. Glossy portrayals of Tibet and Tibetans and slick, highly professional performance are inevitably appealing. Given the prevalence, still today, of Chinese stereotypes of Tibetans as backward, it is hardly difficult to understand how songs that assert Tibetan identity and culture and portray it richly are loved, and also fuel patriotism and to some degree, anti-state emotion. Nevertheless, the value of such a popular culture to the state should not be underestimated. State promotion of Tibetan language education or Buddhism is much less enthusiastic and comprehensive than popular music, to say the least.

Tibetan hip hop is an interesting new space where we can see Tibetan identity being created in ways that break from these state visions, with the presence



Fig 3.3.b: Still from 'Gangchanpa' music video.

of anger, swear words, and the portrayal of urban lives that are gritty or tough or poor (see Su Buer's article on Tibetan hip hop (2019)). Negative emotions that present Tibetans as not happy, wealthy, successful, etc., have in fact played a part in politically potent songs before, notably, the deep sadness in Dadon's songs of the late 1980s, described by Isabelle Henrion-Dourcy (2005). With the state all-controlling, negative emotions of the people point directly to its failures and wrongs. However, many hip hop songs are strongly focused on a personal feeling of alienation or anger, undermining the potential for political critique of the state.

In a different mode, some songs, particularly from Amdo, also exhibit a style of video very different to the glossy norm. An example is 'Lamentation' (*Kyo bod*), by the singer Pema Trinley (2013). The lyrics are a searing complaint against the state of affairs in Tibet as ruled by the Chinese communist Party and the singer was arrested for this song. The video, however, is more subtly subversive, and on its own would not get anyone into trouble. There are some shots of landscaped land typical of music videos, but they are paired with more bleak shots and overall, the style is not glossy, but DIY, or even ethnographic (note DIY was central to the protest of the Punk movement). There are no costumes or exotic locations and much more closeness to Tibetan people and their lives. For example, from 56 seconds into the video, the camera lingers long on a crowd of real-looking rather than merely picturesque Tibetans, then after a shot of meadow flowers, it enters into and underneath a web of prayer



Fig 3.3.c: Still from ‘Lamentation’ music video.

flags where people sit here and there (see Fig 3.3.c.). There is no professional shot composition. Rather than aestheticised and landscaped and a view from outside, this is animated, sensuous, and immersive.

I would describe this video as having ‘thickness’, as in ‘thick description’. If, as Sherry Ortner analyses (2006, 42–62), scholars failed to adequately analyse and understand resistance due to a lack of ethnographic thickness, we can see how ‘thinness’ in pop songs and videos potentially undermines resistance, and how the state, with its thin, stereotyped portrayals of Tibetans, exerts control. I would add, ‘Glory of the Ancestors’, even as it portrays culture and identity in a glossy and landscaped way, still has richness, especially in lyrics, and the potency people perceive arguably lies in this. This is even more the case for Dolma Kyab’s ‘Tibetan’.

In terms of high production standards, gloss, slickness, sheer wealth, power, conspicuous grandeur, material success and upward mobility, the state is always more powerful, and these are its terms of modernity. Music videos that speak on these terms can, inadvertently, support state structures, even if in other ways they challenge them or assert within them. But ‘thickness’ of representation is another dimension, beyond and contrary to the way power is wielded by authoritarian states.

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3.4 Music in the Disciplinary Regimes of Xinjiang's 'Anti-Extremism' Campaign

Rachel Harris

Beginning in 2017, news began to leak out from China's Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region of the construction of a huge, secretive network of detention camps, dubbed 'transformation through education centres' in official Chinese sources. Overseas journalists and scholars began to piece together the evidence, and by mid-2018 international organisations (CERD 2018) and national governments (U.S. State Department 2018) were raising concerns that well over a million Muslims—primarily Uyghurs but also Kazakhs and other Muslim peoples—had been interned in the camps for indefinite periods of time

without formal legal charge. Reports by former detainees, teachers and guards, supported by satellite imagery, revealed a network of over a hundred newly built or greatly expanded detention facilities, heavily secured with barbed wire and surveillance systems, some of them large enough to hold up to 100,000 inmates.

Government documents leaked in autumn 2019 (Ramzy and Buckley 2019) used the language of epidemic to justify these extraordinary abuses. Detainees were said to have been ‘infected’ by the ‘virus’ of Islamic extremism and must be quarantined and cured. In practice, as careful documentation by human rights organisations (HRW 2018) has revealed, enormous numbers of people have been detained simply for the peaceful pursuit of their faith, or because they had travelled abroad, or installed ‘suspicious’ apps on their phones. Detainees include hundreds of prominent academics (UHRP 2019) and Uyghur cultural icons.

In the testimonies of former detainees, regimes of forced repetition and self-criticism feature strongly. Detainees recount being made to recite repeatedly, ‘We will oppose extremism, we will oppose separatism, we will oppose terrorism.’ Before meals they were required to demonstrate their gratitude to the Communist Party by chanting, ‘Thank the Party! Thank the Motherland! Thank President Xi!’ As Gerry Shih (2018) observed, ‘the internment program aims to rewire the political thinking of detainees, erase their Islamic beliefs and reshape their very identities.’

Musical performance has played a key role in the ‘re-education’ program. A leaked video clip which circulated on Uyghur exile networks in 2017 showed two rows of Uyghur detainees holding plastic bowls and singing the revolutionary song, ‘Without the Communist Party there would be no New China.’ Former detainee Abduwali Ayup explained that these inmates were singing for their food; a daily practice noted in many accounts (Byler 2018a). Outside the camps as well, Uyghurs in villages and towns across the region were mobilised in weekly mass singing and dancing. Their repertoire included the canon of revolutionary songs, but also Chinese pop songs, notably the internet hit ‘Little Apple’.

Chinese media reports explicitly linked these activities to civilising projects: countering religious extremism and fostering modernity. I have argued that these activities were intended to break down the embodied norms of Uyghur culture by enforcing forms of public behaviour that violated religious expectations (Harris 2017). This was particularly striking in the case of the images of dancing Uyghur imams (religious clerics) which circulated on social media, and this singing and dancing formed part of a raft of measures including bans on beards and headscarves, beer drinking competitions, and proscriptions on halal food.

In this context of mass incarceration and documented abuse, such coercive use of musical performance may be understood as an example of the ‘weaponisation’ of music. Suzanne Cusick (2008) has described how US forces in the Iraq war also used music in detention centres as part of a package of measures designed to break down an individual’s identity and will. In Abu

Ghraib, music videos were used against Muslim detainees as part of a set of attacks on their ethical sense of self. In Xinjiang's detention camps we find detainees subject to very similar processes, in which the coerced singing of revolutionary songs is used to break down the embodied habits of religious and cultural identity, as part of a set of attacks on detainees' will and sense of self.

Musical performance was also to the fore in the carefully choreographed visits to the camps organised in 2019 by the Chinese authorities for selected international media organisations (Blanchard 2019). Staged in response to international concerns about mass human rights abuses, these visits sought to reassure the international community that the camps were in fact voluntary 'vocational training centres' designed to re-educate people led astray by extremist ideology and prepare them for gainful employment. Assembled inmates sang the English song 'If you're happy and you know it clap your hands' for the press crews. The irony of these coerced displays of happiness was highlighted by international observers, but this was no more than the latest manifestation of the long-standing practices of the staged representation of China's minority peoples through singing, dancing, and smiling.

In the measures it has employed, and the ideological justification of its actions, China's project to securitise Xinjiang and re-engineer its Muslim peoples can be read as a colonial project. As Dibyesh Anand (2019) has argued, built into colonial projects is the assumption that the Other is inferior to the progressive Self, which has the duty and the right to mould the violent and backward Other into its own image. The focus of the Xinjiang campaign on embodied practices is far from unique; we can find many similarities in its approach to re-engineering Uyghurs in other, historical colonial projects around the world.

In the Americas, studies of colonial rule reveal an almost obsessive interest in the embodied, performative practices of the subjugated—rituals, songs and dances—suggesting that colonial elites understood the importance of these practices for the expression and transmission of identity and memory. Diana Taylor (2003) suggests that an important aspect of the colonising project throughout the Americas consisted in controlling and discrediting indigenous ways of preserving and transmitting cultural identity. There are many parallels between these historical accounts and the events unfolding in Xinjiang in the twenty-first century. Just as Uyghur religious and cultural practices are dubbed religious extremism and terrorism in China, for example, so indigenous performance practices were dubbed devil worship under colonial rule in the Americas.

But Taylor's account also makes clear that the persistent attempts by the colonisers to erase these Indigenous performance practices were matched only by their obstinate resurgence. She summarises: 'the performance of the prohibitions seems as ubiquitous and continuous as the outlawed practices themselves. Neither disappeared'. Lessons from history warn against easy assumptions that the campaign in Xinjiang will achieve its goal of erasing the religious and cultural identity of its subjects and rewiring them as patriotic automatons.

In the crowded cell of the re-education camp where Gulbahar Jelil was held in 2018, the detainees were under constant surveillance, and strict punishments



Fig 3.4.a: Worshippers at the Imam Aptah shrine near Khotan, one of many religious sites destroyed in the recent campaign. Image courtesy of Rahile Dawut, former professor of folklore at Xinjiang University, detained since December 2017.

were enforced against anyone seen to be performing the movements of prayer. Gulbahar recounted how the women in her cell whispered to each other to ‘pray on the inside’ (Byler 2018b). Even when they cannot be sounded out, the sonic traces of Uyghur cultural identity may be reactivated—internally, repetitively—through these simple acts of remembering engrained bodily practices. Such small acts of resistance hint at the possibility of sustaining embodied memory even under extreme conditions of coercion and control, and they suggest the inevitable failure of state projects of re-engineering.

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CHAPTER 4

Representations of ‘China’ in Britain

4.0 Introduction

Cangbai Wang and Gerda Wielander

Media representations of China have gone from rapturously depicting an economic miracle and powerhouse that may hold the answer to the UK’s challenges, in particular post-Brexit, to a chorus of cautionary tales about Hong Kong, Xinjiang, the South China Sea, and, of course, Covid-19 within just a few years. This reflects a turn in UK–China relations; the only recently celebrated ‘golden age’ has apparently turned into ‘dust’ (*The Diplomat* 2020) or the ‘deep freeze’ (*Financial Times* 2020). When future historians write an account of the rise of racism and xenophobia in the UK (and the world) as a parallel development of the unfolding coronavirus crisis, the relationship between media coverage and public opinion will no doubt be closely scrutinised. They may try to uncover in what way the British media coverage of China’s handling of the coronavirus impacted or possibly fed the rise of racism and xenophobia in British society.

Luckily, some media studies scholars have made a start. Zhang and Shaw (2021) analysed the coverage of China’s handling of the coronavirus in three British media outlets—the BBC, Daily Mail, and The Guardian—between January and May 2020 and coded their coverage as neutral, negative, or positive. They concluded that these three media outlets did not exhibit significant differences in the themes through which they represented China when dealing

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with the same health issue. However, there were differences when it came to the different media's respective evaluation of China's actions. Overall, the researchers concluded that the general public in the UK would have consumed a largely negative or neutral coverage (85%) of China's handling of the virus. If coverage represents readership views, then the BBC consumer would seem to hold the most balanced or neutral view of China, while more than half of Daily Mail readers may form a negative view of China. This may not surprise many, yet half of Guardian readers, too, seem to hold a negative view based on the nature of its coverage. Both may, of course, be a reflection of wider public opinion and media organisations' pandering to their target audiences.

Interest in China by British media and society is, of course, not new. Britain's fascination with China can be traced to the time of Shen Fuzong, the first Chinese individual in recorded history who visited Britain as a Christian missionary and a scholar in 1685. In the following two centuries, China caught the imagination of wider British society. From the mid-nineteenth century onwards, when China and other Asian countries were entangled in various degrees with the British empire as a result of its global colonial expansion, China frequently appeared in British newspapers, journals, literature, art performance, and exhibitions as a significant 'Oriental Other'. These included publications for children and young readers. Whether missionary texts, popular children's magazines, or adventure stories and detective fiction of the Victorian era, Shih-Wen Sue Chen's article shows that the representation of China in the period was dominated by racist discourse that depicted Chinese people—as representative of an alien empire—as physically alien and psychologically inferior to British children and as subjects in need of Christian salvation.

Representations of China, as our review of most recent media coverage shows, are never neutral nor consistent. They have always been associated with a particular discourse of representation that has shaped by and, in turn, has been shaping the changing state of the relationship between China and the UK over the past two centuries. Then and now, this discourse has been ambivalent, informed by an often foreboding recognition of China's potential power (Parker 1998, 72). Perceptions of China swing from a mythical and exotic culture seen through the fetishistic gaze of chinoiserie in the eighteenth century Britain and Europe (Clunas 1998; Witchard 2015), to a threat embodied in the evil fictional figure of Fu Manchu in the early twentieth century Britain (Clegg 1994). In the post-war period we then find examples of a more sympathetic representation of China and its people as an awakening populace who are able and united, taking up arms against fascist invaders and playing their part in the war (Thorniley, this volume). This sympathetic view of the Chinese people afar is offset by the discourse around isolated and subservient alien caterers in post-war UK (Luk 2009) and a 'successful' model minority in the discourse of a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural Britain (Pang and Lau 1998; Yeh 2014). Rarely do these discourses focus on individuals like Chiang Yee who reversed the gaze by offering a Chinese perspective on familiar British destinations, but who, as

an artist, made a significant contribution to British national ballet and hence British cultural life, as Witchard points out. Even more rarely do they bring to the fore the linguistic and cultural diversity within the diasporic Chinese world, nor do they often ask questions about the relationship between Chineseness and Sinophone identities (Shi, this volume).

Every engagement with an 'Other' offers insights into the 'Self'. While scientific interest or cultural curiosity may play a part in the various depictions of China in Britain as they have circulated over the centuries, why and how China is represented has always reflected British desires and anxieties of a particular period. What we see through Chen's and Thorniley's pieces—as much as through the shifts in contemporary media coverage—is a pattern of representation: the image of China oscillates between the two poles of positivity and negativity with the corresponding perceived needs and associated public opinions at different points in history.

China is, of course, neither a homogeneous nor a fixed entity. Over the timespan collectively covered by the four articles in this section, the term 'China' refers to an empire, a republic, Taiwan, the diaspora, and ideas of Chinese high culture respectively; it is used as a collective noun for people and bodies rather than a specific country. We refer the reader to the introduction of this volume for the many ways this is problematic and has been problematised in scholarship.

This degree of diversity also applies to those who do the representing. As the articles clearly show, creators of Chinese representation in Britain are not necessarily British. Individuals like Chiang Yee (Witchard) or Ye Junjian (Thorniley) could be referred to as 'accidental cultural brokers,' as could Jenny Lu, the Taiwanese director based in London whose film is the subject of Shi's article. Travelling back and forth across geographical and cultural boundaries, they facilitated, intentionally or unintentionally, the representation of 'China' to other cultures while their own identities in relation to Britain and British culture were surely complex and conflicted.

And finally, what about the audience of these representations? The depiction of China appearing in the children's texts in Victorian Britain was primarily intended for the domestic audience. The same was perhaps the case for Chiang Yee who caused a cultural sensation in 1930s Britain but was a largely unknown figure in China until very recently. Similarly, Lehmann, *The Penguin New Writing* editor, never published the whole manuscript submitted by Ye Junjian but only those parts that he felt would appeal to his Anglophone readers. However, audiences are not static. Chiang Yee's books have recently drawn the attention of a new generation of Chinese readers who are keen to find out how Britain was seen through the eyes of an exilic Chinese artist more than half a century ago. In the same vein, the cinematic portrayal of Chinese women in London resonates simultaneously with British and Chinese audiences.

In a globalising and, at least digitally, connected world, all actors in the complex theatre of representation and their audiences are themselves forever moving and dynamic pieces, variously occupying the position of 'Self' and

'Other,' and both representation and reception are shaped through the interplay of global and local contexts.

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4.1 Representations of China in Historical Children's Texts

Shih-Wen Sue Chen

Children's writers mediated a complex textual discourse on China for young readers in the Victorian and Edwardian period, trying to make 'knowledge' of 'the Celestial Kingdom' accessible to the British public after China was 'opened up' to the West after losing the Opium Wars. A plurality of viewpoints on China is evident in the numerous books for children that were produced in the years between the Opium Wars and the First World War. Here, I provide a glimpse into the rich texture and scope of British representations of 'China

and the Chinese' in children's texts published in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries.

The British children's book market changed as literacy rates rose after the passing of Forster's Education Act in 1870. The Act allowed for the establishment of board schools and authorised school boards to make attendance compulsory. By 1880, there were over one million new places in schools set up. Observing this phenomenon, publishers took the opportunity to market various forms of literature to the children of the British Empire.

Sunday School Texts: The editor and author J. A. Hammerton (1871–1949) remembered being excited about 'a beautiful colour-book on Chinese life' given to him by his great-aunt for Christmas (Hammerton 1944, 13). For those children whose families could not afford books like the ones Hammerton received, Sunday schools provided a repository of discourses on China. Children may have pulled books such as *Peeps into China*, *The Children of China*, *The Chinese Boy and Girl*, and *The Land of the Pigtail* off the shelves of Sunday school libraries, or received them as rewards. *Some Chinese Waifs* and *The Boy with a Borrowed Name* were among the various Sunday school leaflets published by religious organisations such as the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge and the Religious Tract Society. These Sunday school texts were often used to encourage children to raise money for missions. While many of these missionary texts reinforced the image of the Chinese as 'Other', some authors emphasised the similarities between British and Chinese children to point out the universal need for Christianity, as I have explored (Chen 2016). By taking part in religious plays and cantatas such as *Queen Lexa's Chinese Meeting: A Missionary Recitation for Eight Girls and Three Boys*, *Busy Bees: A Missionary Dialogue in Three Scenes*, and *Missionary Cantata: Every-day Life in China*, children were exposed to representations of Chinese children, particularly girls, as pitiful, helpless innocents suffering at the hands of adults who forced their daughters to be foot-bound and gave their children 'very strange' names, as I have examined (Chen 2014).

Children's Periodicals: Children interested in China could satisfy their curiosity by reading the wide range of magazines that flourished in the late nineteenth century. For example, the *CMS Juvenile Instructor* and *The Juvenile Missionary Magazine* frequently carried articles on China, with titles ranging from 'Chinese Children' to 'A Chinese Funeral'. Young readers could also gain information from the Religious Tract Society's numerous periodicals, such as the *Child's Companion and Juvenile Instructor*, *Child's Paper*, *The Girl's Own Paper*, and *The Boy's Own Paper*.

Stereotypical images of 'the Chinese' circulated in *The Boy's Own Paper* (1879–1967), one of the most popular children's magazines in the Victorian era. Chinese people were considered distinctly different physically, with their ubiquitous queue, slanted eyes, and buck teeth; psychologically, they were believed to be devious, cruel, and evil. One telling visual example of this stereotype can be found in vol. 28 of *The Boy's Own Paper*. On page 312, there is an engraving



Fig 4.1.a: Image from Isaac Taylor Headland's *The Chinese Boy and Girl* (1901). Source: Wikimedia Commons. Retrieved from: <https://bit.ly/3h5lg1x>.

by Leo Cheney inserted into the space between the end of one story and the beginning of another. The words 'The End' appear above the illustration. These words could either be used to signify the closure of the previous story, or be interpreted as the image caption. The engraving features the profile of a skinny Chinese man with an elongated neck and a big head standing in front of a table preparing to kill an innocent-looking puppy. With one hand, he lifts up the puppy by its neck, in the other, he holds a large scythe-like knife. Underneath his cap, a very long pigtail, adorned at the end with a ribbon, flows down his back, reaching past his knees. His narrow, slanted eyes appear even smaller in contrast to his big smile, which might suggest that he has been starving for so long that he, the stereotypical dog-and-cat-eating Chinese, is very eager to devour the dog. The adorable fat puppy stares pitifully at the readers, reminding them of their own pets and making them shudder at what will inevitably take place. While racial caricatures were present in numerous children's texts published in Britain when it was at its height of imperial power, my research has shown that diverse images of China and the Chinese appeared in children's travelogue storybooks, historical novels, adventures stories, and periodicals published in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries (Chen 2013).

Adventure Stories, Historical Novels, and Detective Fiction: Edwin Harcourt Burrage's Ching-Ching series provides a counterpoint to the image of the dog-killer described above. Ching-Ching first appeared in a story serialised in *The Boy's Standard* (1875–92), and later featured in his own magazine called *Ching Ching's Own* (1888–93). On the surface, Ching-Ching seems to be a stereotypical

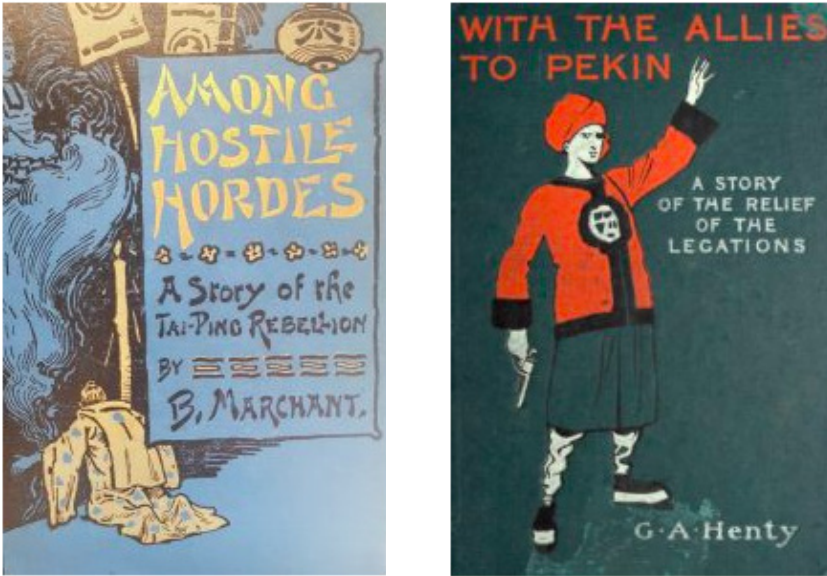


Fig 4.1.b: Left: cover of *Among Hostile Hordes*. Source: author. Right: cover of *With the Allies to Peking*. Source: Internet Archive. Retrieved from: <https://bit.ly/3h6AnLC>.

Chinese comic relief character who speaks Pidgin English and sports pigtails. However, child readers loved his character so much that the author decided to transform Ching-Ching from a minor sidekick into a detective hero who solves cases in England. In the early twentieth century, another 'great Chinese detective' entertained child readers: Charles Gilson's Mr. Wang (Chen 2015).

Mr. Wang is a key character in at least nine stories, including *The Lost Column* (1909), which is set during the Boxer Uprising (1899–1901). Adventure novels such as *The Lost Column*, Bessie Marchant's *Among Hostile Hordes: A Story of the Tai-ping Rebellion* (1901) and G.A. Henty's *With the Allies to Peking* (1903) underscore the historically complex relationships between Britain and China. Boxer narratives for children published between 1900 and 1909 provided different interpretations of the same event. As I have argued, the Boxer Uprising was a pivotal conflict from which negative images of the Chinese and fears of the Yellow Peril emanated (Chen 2013). It is therefore important to consider the state of Sino-British relations during the text's production because they influenced how 'China and the Chinese' were represented in children's literature.

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4.2 Dire yet Diverse: Desperate Diaspora in Jenny Lu's *The Receptionist* (2016)

Flair Donglai Shi

Jenny Lu (Lu Jinming 盧謹明) is a Taiwanese director based in London. She set the focus of her first feature-length film on sex workers in an illegal massage

parlour on the outskirts of the city after she found out, with shock, that one of her Chinese friends had had similar experiences and committed suicide. As the title makes clear, *The Receptionist* does not dive into the world of the illegal massage parlour directly. Instead, audiences are led into it at a slow and reluctant pace by the protagonist Tina, an international student from Taiwan. Hit by the financial crisis of 2008, Tina found her literature degree useless in her regular job hunt and took up the receptionist position at the massage parlour so that she could pay her rent and stay in London.

Lu is aware of the inevitable voyeurism that comes with the plot of her story. On the one hand, making Tina the observant outsider offers a clear object of identification for the film's audiences to enter the world of these sex workers, a world that is rarely discussed without prejudice. On the other hand, this setup nevertheless creates moralist boundaries between Tina/the audiences and the sex workers. In the film, Tina slowly befriends the women in the massage parlour but never really becomes one of them. This social distance thus safeguards the audiences' ethnographic gaze towards the Other throughout the film and consolidates its fundamental conservative tone. It calls for sympathy but stops short of real affirmation for what these women do.

A British–Taiwanese co-production, *The Receptionist* contains short dialogues in English, Mandarin, and Taiwanese, and its representation of women can be examined in both the context of British visual culture and that of Taiwanese cinema.

The representation of China in British popular culture has not really improved since the 1980s. This is the case in terms of the level of visibility afforded to the Chinese living in Britain as well as the ways in which Chineseness as a generic ethnic marker is featured. Even with the end of the *Fu Manchu* film series in 1980, entrenched ideas about the Chinese threat have persisted into the 2010s. For example, in the episode 'The Blind Banker' of the hugely popular TV series *Sherlock* (2010), the heroic protagonist investigates and defeats a Chinese crime syndicate called Black Lotus lurking in the tunnels beneath London's Chinatown—a less-than-subtle mutation of the evil yellow gangs imagined by *Fu Manchu's* inventor Sax Rohmer a hundred years ago. Similarly, in the thriller series *One Child* (2014) produced by BBC, old tropes of Oriental despotism and Cold-War red scare narratives are mixed to create an updated Sinophobia. It provides a fictional account of an adopted Chinese–British kid travelling back to her racial motherland, only to have her dreams crushed by the oppressive, authoritarian regime. Or if these haunting reappearances of the Yellow Peril are not entertaining enough, plenty of ironic self-racism about impotent Chinese men and crazy rich new immigrants can be found in the pilot episode of the 2017 BBC comedy *Chinese Burn* (Shi 2017).

Against this background, *The Receptionist* is perhaps a better fit in the series of feature films about the Chinese diaspora in Britain made in the 1980s and 1990s: *Ping Pong* (1986), *Soursweet* (1988), and *Foreign Moon* (1996). Like Lu's story, these films carry many characteristics of the ethnic *bildungsroman* and illustrate Chinese women's struggles in juggling tasks of survival and demands

from different cultural expectations. However, what sets *The Receptionist* apart is Lu's focus on the relations between women, which are to do with neither familial ties nor heterosexual romance.

Dim and hidden, the illegal massage parlour run from an ordinary suburban English house is a space of homosocial bonding that doubles as the main site of Tina's journey of *bildungsroman*. Here she meets a diverse group of Chinese-speaking sex workers, including the money-oriented *mamasan* Lily, the Taiwanese single mother Sasa, funny Chinese Malaysian student Mei, and Anna, the obedient and reserved newcomer. As she initiates her new job in the parlour, Tina tries to keep her distance from the women with a holier-than-thou attitude during meals. However, she eventually moves in with the girls after her puritanical white British boyfriend discovers that she has been lying about her new job and kicks her out. In this process, Tina becomes more and more integrated in the world of the sex workers and forges meaningful connections with them. In contrast to its largely sympathetic and humanistic portrayal of these women, the film's depiction of men is almost always negative and does not afford them much complexity of character.

Unlike the generic way many British cultural products depict Chinese people living in Britain, *The Receptionist* takes a very Sinophone approach towards its Chinese-speaking female characters and foregrounds the linguistic diversity among the different accents and dialects used in the parlour. While Mei's Malaysian accent often delivers comic effects to temporarily relieve the desperate atmosphere of their working environment, Lily's harsh northern Chinese tones coupled with an unapologetic materialism make her the most unlikable person in the house. Although these features enable the audiences to see Chineseness as larger and more complex than the nation state of China, the Sinophone as employed in this film does not confine itself to Shu-mei Shih's paradigm against Chinese hegemony (Shih 2010). In the film, the women encounter racist glances from their white neighbours and endure precarity and hardships in an unfriendly Britain paved with frustration and hostility rather than gold and opportunities. As the director admits, these women's marginality in relation to white middle-class Britain unites their diverse Sinophone backgrounds, and thus '華人' (*huaren*) as an ethnic and cultural identity in this context becomes an inclusive and yet place-based force against white racism and economic precarity, rather than the kind of exclusive critique against Chinese hegemony advocated by Shih and other scholars (Xie 2016).

Moreover, rather than depicting a hegemonic China oppressing Taiwan and the other communities in the diaspora, *The Receptionist* brings in more complex social dynamics among its Sinophone subjects and provides subtle criticisms against Taiwanese nationalism or cronyism instead. In the middle of the film, Tina steals money from Sasa and then frames the mainland Chinese girl Anna (Lu's fictionalisation of her real-life friend). Anna is then forced to take more sex work upon herself as punishment, which eventually leads to her suicide. Later, during a conversation about missing Taiwan as their home after Anna's death, Sasa reveals to Tina that she actually helped Tina cover up her

theft even though she knew all along that Anna did not take the money. The bond between Tina and Sasa is therefore partially built on this shared Taiwanese identity, which propelled them to treat the mainland Chinese girl Anna unfairly and left them with strong senses of guilt.

At the end of the film, Tina returns to her hometown in the Taiwanese countryside to help rebuild her family's farms after a devastating typhoon. She finds peace at home and tells Sasa in a letter that if she ever decides to come back as well, she must let her know. In many ways this homecoming call is reminiscent of the nativist (*xiangtu* 鄉土) tradition in Taiwanese literature and film. For example, the famous novella 'A Flower in The Raining Night' (*Kan hai de rizi* 看海的日子) by Huang Chun-ming also centres on the tough journey of a female sex worker, who returns to her native village with a son and is finally accepted by a community with warmth and kindness (the story was made into a film in 1983). This nativist message is brought up in *The Receptionist* more than once with the metaphor of the earthworm, and the sentence 'If the earthworm leaves the soil for too long, it will die' is repeated in Tina's letter to Sasa as the last line of the film. Admittedly, 'just go back to where you come from' is a rather escapist, if not outright essentialist, solution to the diasporic condition no matter how dire the situation is. In other words, the film's critique of racism and sexism indeed stops at the level of ethnographic empathy and redemptive homecoming.

Just minutes before Tina reads these lines in her letter, the film shows Sasa and her son wander in a London park and receive flyers about a church event. When asked about where she lives, Sasa hesitates and is unable to respond. What the film seems to suggest with this ending for Sasa is that the only way for the diasporic sex worker to make peace with herself is to get rid of her professional identity and diasporic condition altogether. Namely, she should become a 'good and normal' mother in Taiwan. As such, the persistence of a strong conservatism against the transgressive power of both cultural displacement and sex work becomes the most limiting aspect of the film, a film that is otherwise interesting and refreshing in its representation of a diverse group of Chinese-speaking women getting by in the unseen corners of British society.

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4.3 *The Silent Traveller* and Sadlers Wells (1942)

Anne Witchard

The artist and writer Chiang Yee is best remembered for his *Silent Traveller* books, a series of illustrated travelogues that presented Anglophone readers with a Chinese perspective on familiar destinations. Informative, thought provoking and humorous, they found a wide readership and are still enjoyed today. Chiang Yee's contribution to the art of ballet however is quite overlooked, perhaps because – as it turned out – it was a one off. But it is an episode that has much to tell us about his artistic versatility and about his wider significance to British cultural life.

After his Hampstead home was destroyed in the Blitz, Chiang Yee relocated to Southmoor Road, Oxford (in 2019 the recipient of a Blue Plaque), where he would reside for the next 15 years. In the penultimate chapter of *The Silent Traveller in Oxford*, titled 'Friday the Thirteenth', he describes the woes of the London commute and bewails the inadequacies of the train system, erratic no doubt due to the exigencies of wartime rather than because on this particular day, as an old lady points out to him, it is Friday the Thirteenth (Chiang 1944, 172).

Chiang Yee had become something of a regular commuter because he had been commissioned to design a new ballet, *The Birds*. And, as he explains: 'There seemed perpetually to be some detail or other for which my attendance was required – some costumes had been finished and were to be fitted, or certain materials that I had chosen had proved unobtainable and others must be selected. And always the matter was urgent. No time to be lost' (Chiang 1944, 169–70).

He had been appointed by Constant Lambert, the celebrated conductor with Ninette de Valois' recently formed Sadlers Wells company, a great gathering point for artists which, after a passionate wave of wartime patriotism would emerge as the Royal Ballet. Lambert was a remarkable man, something of a Sinophile and in order to appreciate his choice of Chiang Yee, it is important to recognise the significance of a British national ballet at this time – and Lambert's part in establishing it.

Until the arrival of Sergei Diaghilev's ground-breaking Ballets Russes in 1910, ballet on the British stage had been an amateur affair. The effect of the Ballets Russes was to raise the status of British ballet from a rather risqué music-hall entertainment, frequented mostly by men, to an artistically respectable art form. Unlikely as it might seem, the conditions of the Second World War were to prove the hotbed in which the young seedling of British ballet grew to maturity and to popularity. Soldiers on leave eagerly swelled the regular audience and the dancers' reputations grew from minority cult to star status. It seems likely that one reason for Constant Lambert's wish for *The Birds* to be given a Chinese design was a nod to the various Ballets Russes productions of *The Nightingale*, based on Hans Christian Andersen's chinoiserie fairy tale, 'The Emperor's Nightingale' composed by Igor Stravinsky.



Fig 4.3.a: Beryl Gray as 'The Nightingale'. Courtesy of Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

Diaghilev had always employed the most cutting-edge artists rather than theatre designers to work on his ballets, and in asking Chiang Yee to design *The Birds*, Lambert (who had worked with Diaghilev) was following suit.

The lesson Lambert learned above all from Diaghilev was that ballet could be an intoxicating creation in which dance, music and design are one. *The Birds* was a brand new ballet choreographed by Robert Helpmann to showcase the talents of the company's up-and-coming young ballerina, 15-year old Beryl Grey. Elaborate feathered costumes required frequent trips to London at short notice. Chiang Yee, we learn, managed to get to his rendezvous on time despite it being Friday the 13th and he goes on to describe the fittings. He arrived at the studio of costumier Matilda Etches to find Helpmann attempting 'to put on his head the tailpiece of the male dove's costume, which was fan-like and looked, on him, like a Red Indian's feathered head-dress' (Chiang 1944, 172).

Reviews of the ballet were mixed and suggest that the design was its strongest suit – *The Dancing Times* described its 'ravishing garden setting and charming costumes'. Horace Horsnell in *The Observer* (17 May 1926, 19) loved its pretty 'animated chinoiserie', writing: 'The birds ... are delightfully dressed by Chiang



Fig 4.3.b: Costume Design for Male Dove. Courtesy of Royal Ballet Benevolent Fund., Royal Opera House Archive with kind permission of San Edwards (Chiang Yee's Estate).

Yee, and roost, one feels, not in his decorative wallpaper trees but in cabinets of rare porcelain.' Elspeth Grant in the *Daily Sketch*, (25 November, 1942) called it 'light, sweet, delicious' and James Redfern in *The Spectator*, (27 November, 1942, 11) found it 'an entrancing ballet' with a 'rewardingly complete unity of style in music, choreography and décor'.

Chiang Yee's costume and set designs are stored in the archive of the Royal Opera House.

Note

Thank you to The Royal Ballet Benevolent Fund for permission to reproduce the featured images.

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4.4 Representations of China in *The Penguin New Writing* (1940–1950): How Chinese Writers Shaped Responses to China

Tessa Thorniley

The publication of the literary journal, *The Penguin New Writing* (TPNW), spanned a traumatic period of history including WWII and its aftermath, and in China, the Second Sino-Japanese War. It was a period when representations of China in Britain shifted as sympathy for the plight of the Chinese people increased, particularly after Britain and America declared war against Japan at the end of 1941. This shift was reflected in the literature about the country and its people published in Britain at that time, most noticeably in newspapers, magazines, journals and in the output of publishers with Leftist and/or pro-Communist political sympathies which viewed Japanese occupation as an act of fascist aggression.

After securing the backing of Penguin Book's co-founder Allen Lane, TPNW, soon became one of (if not *the*) most successful literary magazines published in Britain during WWII. Alongside the British and Chinese writers whose short fiction and literary criticism about China is briefly introduced here, the journal published original fiction, reportage, poetry and criticism by: George Orwell, Elizabeth Bowen, Stephen Spender, Christopher Isherwood, V.S. Pritchett, W.H. Auden and Cecil Day-Lewis among others.

At the helm was the autocratic editor, John Lehmann, who is probably better known for his 1930s *New Writing* periodical (of which TPNW was a successful offshoot) and as co-owner of Leonard and Virginia Woolf's Hogarth Press. Lehmann's contribution to the promotion of international writers has received scant critical attention, even though the magazine's circulation - which reached 100,000 shortly after the war - points to an extremely wide readership for a literary magazine and around a third of the contributors (to Lehmann's *New Writing* venture in its entirety from 1936–1950) were non-British. As well as literature from and about China, TPNW featured paintings by official British war artists who travelled to Hong Kong and Burma, but here I will focus on ten stories.

Access to modern Chinese literature in the 1930s and early 1940s Britain was limited. While publications such as *Life & Letters Today*, *The New Statesman & Nation*, and *Left Review* published short stories and poetry by Chinese writers, there were few serious literary editors inclined to or capable of seeking it out. And while Lehmann's pro-Communist affiliations had steered his initial interest in and sympathy towards China, he required a wider network of translators and experts - which came to include the Sinophile Harold Acton and the Chinese writer Xiao Qian (Hsiao Ch'ien 萧乾) - before he would consider publishing works in Chinese translation.

One of Lehmann's early collaborators was Ralph Fox, the British Communist whose contribution in the first issue of TPNW (1940) was published

posthumously after his death in the Spanish Civil War. Fox's story, set in Mongolia where he had travelled, is a dialogue between a narrator and a lama or holy man in which they muse, over tea and airik, on Russian and Chinese influence in the region. Fox's tale is an exploration of the potential for deeper understanding between East and West, and it sets the tone for ideas relating to China (and indeed Russia) in the journal.

In the same issue, Lehmann published a short story by the Chinese writer Zhang Tianyi (Tchang T'ien-Yih 张天翼) whose longer fiction is still being translated today (Zhang Tianyi [tr. David Hull] *The Pidgin Warrior*, Balestier Press, 2017), a grim and powerful account of the suffering of Chinese civilians and soldiers during the period of early Japanese occupation in the north of China and civil war. In his memoirs, Lehmann wrote of the 'brotherhood of oppression' which united contributions to his magazines from around the world, Zhang's story being a particularly striking example of this spirit of writing.

Lehmann's most significant and fruitful link with China came through his close friendship with Julian Bell (son of artists Clive and Vanessa Bell and nephew of Virginia Woolf) who briefly taught English at Wuhan University. In correspondence, Bell introduced his best pupil, Chun-chan Yeh (Ye Junjian 叶君健), to Lehmann and they struck up a friendship that lasted for several decades, long after Bell was killed fighting in Spain. In 1939, Ye sent Lehmann a manuscript of the translations of 20 wartime short stories by Chinese writers which he had worked on while engaged in semi-official propaganda work in Hong Kong.

The manuscript was never published whole but Lehmann selected several stories from it which he felt would resonate with his Anglophone readers. These included short fiction by Yao Xueyin (Yao Hsueh-yin 姚雪垠), Bai Pingjie (Pai Ping-chei 白屏阶), S.M (a pseudonym for Ah Long 阿垅, or Chen Shoumei) and a second story by Zhang. All had been written during a period of relative optimism in the war against Japan, when China was unified under the Second United Front.

The underlying narrative theme in these works is the shifting consciousness of the Chinese people, particularly the peasantry who are seen taking up arms against a common enemy in rural areas as guerilla fighters. The stories suggest a populace that is awakening, and seeking to overcome its shortcomings, to play its part in the war. A sharp satire by Zhang (his second short story in *TPNW*) takes a swipe at the ineptitude and moral corruption of certain types of Nationalist government officials. While there is a strong underlying leftist agenda to the stories, for Lehmann, any propaganda value had to be outweighed by literary qualities.

The need for representations which brought the people of China to life in the West had been highlighted by the American journalist and writer, Emily Hahn, in 1937 when she pleaded for her Anglophone readers to see China as 'a living sister' rather than a 'dead ancestor'. Xiao Qian similarly criticised those who



Fig 4.4.a: Ye Junjian (Chun-chan Yeh). Courtesy of Ye's son Nienlun Yeh with kind permission.

viewed China as a 'heap of bones and stones'. Using satire, humour and sharp dialogue, the stories in *TPNW* conveyed the country's unity and the dynamism of its people and by doing so they also pushed against Western archetypes of Chinese soldiers as inept, badly led and ineffective, of officials as inhumane and of the people as passive or backward.

From the end of the war Lehmann published short stories by Chinese writers living in Britain and writing in English, including by that time, Ye, but also Kenneth Lo, (Lo Hsiao Chien 羅孝建), best known today as author of 40 Chinese cookery books and the restaurateur behind *Memories of China*. Lo's tale in *TPNW* 24 (July 1945) was a short story based on the extraordinary real life account of the Chinese seaman Poon Lim (Pan Lian 潘濂) who had become a global celebrity after he survived for what was then a record 133 days adrift on a raft in the South Atlantic Ocean. In Lo's story, Lim is described as orderly, physically and psychologically capable, calm and rational and as an individual whose Chinese upbringing had equipped him to endure what few others had ever managed. This representation of Lim ran very much counter to press reports of marauding Chinese seamen, commonly found in newspaper reports around the time. As a Chinese liaison for Chinese seamen based in Liverpool during the war, Lo had been in a position to observe and document their lives and was keenly aware of the prejudices and injustices they suffered while serving on British merchant ships.



Fig 4.4.b: Kenneth Lo, Cambridge 1936–1941. Courtesy of Lo’s family with kind permission.

Ye travelled to Britain in 1944 at the behest of the British Ministry of Information to raise morale ahead of the Normandy landings with tales of Chinese resistance. During the time he spent in Britain, until 1949, Lehmann supported and promoted Ye’s writing career and welcomed him into his literary network. When Ye came to publish his own short stories and his first novel in English they received glowing reviews in the literary press. His two short stories published in *TPNW* after the war reflect on the tension between traditional and modern China and the brutality of the old ways.

By publishing works of modern Chinese literature by unknown Chinese writers alongside established British, European, and Russian writers, Lehmann sought to elevate modern Chinese literature for his Anglophone readers around the world. His archived correspondence from this period in Austin, Texas, is explicit about his intention to elicit sympathy for China’s cause by publishing the work of living Chinese writers. His efforts attracted the attention of George Orwell, then at the BBC’s Eastern Service, who ran a series of broadcasts about China’s modern literature after reading stories in Lehmann’s journals. Acton was among those in Lehmann’s China network who shared his enthusiasm for China’s contemporary literature and in an article about literary developments in the country for *TPNW 15* (1943), Acton highlighted its innovative qualities.

This period was the first time in Britain that a body of Chinese writers represented themselves and their country. The trajectory of Ye's (and several other Chinese writers') literary careers, is suggestive of an openness towards and interest in more nuanced representations of China in Britain. Lehmann, *TPNW* and his Chinese network had a fascinating role to play in these unofficial Sino-British relations where sympathetic representations of China briefly flourished prior to 1949.

CHAPTER 5

Heritage and Memory

5.0 Introduction

Giulio Verdini

Memory is crucial in the process of heritage making, and is ‘vital for individuals, groups and communities in forming collective identities’ (Apaydin 2020, 1). The negotiation around its meaning, however, is by no means easy. In critical heritage studies this is addressed as the ‘problem of memory’, given that such a process can generate forgetting, manipulation, appropriations, contrasting visions around commemorations, or even destruction or removal of heritage objects for the sake of eliminating those memories (Harrison 2013). It is worth reminding ourselves of the fortunate definition by Laurajane Smith that heritage is not (only) an object but rather ‘an active process engaged with the construction and negotiation of meaning through remembering’ (Smith 2006, 66).

As the four articles in this section demonstrate, heritage is deeply ingrained in policy making and shaped by evident, or relatively hidden, economical interests and agendas. It is for this reason that the process of heritage-making, alongside the selective memory that this implies, might be quite controversial in contemporary China, and therefore worth investigation.

Harriet Evans introduces the increasing conflicts between top-down practices of cultural heritage in China and a variety of grassroots voices. The aim is to highlight the interesting emergence of creative practices around heritage, beyond ‘a binary relationship between state and locality’, and to understand a multiplicity of heritages on the ground. This sheds light into the exceptional

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dynamism of localities in China (including commercial enterprises, tourism and local communities) in claiming their heritage, while also questioning their approaches to heritage reinvention and authenticity.

Philipp Demgenski focuses on intangible cultural heritage (ICH) practices, showing the increasing attention around this in China, since the country joined the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2004. As also argued in the previous post, the government plays a central role in heritage production, in this case in the process of identifying and listing ICH, which remains pretty much a matter of the state. On the other hand, this is often seen as an opportunity for local communities to engage actively with ICH, not least for the legitimate attempt to improve their livelihood.

Paul Kendall focuses instead on an interesting case of memory's omission, using as a case study the park created to commemorate the Third Front, a 1960s Maoist military industrial project in Kaili, Guizhou. Here, the process of heritage-making around this industrial legacy has been unpopular leading to the closure of the park, given the recent rebranding strategy of the town around its ethnic Miao and Dong minorities. It remains to be seen whether this failed attempt was originally motivated by genuine, or more instrumental, intentions to give visibility to the industrial workers' history.

The final piece from Lisheng Zhang introduces the Jianchuan Museum Cluster, China's largest non-state museum, in Chengdu, Sichuan. The collection is a material culture repository of China's twentieth century history, which includes objects of controversial periods, such as the resistance war against Japan and the Cultural Revolution, representing contentious memories of a recent past yet to be fully disclosed.

In bringing together these pieces a sense of unresolved tension between official and other memories, and similarly, between state-led and more spontaneous forms of heritage-making, emerges. One might therefore legitimately ask whether this is a typical trait of contemporary China or part of a more general, and international, discussion around heritage.

Indeed, the grand narrative of modern nation states, and the monumentality of their heritage, has been associated with a self-referential and dominant 'authorised discourse of heritage' (ADH) (Smith 2006), as opposed to 'everyday heritage', a people-led practice of heritage-making that shapes ordinary, yet no less important, historic landscapes and places (Mosler 2019). ADH, however, has historic roots in the western practice of material heritage classification and preservation (Choay 1992), which, being so pervasive and widespread, has actually been prevented for a long time from appreciating a variety of unorthodox approaches emerging in other contexts (Verdini 2017). Asian countries, Japan *in primis*, has struggled since the early 1990s in the recognition of other notions of immaterial authenticity, and they have played an important role in challenging the dominant western discourse, resulting in the affirmation of

alternative and intangible forms of heritage more suitable for their tradition (Taylor and Verdini, forthcoming).

Moreover, this is not the only arena of renegotiation around heritage in the international debate. A similar role has been played by emerging landscape approaches to heritage, such as on the cultural landscapes and, more recently, on the historic urban landscape (Taylor 2018). In essence, there has been a broad shift of attention from the monumental to the ordinary, from the tangible to the intangible, from objects to processes, and this emerging discursive practice, no longer shaped by monolithic identities or fixed memories, has found hostility everywhere.

To put it bluntly, what is found in China is common in many other parts of the world, especially when centralised systems of heritage management still persist, or new nationalistic discourses surge (see the brilliant *Heritage and Brexit* of Pendlebury and Veldpaus 2018) with the results of minority voices and memories being marginalised and silenced in the heritage arena. Yet, the question of what is different about China remains. This would not serve the purpose for backing a supposed Chinese exceptionalism, which is increasingly used as an annoying rhetoric of greatness in the new Chinese nationalist discourse (Ho 2014). Rather, this will be used, in the final notes that follow, to highlight a few points to contextualise Chinese approaches to heritage, and to suggest the idea that every scholarly judgment about China should take into account various aspects of its complexity, not least the scales of the phenomena observed. These points are about: cultural soft power, cultural heritage and economic development, and authenticity in heritage making.

Let's first address cultural soft power. China's efforts to revert, in a few years, an image of polluted industrialising 'world factory' into an advanced economy, investing in culture, innovation and creativity is probably unprecedented. Heritage, both tangible and intangible, has played a major role in this (Zhu and Maags 2020). The list of Chinese world heritage sites has exponentially increased; and similarly the support to all kinds of UNESCO programmes. The number of culture and creative-led conservation projects promoted literally in every city, as well as museums, events, and cultural performances within them, is countless. For a country that has modernised very fast at the expense of its traditional culture, let alone the still painful memory of the Cultural Revolution, it is a remarkable achievement that could serve as a model for other fast urbanising countries of Asia and Africa.

When it comes to cultural heritage and economic development, there is a sense of a certain instrumentalism in every project of heritage conservation or promotion in China. It is part of a very effective entrepreneurial governance, accompanied by ad hoc city branding strategies that push localities to compete and to seek for economic gains at all levels, implying large scale heritage regeneration, and aggressive promotion and marketing of cultural resources. However, as some pieces have explained (Evans and Demgenski in particular),

this often finds local communities allied in this process, given the promise of an improved livelihood. It is nevertheless hard to distinguish in China whether projects are motivated by genuine intention to bring benefits to communities or by pure economic calculus, in the hands of few, due to the lack of accountability of policy-making.

Finally, when it comes to authenticity in heritage-making, the process of selection of memory, and material objects, behind any heritage-making process (see for example Kendall and Zhang) is often unclear. So is the question of whether heritage represents the multiplicity of existing voices or, on the contrary, it is subject to a process of authentication which lacks inclusion and diversity, under the diktat of the state's propaganda.

In dealing with China, even after many years, I am always hesitant to reach any black or white conclusion. In respect to heritage and memory, one might argue that China is no different from many other countries, in the ever-present negotiations or clash between dominant and emerging discourses around heritage. When looking at the big picture, and in observing how much the country has evolved in recent years, one can simply appreciate such endeavour. Where the analysis becomes more granular there is no doubt that some controversies arise.

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5.1 Grassroots Values and Local Cultural Heritage in China

Harriet Evans

What is cultural heritage in China today? Dominant top-down practices of cultural heritage in China are accompanied by the massive construction of museums, competition for UNESCO recognition, and projects of heritage tourism increasingly associated with the One Belt One Road initiative and designed to boost regional and local incomes. But how do local communities both implicated in these large-scale projects and their discursive effects approach the issue of what to preserve? How do local people's memories of their past cultural experiences inform local projects of cultural preservation?

Grassroots Values and Local Cultural Heritage in China is a collection of papers that emerged out of a three-year research grant awarded by the Leverhulme Trust, for a project titled 'Conflicts in Cultural Value: Localities and Heritage in Southwest China'. The papers in this volume move beyond the southwest to include areas stretching from Tibet, northern Yunnan and Anren, Sichuan, to Huangshan in Anhui and Quanzhou on the south-eastern seaboard. Together they offer an ethnographic exploration of diverse places and practices, undertaken largely by young Chinese scholars. The overall aim is to foreground the local as a site of negotiation between state, entrepreneurial and local community interests in an economic, political, and cultural context in which heritage practice in China has been transforming local social, economic, and cultural life and reshaping domestic and global notions of China's national identity.

We approach the local not as a fixed spatial definition of place but as a shifting arena of everyday life and belonging underpinning ordinary social interactions. Heritage emerges as a series of creative practices and possibilities that by definition are multiple. Given the pervasive power and appeal of the state's ambitious projects of museum building and world heritage recognition, a dominant heritage discourse of '文化遗产' (*wenhua yichan*) has percolated through to local people's experience of how they negotiate ideas about preservation and conservation of local cultural value. The complex picture of heritage across our different sites cannot be explained by a binary relationship between state and locality, particularly if the latter is inscribed with ideas of resistance and subversion of state power. Rather, multiple heritages are operating at different levels and through different modes of encounter and memory between state, commercial enterprise, tourism, and local communities. Potential sites of conflict between locality and state lead to negotiated redefinitions of heritage—to heritage alternatives—to accommodate desires both to maximise economic



Fig 5.1.a: Baishuitai, Yunnan. Photo by the author.

benefit from heritage construction and to preserve locally-centred ritual and cultural practices. It would be mistaken to think that the local is not concerned with economic benefit; the desire for material well-being is locally as well as centrally defined. Rather than see the economic as contrasted with local ritual/cultural practices, it is a matter of accommodating the varying desires and hopes whose political, economic/material, spiritual, and ethical implications come into contact with each other, leading to a redefinition of heritage and the remaking of the local. Crossing our different sites of enquiry this volume shows a diversity of ‘locals’—the remote rural, the urban neighbourhood, the sacred mountain, mainstream heritage sites, and the museum town—as different and alternative heritage practices spanning Han and ethnic minority practices.

From powerful centres of national heritage value, such as Quanzhou, through to small Naxi communities off the beaten track in northern Yunnan, *wenhua yichan* has thus brought a new focus to people’s ideas about what they think is valuable, and what then becomes a value of loss. It has brought a precision to local questions about what people need/who people are that may be under threat and therefore in danger of losing. It also redefines tradition in light of the new heritage projects that have been emerging across the sites of our research and beyond, leading to what can be thought of as ‘the newness of tradition’.

One crucial dimension of the alternatives that are emerging in this process is the framing of moral/ethical ideals and realities, often around claims, explicit



Fig 5.1.b: Baishuitai, Yunnan. Photo by the author.

or implicit, to authenticity. Some scholars argue that the ‘authentic’ (*yuansheng-tai* 原生态) may be best understood as a component of a national discourse of cultural authority shored up by tradition. In conditions where cultural heritage offers substantial economic returns, the evocation of ‘authentic traditions’ may cement a subjective and collective sense of belonging and memory that paradoxically both reproduces and seeks to resolve possibly violent competition for resources. Such competition is also fed by the state’s increasing interest in asserting control over ‘cultures’ by investing more and more in heritage building projects. Again, claims to authenticity may be prescribed by appeals to the outside, in the form of bringing in expertise of local intellectuals and heritage practitioners, or of appealing to diasporic yearnings of belonging. In the process of such appeals, the local becomes separate and assumes a distinct identity. Elsewhere, such claims may be associated with practices of what some might term the ‘deep rural’, or increasingly marginalised landscapes and places linked to ancestral legacies of a deep past which exists in memories and fragments of ritual practices retrieved from recent decades of violence and destruction.

All these alternative heritages converge in their concern for the right to preserve and conserve for the future. At one level this concern forms part of a shared yet contested discourse about how and what to preserve —what old things to preserve and what new things to construct. It is also present in an ethical value of remembering as a creative process involving the return of people to their hometown/village of origin to invest in honouring their ancestry. Ideas of preserving and remembering may also be associated with loss and fear of humiliation. They also have to distinguish between different things/entities that are being preserved and remembered at different levels in the relationships between people, things, ideas and places. All these create different heritage values that operate in different ways, with different meanings, creating differently embodied and spatialised notions of subjecthood and cultural value.

5.2 ‘When It Comes to Intangible Cultural Heritage, Everyone Is Always Happy’: Some Thoughts on the Chinese Life of a UNESCO Convention

Philipp Demgenski

In early 2017, I joined the UNESCO Frictions Project (UNESCO Frictions n.d.) and set out to study how the UNESCO 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity (UNESCO 2016) is implemented in China. In this post I reflect upon some of my experiences and findings.

The 2003 Convention defines Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) as ‘the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills—as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith—that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognise as part of their cultural heritage’ (UNESCO 2016, Article 2). Accordingly, cultural heritage is not (only) material, fossilised and monumental, but dynamic and subjective. Also, it is the so-called ‘heritage bearers’ and not experts who are to define heritage, imbue it with meaning and value and work towards its safeguarding and management. By focusing on heritage communities, on ideas of participation and self-representation, the founding fathers (Proschan 2018) of the 2003 Convention also particularly envisioned this convention as a tool for good governance and the protection of human rights.

China was among the first countries to ratify it in 2004. Since then, impressive amounts of ICH elements have been identified domestically, legal texts have been devised and the ICH concept has found much resonance in the media and among the general public. China was also quick in setting up its own administrative and institutional framework. It now has a comprehensive national inventory system for ICH elements at four administrative levels (national, provincial, municipal and district/county) and an additional four-tier inventory for so-called ‘Representative ICH Transmitters,’ (*daibiaoxing chuancheng ren*



Fig 5.2.a: Example of ‘non-heritage’ discourse. Photo by the author.

代表性传承人) (ihchina.cn). Locally known as *fei yi* 非遗 (lit. ‘non-heritage’, see Fig 5.2.a.), ICH is indeed everywhere, especially when one actively looks for it. During fieldwork, I found it at airports, in train stations, shopping malls, on mobile APPs, in the media, in specially designed ICH expos, in academia and, above all, in political discourse. I heard many proud remarks about China being particularly rich in ICH. Bringing up ICH seemed like a cue for people to ascertain that ICH and China simply belong together. A Chinese folklorist who also advises the government on ICH matters once told me: ‘Normally, it’s always either the people that are not happy about the government or the government that is not happy about the people. Only in ICH, everyone is always happy: government, scholars, people’. As of early 2020, China has 40 elements inscribed in the UNESCO ICH lists, more than any other country (Zheng and Qing 2020).

There are a number of reasons for this ‘ICH fever’ (*fei yi re* 非遗热). The 2003 Convention and with it the ICH concept entered China precisely at a point when notions of ‘traditional culture’ (*chuantong wenhua* 传统文化) or ‘folk customs’ (*minsu* 民俗) re-emerged in the political and public discourse, after having been under attack during the Cultural Revolution and largely ignored during the early ‘reform years’. In 2002, then President Jiang Zemin famously called for ‘the protection of major cultural heritage and outstanding folk arts’ (Jiang 2002) and hereby heralded the beginning of a new identity for cultural heritage as not being antithetical to, but very much compatible with the goals of economic growth and modernisation. ICH presented the state with a distinct value framework to appraise, control, but also to legitimise many cultural practices and traditions that were previously discarded as undesired superstitions. Under this newly gained umbrella of legitimacy, officially-endorsed ICH could then also be exploited for the growing domestic tourist industry and the increasing desire of people to travel and consume ‘culture’. Especially in recent years, ICH transmitters have been urged to innovate and tailor their respective

products to market demands (Hu 2017); there now exist a number of mobile APPs that sell ICH products as luxury goods. Internationally, the introduction of ICH has allowed China to further engage in cultural diplomacy, consolidate its soft-power and to spread a specific image of ‘cultural China’ around the globe; being a member of an international legislation has also helped the state to legitimate policies at home.

It is clear: ICH matters in and to China and it is ubiquitous in everyday life. But looking at domestic understandings, both on the level of legislation and public discourse, there exists a rather stark discrepancy vis-à-vis the UNESCO definition described above. A scholar and ICH advisor to the Ministry of Culture and Tourism once even told me that ‘ICH in China is not actually ICH’. Rather than defining ICH as something ephemeral, mobile, and spontaneous that belongs to the communities whose heritage is at stake, China’s own ICH Law from 2011 (State Council 2011), for example, ‘is formulated for the purposes of inheriting and promoting the distinguished traditional culture of the Chinese nation...’ The law also refers to the idea of ‘authenticity’ (ibid., Article 4), which had deliberately been excluded from the 2003 Convention. Chinese ICH is, in fact, conceptually much closer to the World Heritage Convention from 1972 and allows for external actors (scholars, officials) to evaluate and authenticate heritage. The law is also largely void of the key ideas of community participation, merely stating that ‘the State shall encourage and support its citizens, legal persons and other organisations *to participate* in the work concerning the protection of intangible cultural heritage’ (ibid., Article 9, emphasis added). Someone closely working with the Ministry of Culture once stated half-jokingly that ‘in China, if they don’t control or regulate you, your participation is already quite significant’, explaining that the idea of community participation is really only something understood and used by experts who have a good grasp of heritage terminology (Bortolotto et. al 2020). Generally and little surprisingly, Chinese ICH is essentially a matter of the state. In the absence of the political ideals of good governance and human rights that permeate the discourse at UNESCO, Chinese ICH is largely reduced to a general idea of ‘culture’ and even though many actors involved in the ICH field see the need to ‘keep this culture alive’, it is essentially the state that not only decides how this should be done, but also what ICH is and who it belongs to.

At the same time, recalling the above quote about everyone in ICH being happy, the introduction of this concept has also been an enabling and empowering force. For example, many practitioners and official ICH transmitters in China conveyed to me that they are indeed happy about the existence of the ICH framework, that they feel ‘more recognised’ and, most commonly-heard, that ICH has allowed them to earn money and make a livelihood from their cultural practices to a degree that was not possible before. So within the broader political economy of China, we may say that ICH has provided many practitioners with an opportunity to *participate* in and benefit from national economic development and modernisation. This form of participation may be different from that

envisioned by the 2003 Convention, but it would be erroneous to jump to the conclusion that China's 'take' on ICH is somehow wrong. After all, even though politics are often seen as standing in the way of genuine safeguarding and preservation work (ironically often by those who most passionately believe in the political potential of the 2003 Convention), ICH is by definition political and it is also never neutral. When cultural practices and traditions are 'diagnosed' as ICH (Hafstein 2015), they are subject to a new value system, which is inevitably also transformative, whether in China or elsewhere. How this transformation takes place and what it looks like can only be evaluated within specific socio-political and cultural contexts. Maintaining this degree of detachedness has, however, been the biggest challenge in my fieldwork as I was always treading the narrow path between 'UNESCO extremes' and 'China extremes'.

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5.3 Ruins on Ruins: Forgetting, Commemorating, and Re-Forgetting the Third Front

Paul Kendall

During 2011 and 2012, I did fieldwork in the small city of Kaili studying—among other things—its branding as a tourist destination of singing and dancing ethnic minorities. Branding turned out to be pervasive in this autonomous prefectural capital of southeast Guizhou, including the physical imprint of ethnic minority motifs upon nearly all official leisure spaces (see Kendall 2019). I was therefore surprised in 2013 to learn that a small park had been built in Kaili to celebrate not ethnic minorities but the Third Front, a 1960s Maoist military–industrial project constructed in response to the threat of nuclear war amid some of China’s most inhospitable terrain, including the mountain valleys around Kaili. On a further trip in 2018, I returned to find the park in ruins. In the following paragraphs, I analyse the park’s rapid rise and fall as a manifestation of tensions between recent nationwide efforts to repackage the Third Front as industrial heritage and a city brand that stresses rural minority culture rather than Maoist industry.

During the 1960s and ‘70s, 11 Third Front factories were constructed at a distance of around 5–10 km from the (then) small town of Kaili in accordance with a central directive that these war factories should be dispersed, hidden and located in mountain valleys. During the post-Mao era, in contrast, the municipal government has marketed Kaili as a tourist destination of exotic minority culture, while all but one Third Front factory has relocated or gone bankrupt. City brands are synecdoches (following Massey 2007, 41–2 on London’s ‘strategy of synecdoche’), in the sense that a preferred part (or ‘unique selling point’) provides a simplified representation of a complex whole. In the branding of Kaili, the preferred part has been the exoticised cultural practices of the Miao and Dong minorities, while the Third Front has been almost entirely overlooked. Indeed, there is a tension between images of industrial spaces—with their contemporary associations of homogeneity and pollution—and Kaili’s brand as a place to escape the stress of the big city and experience untainted rural minority culture. Monikers attached to Kaili, such as the ‘homeland of 100 festivals’ (*baijie zhi xiang* 百节之乡), refer to the festivals of minority groups who have long been associated with the rural and the primitive, rather than with industrial production. There is also a certain hostility towards the Third Front in Kaili, with some local residents remembering factory workers—many of whom came from big cities—as aloof and arrogant.

I was therefore surprised in 2013 to come across a couple of online articles which described the ongoing construction of a Third Front park in Kaili. Later that year, I visited this unexpected commemoration to industrial heritage. The small park was located far outside the city centre next to the ruins of a former Third Front factory. A towering, renovated Mao statue visually dominated the



Fig 5.3.a: Third Front park. Photos by the author.

park, with visual support provided by mock tanks and guns as well as commemorative plaques. The park was deserted, difficult-to-reach, and only occasionally depicted in local media, in contrast to ethnicised spaces such as the Nationalities Stadium which have featured heavily alongside pictures of Miao villages in touristic representations of Kaili. Nevertheless, the park's mere existence fascinated me, given the lack of representation that the Third Front had previously been accorded within the built environment of the city.

Looking beyond Kaili, this neglect of the Third Front has not been representative of recent governmental approaches in southwest China. In fact, many local governments and businesses have come to regard the Third Front as exploitable heritage, given its visually striking combination of industrial architecture and picturesque rural surroundings, as well as its narrative of heroic patriotic workers. Discourse is always on the move, and understandings of the Third Front have become intertwined with the rampant production of national heritage, as it extends even to include Maoist industry. Thus, the municipal government of neighbouring Duyun in south Guizhou has transformed one former factory site into a Third Front museum. And in the suburbs of Guiyang, another former factory site has been shaped into a variation on the 798 Art Zone theme, as a site of consumption and commemoration including museum, art gallery, shopping mall and cinema.

A city brand typically stresses the unique selling point of a place. It shapes and promotes a tamed, managed form of difference. However, there is also a defensive, hedging quality to many city brands, so that a unique selling point may be complemented—or even contradicted—by emulations of other cities' unique selling points. So if Guiyang has been developing its reputation as a big data city, then Kaili develops its own big data centre. And if multiple cities in Guizhou have Third Front commemorative sites, then it would be best for Kaili to avoid being different, even if difference is what makes a city brand stand out.

When I visited Kaili in 2018, I found that the park—a commemoration to ruined factories—had itself fallen into ruin. Grass and flower beds were untended while plaques were faded or broken. The Mao statue also seemed to



Fig 5.3.b: Mao statue and residential complex, Kaili. Photo by the author.

be facing in the opposite direction to how I remembered. In 2013, Mao's face and upraised hand could be seen from the road that passed in front of the park, with the factory's ruins to the rear of the park. In 2018, the road provided a view of Mao's backside in one direction and a view of a new luxury residential complex in the other direction. It eventually dawned on me that the road had been moved so that it now cut through where part of the park had previously been located, while the residential complex stood where the ruins of Factory 210 had been located. On the residential side of the road was an impeccably tended space of greenery, in contrast to the semi-abandoned Third Front park.

In 2013, a huge billboard close to the park had advertised the impending arrival of this residential complex, whose name 'Mountain and City' (*shan yu cheng* 山与城) encapsulated a tricky PR balancing act of depicting the complex as not only surrounded by greenery but also close to urban amenities. Fortunately, a park constitutes both greenery and urban amenity, and the complex's profile must have been enhanced during initial advertising by the presence of the new park at its main entrance. In 2015, the residential complex's profile was further boosted by the announcement—covered by *Kaili Online* (*Kaili wang* 凯里网)—that the existing 58-mu park would be expanded into a 260-mu park including Third Front-style buildings, a museum, underground car park and, of course, ethnic minority architecture. It would be 'constructed according to the AAAA standards for scenic sites', although, as of 2019, it did not feature in the Guizhou Government's official directory of AAAA sites.

In 2016, *Civilised Kaili Online* (*Kaili wenming wang* 凯里文明网) reported that work on the first stage of this new Third Front commemorative project was 80% complete. On my 2018 trip, work looked nowhere near complete. In 2020, the promoters have seemingly gone not so much for a soft business opening as a silent opening, with no online indication that the new park has formally opened. Regardless of physical realities, Kaili is now frequently mentioned when online articles on the Third Front provide lists of cities that have Third Front commemorative sites. However, it remains to be seen to what extent the project will represent a genuine branding attempt to recognise the complexities of Kaili's urban development, as built not just on the brand of ethnic tourism but also the construction efforts of Third Front workers.

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5.4 Complex Collections, Contentious Memories: Reflections on the Jianchuan Museum Cluster

Lisheng Zhang

The first item visitors see in the Jianchuan Museum Complex (JMC), China's largest non-state museum, is a red gantry crane. In its overwhelming immensity, the 20 x 12 metre steel structure, acquired from a city stricken during the 2008 Wenchuan Earthquake, serves as the museum's entrance gate, bearing the name 'Jianchuan Museum Complex' (*Jianchuan Bowuguan Juluo* 建川博物馆聚落), in the handwriting of its founder and director, Mr. Fan Jianchuan. The sheer scale of its entrance distinguishes the JMC from the landscape of its locale, a historic small town called Anren, just outside Chengdu, in Sichuan Province, southwestern China. Through the crane stands a statue of a gun-holding soldier, erected on top of a 40-ton Second World War Japanese bunker shipped from Tianjin, a northern port city some 1850 kilometres away. Behind



Fig 5.4.a: Entrance to the Jianchuan Museum Complex. Photo by the author.

it, a 1000-metre drive, lined with giant bamboo towering exuberantly over a narrow footpath on each side, leads to the main compound of over 82 acres, housing 30 individual museums, each dedicated to a specific theme related to the memories of the Resistance War against Japan (1931–1945), the Mao Era (1949–1976), the 2008 Wenchuan Earthquake and Chinese folk culture in the past hundred years.

Developed since 2003, the JMC is built upon the personal collection of Fan Jianchuan, a self-made multimillionaire and collector who has amassed over eight million items over the past 30 years. His collection ranges from retired tanks, missiles, and airplanes to suicide notes, personal diaries, and photographs from the Cultural Revolution. While the museums display only a small portion of the collection, the majority is stored in a huge warehouse that opens exclusively to invited guests and employees.

From 2015 to 2017, I spent 15 months as a voluntary worker at the JMC conducting fieldwork for my PhD research as part of the Leverhulme-funded project *Conflict in Cultural Value: Localities and Heritage in Southwest China*, and had the opportunity of visiting the museum warehouse a few times.

Being in the presence of the entire collection is a formidable experience. Stepping into the warehouse, one is immersed in long lines of shelves of Mao busts, clocks, teacups, radios, and mirrors from the Maoist period. Along the walls, huge piles of vintage posters and newspapers reach up to the high ceiling. Going further, one comes across lines of closed bookshelves with A4 signs noting ‘Cultural Revolution Materials’ in bold. These shelves are stuffed with



Fig 5.4.b: Fan Jianchuan's collection warehouse. Photo by the author.

documents wrapped in plastic bags, containing personal profiles, trial records, self-criticism letters, complaint documents, rehabilitation documents, and so on. Mostly handwritten, these crisp and yellowish pieces of paper were items that had the power to have people imprisoned, persecuted, and their families broken. I remember myself breathing heavily while walking amongst the shelves, pondering the number of individuals being documented here by what lay quietly and banally in front of me. Yet the questions that really matter seem to be 'who were they?' and 'where are they now?'

Equally worth considering as the destiny of their authors is the destiny of the documents themselves. Upstairs, there are six full rooms of photo albums and diaries Fan collected during home clearances in the 1990s. These images of total strangers, and brief or lengthy accounts of their days, are of the most ordinary hence familiar contents: trips to the park on a sunny day, family gatherings, the first day back to school after holidays, significant moments in a relationship. I refrained from photographing these diaries and photographs, for I found them simply too private, too intimate for some random spectator like myself.

With the earliest acquisitions made during and shortly after the Cultural Revolution, Fan's collecting took on momentum in the early 1990s with the emergence of antique markets across the country, where he travelled extensively and frequently. Over the years Fan cultivated a countrywide network of antique traders specialising in twentieth century collectibles. The museum's 50,000 Mao-era mirrors were acquired by 20 of his contacts going through villages in different parts of China with loudspeakers looping the voice message 'there is a crazy guy from Sichuan who wants to trade new mirrors for your old

ones and give you five *yuan*!’ Since 2009, the JMC has been running an annual Red Collectors Forum (*Hongse shoucang jiaoliuhui* 红色收藏交流会) where these traders gather to showcase their collections, network, and most importantly, sell their items to the museum. Given the quantity and miscellany of its collection, the JMC’s cataloguing process has never been able to keep up with its acquisition, and only about 15% of its collection were catalogued by 2017.

The JMC is one of the very few museums in the country that has ever been able to address some of its most politically contentious memories. The early museums in the complex, opened from 2005 to 2010, are engaged with ‘sensitive’ topics such as the Chinese Nationalist Party (*Guomindang* 国民党) and the Cultural Revolution that have been largely marginalised or completely obliterated in official museum narratives. Highlighting the power of ‘real artefacts’, which the JMC possesses abundantly and often displays in unusually large quantities, with contextual explanations kept to a minimum, these museums create uniquely affective and evocative experiences.

In the meantime, the project has also been developed as a profitable business since around 2010. It now welcomes close to two million visitors a year and has successfully branched out to museum planning and construction, working with local governments across the country. In 2018, it opened another group of eight museums in the nearby megalopolis, Chongqing. Therefore, though non-state, it is deeply enmeshed with government authority in political and economic terms.

The largest non-state material culture repository of China’s twentieth century history, the JMC speaks amply of the moral and political complexities in remembering, collecting as well as understanding the museum and heritage industry in China today. And yet the vast majority of its collection remains unavailable for research or display, and the future of this unprecedented and gigantic project is still a story unfolding.

CHAPTER 6

Language Politics

6.0 Introduction

Séagh Kehoe

In September 2020, mass protests took place across Inner Mongolia after the Chinese state announced plans to replace the language of instruction in Inner Mongolian schools from Mongolian to Putonghua 普通话, or ‘standard mandarin Chinese’. The proposals, which the Chinese state argued would improve employment chances and enhance ethnic unity, led hundreds of students, parents, and language activists in Inner Mongolia to fear that they had become the latest target in the Chinese state’s attempts to further assimilate ethnic minorities into Han Chinese culture (Davidson 2020).

The state’s actions in Inner Mongolia represent the latest instance in recent decades of increasing restrictions on language instruction to be introduced across the PRC. In 2010, local officials in Qinghai province pushed for reforms of the ‘bilingual’ education system that effectively relegated Tibetan language to the status of a subject in an otherwise Putonghua-medium curriculum. Schools across Xinjiang have also faced a similar ‘restructuring’ of ‘bilingual’ education, while reports of Uyghurs and other Muslim minorities in the region’s extensive network of detention camps describe forced training in Putonghua and standard Chinese characters (Roche 2020). Language activism and media

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programming in non-Putonghua languages across these regions and elsewhere have also been met with increased crackdowns under Xi Jinping, all in the name of ‘stability maintenance’.

Such developments throw into sharp relief the longstanding everyday intersection of language and politics in the PRC. Since 1955, Putonghua, literally ‘the common language’, has been promoted, often aggressively, in the PRC as the official national language of government, education, mass media, public service, and all other formal purposes. 65 years on and efforts to make the ‘common language’ more common are very much ongoing. In 2007, Putonghua was only spoken by only 53% of the population, rising to 70% in 2015, while in September 2020, as part of the country’s 23rd annual week-long nationwide campaign to promote Putonghua, the Ministry of Education declared that just over 80% of the population now speak the language, though this falls to just 61% in impoverished areas (CGTN 2020). This persistent drive to promote the ‘national language’, as one professor at Minzu University recently told the *Global Times* (2021), is ‘to ensure the unity and integrity of the country and the smooth flow of government orders’.

The articles in this section examine linguistic practice and governance in both modern and contemporary China. Whether in the case of ‘ethnic minority’ languages, ‘dialect’, (un)gendered pronouns, or even research ecosystems, our contributors showcase the myriad ways in which language politics have always been at the heart of China’s nation-building project, central to its quest for modernity, and increasingly, part of its broader soft-power efforts.

As we have seen above, Putonghua promulgation often goes hand in hand with suppression of languages spoken by the state’s 55 officially recognised ethnic minority (*shaoshu minzu* 少数民族) populations. In the first article of this section, Grey describes how a key part of the problem lies in the fact that *shaoshu minzu* languages are only constitutionally afforded ‘the freedom to use and develop their own spoken and written languages,’ which does not require state action for its vindication. In contrast to Putonghua, the primacy of which is enshrined in the constitution in far less ambiguous terms, *shaoshu minzu* languages are characterised as a matter of group responsibility and choice, rather than a duty of the state. It is also important to examine the changing systems of values about language through which these language laws are now being interpreted. Grey identifies a distinct and growing tendency of the state to assess language value on the basis of its contribution to national development, which is mainly understood in economic terms. According to Hillman (2016), efforts to promote *minzu* languages are further pitted against pressures to encourage ideological loyalty and social stability at the expense of local language practices. As such, while Putonghua is seen as the solution to various social and economic inequalities, *shaoshu minzu* languages are often characterised as the obstacles.

Shaoshu minzu language endangerment is not just about subordination to the national language; it is also about practices of active erasure. Linguistic policy

in the PRC is guided by the state's imagining of ethnic minority languages as 55 'linguistically homogenous blocs' (Roche 2019, 493). In contrast, linguists have identified between 130 and 302 languages spoken among *shaoshu minzu*, though there are likely far more. In Inner Mongolia, for example, there are at least six distinct languages, but only 'standard Mongolian' is officially recognised and even this, as we have already seen, is under threat (494). Speakers of unrecognised languages have no standing within the law and do not officially exist. Regional variants of Mandarin Chinese, or *fangyan* 方言, such as Shanghainese, Cantonese, and dozens of others that are categorically different from Putonghua, often find themselves in a similar position (Luqiu 2018). However, as Tam argues in her piece in this section, the interests of national and local government, and those of *fangyan* movements, can variously overlap and converge. Indeed, while the state's promulgation of Putonghua as the primary national language is unambiguous, efforts at the level of local government, sometimes backed by the state itself, can be both supportive of and responsive to local language needs. Promoting *fangyan* as a form of local cultural heritage preservation, for instance, can be used to showcase official commitment in this area (see Section Five in this collection), while at the same time affirming the supremacy of Putonghua as the 'national language' of socialist modernisation.

As the dominant language, Putonghua is also the subject of much scrutiny and meticulous management. The incorporation of loanwords into the language, for instance, has regularly been the subject of scorn across the pages of state media for 'harming the purity and health' of the national language (China Daily 2014). Rhetoric of this kind, as well as the various laws in the PRC that restrict the use of foreign loan words, neglect the ways in which languages have always and continue to undergo phonological, lexical and syntactic change (Li 2004). We see this clearly in Jortay's article where she describes the heated debates surrounding pronominal politics in the late Republican period and the early years of the PRC. She shows how, as early as 1920, writers and activists argued over whether or not a new set of gender-differentiated pronouns should be introduced in the name of visibilising women. By 1953, these same pronouns had become the object of explicit party directives aimed at regulating how to 'properly' refer to men and women.

The politics of language within the PRC also extend well beyond the country's borders. As Zhou (2019) has argued, there exists clear linguistic association between China's domestic drive and global outreach since the turn of the century, perhaps most evident in the Confucius Institute project. This is also the subject of the final article of this section, where MoChridhe connects changing language policy in China's research evaluation reform with the state's growing power and confidence on the global stage. He explains why the Chinese state shifted to emphasising Mandarin-language publications in early 2020, putting Mandarin-language journals on an even footing with English-language ones in domestic assessments. While the move has some scholars in China concerned that journals published in Mandarin will be inaccessible to international

scholars, MoChridhe wonders whether Mandarin might one day sit alongside English in a bilingual research ecosystem and what this would mean for the language politics of research in China and around the world.

The ideas and insights shared across and between these articles give us much to think about in terms of how language governance, ideologies, and genealogies unfold and intersect at local, regional, and national levels across the PRC. There is much more to be said about how the insights and questions shared here relate (or do not) to understandings of cultural china more broadly. How, for instance, do the language politics explored in this section compare, contrast, and interact with language practices in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and in the diaspora? How do references to a ‘Chinese language’, so often found in the media, classrooms, policy and everyday conversation around the world, fit into such discussions and to what extent does this normalise and reinforce the hegemony of Putonghua as a ‘national language’? So often ‘Chinese language’ is used in monolithic terms, reproducing what Chow (1998) described in the 1990s as the ‘myth of ‘standard Chinese’ and reifying notions of a homogenous, unified, and univocal China. Today, as the PRC becomes ever more assertive in ‘telling China’s story well’ internationally, it has become increasingly important to critically examine the ways in which ‘Chinese language’ neatly packs away and conceals the various forms of linguistic diversity, change, continuity, tensions, and erasures that have always been core to the lived realities and politics of cultural china. In this light, perhaps the clearest takeaway from this section is that no single version of a ‘Chinese language’, whether Putonghua or otherwise, has ever or could ever in any way adequately represent Cultural China and that it is more vital than ever to resist any such assertion.

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6.1 China's Minority Language Rights: No Bulwark Against Upcoming Change

Alexandra Grey

China sees linguistic diversity and language use as matters to be governed. It has therefore enacted laws and promulgated official policies about (non-Mandarin) minority languages, national standardised Mandarin (*Putonghua* 普通话) and Mandarin dialects over the course of the twentieth century.

First, fundamental minority language protection is enshrined in the current (1982) *Constitution*. It is expressed as a freedom to use and develop (officially recognised) minority languages. This current protection follows the inclusion of more or less the same provision in each of the three preceding constitutions (Article 3, 1954; Article 4, 1975; Article 4, 1978) and in the 1949 *Common Program* (Article 53), which served as the constitution from the throes of the PRC's founding in 1949 until 1954. A minority language freedom is one of the types of language right found in laws around the world. This form of language right has its own legal limitations, but expressing such a language right in the *Constitution* is nevertheless part of a commitment by the State to protect the interests of China's 55 official minority *minzu*.

Second, from the turn of this century onwards, there has been an important piece of national legislation (National People's Congress 2000) underpinning a suite of protective and promotional policies relating to Putonghua. It is extensive and detailed, and it mobilises legal authority to monopolise certain



Fig 6.1.a: Dong Xiwen 董希文. 1956. *The Founding of the Nation*. Source: China Visual Arts Project, University of Westminster.

domains of language use for Putonghua. Moreover, this law expresses a positive right to learn and use Putonghua. This law enshrines what was already developing in practice: the lingua franca usage of Putonghua across the nation. It builds on historic state practices of language standardisation; before the PRC, the Imperial and Republican Chinese states also prescribed varieties of Mandarin as their official, national language.

There are also a number of more specific, derivative language rights in various national, regional, and local laws. These include rather toothless criminal penalties for state employees who seriously encroach on minority cultural customs, a legal permission for schools in minority areas to use a minority language for instruction in the early years – the legal weakness of which is clear from the current, contentious reductions to bilingual schooling in Inner Mongolia (Baioud 2020) – and a legal obligation on schools to popularise Putonghua.

There is a tension between China's minority and majority language rights. Yet both underpin China's state practice in regards to language.

A long-standing flaw (or design feature, depending on your perspective) of the legal system is that it does not empower individuals or even minority groups to take much agency in the future of the languages they speak, nor does it offer much of a resource if people wish to fight against encroachments on their free language use. The legal framework is sensitive to top-down beliefs about languages, and these, of course, have changed markedly.

While official language policies get updated, the laws about minority languages have remained virtually unchanged. And yet the linguistic and



Fig 6.1.b: Artist unknown. n.d. The Census is Everyone's Duty. Source: China Visual Arts Project, University of Westminster.

socio-economic contexts in which those laws operate has changed markedly since 1949. Intrigued by this, I began researching Chinese minority language laws and policies in practice in 2013. I have looked at the overarching national framework and then delved into the specifics of the governance and practice of Zhuang (*zhuang yu* 壮语), the language associated with China's largest official minority, the Zhuangzu (*zhuangzu* 壮族). The Zhuangzu was not one of the 'five nations' foundational to the politics of the Republic of China. Iredale and Guo (2003, 8) report that in the 1949 pre-census, people nominated themselves as falling into over 400 ethnic groups with Zhuang not among them; Zhuangzu was introduced by the state as a category on the 1954 Yunnan census (Mullaney 2006, 142).

Thus, the social significance of Zhuang language changed alongside changes in the lead up to the founding of the PRC, and continued to evolve once the PRC was established. This was true of the social significance of linguistic diversity more generally.

The politics of diverse languages—by the 1950s, diverse *officially-recognised* 'shaoshu minzu' 少数民族 (minority) languages—fell prey to the perception that ethno-linguistic difference was threatening during the Cultural Revolution. Perceptions changed again with Opening and Reform. Opening and Reform paved the way for an ongoing drive towards 'modernisation'. Modernisation also loosened the tight binding between people and place through the rural and urban household residency system, and developed structures by which

employment and welfare could be organised other than through workplaces. Migration—mainly to the quickly-growing cities of East China—resulted from this structural modernisation and from relaxing the central control over both university placements and the job market. This started to create—and is still creating—minority diasporas, rather than tightly concentrated communities sharing languages. This affects language use and creates divergence between where minority languages are believed to be in place and thus to be governed, and where the people who can speak them actually live.

As the modernisation progressed, the current era of globalisation emerged. Globalisation manifested in China in many ways including the state-backed but also highly commercial spread of English language teaching and learning.

English was not the only language to spread as modernisation and globalisation fused in China; Putonghua did too. By the turn of this century, Zhou and Ross (2004, 16) observed that ‘coupled with globalisation and the forces of market economy, China’s modernisation drive appears to favour only two dominant languages, [Putonghua] Chinese as the national commonly-used language and English as the world language’. Moreover, as the twenty-first century began, China was preoccupied with harmonising a nation-wide society. In this context, the old fear of ethno-linguistic difference as threat re-emerged, gradually hardening into securitised language policy, especially in areas of unrest in the North-West. Thus, in my view, even as a ‘pluralistic’ language policy phase was being named by scholars in the 1990s–2000s, a new and more minoritising phase was emerging.

Moreover, ethnolinguistic minoritisation still tends to intersect with poverty, even as China’s overall wealth has vastly increased, and the current patterns of residency also mean that more change is coming for most minority peoples. Adamson and Feng (2009, 322) report that the minority *minzu* are mainly ‘living in 155 largely resource-rich but economically under-developed ethnic autonomous areas, many of which are located near the country’s frontiers’. Change is afoot within these very areas and in terms of their centrality to the nation. In the era of international trade (including Belt and Road), these areas’ border locations make them strategically important, and they now have greater potential for extractive industries and urban settlement than the already industrialised, densely-populated East.

A possibility for ‘double domination’ of Putonghua and English over Zhuang and other minority languages is created by these changes (Grey 2018[2017], 58). Yet this is not what China’s mid-twentieth century language laws and policies were designed to respond to. We may wonder what sort of sociolinguistic orders the minority language governance framework is now aspiring to, reproducing or resisting. Within what system of values or beliefs about language are language laws now being interpreted?

It is a system of beliefs about heritage protection, rather than about maintaining minority languages as valuable and viable parts of modern life. This is

seen in China's new, national Yubao 语保 'Language Protection' project. Shen and Gao (2019, 7) explain that Yubao explicitly and officially frames linguistic diversity as a resource and 'is supposed to address the problems that may be generated by [the state's] commitment to unity, such as disappearing diversity'. Yubao considers only some languages as resources to maintain for international economic exchange (but not many minority languages), but considers all language to be cultural resources. To operationalise this belief, it focuses on documenting minority languages as they disappear. This Yubao approach builds on the 'developmentalist' beliefs about language which I have argued have been embedded in the legal framework all along; minority languages are valuable, and worthy of the State's backing, only in so far as they contribute to national (primarily economic) development. Thus, in my view, China's language rights now produce, or at least allow, 'aspiring monolingualism', to borrow the apt phrase that Hult (2014, 209) used in the context of another massive nation, the USA.

Will Yubao's resulting, disembodied records of minority languages – historic language artefacts – remain meaningful as cultural and identity resources in the future, if people do not also still speak those languages?

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6.2 Linguistic Hierarchies and Mandarin Promulgation: An Excerpt from *Dialect and Nationalism in China, 1860–1960*

Gina Anne Tam

This excerpt is from my book Dialect and Nationalism in China, 1860–1960 (Cambridge UP, 2020). The book centres the history of the Chinese nation and national identity on fangyan—languages like Shanghainese, Cantonese, and dozens of others that are categorically different from the Chinese national language, Mandarin. I trace how, from the late Qing through the height of the Maoist period, fangyan were framed as playing two disparate, but intertwined roles in Chinese-nation building: on the one hand, linguists, policy-makers, bureaucrats, and workaday educators framed fangyan as non-standard 'variants' of the Chinese language, subsidiary in symbolic importance to standard Mandarin; on the other hand, many others, such as folksong collectors, playwrights, hip-hop artists, and popular protestors, argued that fangyan were more authentic and

representative of China's national history and culture than the national language itself. These two visions of the Chinese nation—one spoken in one voice, one spoken in many—have shaped the shared basis for collective national identity for over a century, and their legacies are still significant to the ongoing construction of nationhood today. The section below looks at these contemporary legacies, examining how PRC language policy today reflects a long-established state-driven emphasis on the political, cultural, and linguistic hierarchy between Chinese fangyan and the Chinese national language.

In 2003, a local journalist filed a report on language reform in seaside Qingdao. The largest city in Shandong province, it is known among linguists as a distinct branch of the *Guanhua* 官话 dialect region—mutually intelligible with *Putonghua* 普通话, the Chinese national language known commonly as Mandarin, but unique in its phonetics and tones. The journalist was tasked with measuring the effects of *Putonghua* promulgation by interviewing a line of workaday bank tellers, hotel concierges, and nurses. ‘Why are you not speaking *Putonghua*?’ the reporter asked a bank teller incredulously. The equally perplexed man stated, ‘I am speaking *Putonghua*, no?’ She moved on to a handful of middle-aged workers, demanding to know why they did not speak in the national language. These things come slowly, they maintained with a hint of defensiveness. Some remained confused as to why a journalist would challenge their claims about the language they were speaking. Still others simply laughed sheepishly at her questions. In concluding the piece, the journalist interviewed a younger Qingdao resident, who, in perfect *Putonghua*, expressed outrage over falling standards. If its residents cannot properly speak the nation’s common language, she asked, ‘how could Qingdao claim to be a modern city, ready to be featured on a global stage?’ Qingdao, the two summarised, was falling short of its responsibility to properly represent the Chinese nation (*Tuiguang Putonghua* 推广普通话 2003).

This report, a bizarre mix of investigative journalism and public shaming, had a clear message: speaking *Putonghua* was an expectation for being part of modern Chinese society. Its message also poignantly reflects current government priorities. While the PRC’s government deemed *Putonghua* the national language in 1956—defined as ‘Beijing’s pronunciation as standard pronunciation, Northern dialect as the base dialect, and modern vernacular literature as standard structure, vocabulary, and grammar’—the push for *Putonghua* promulgation became more targeted, ubiquitous, and aggressive in recent decades. The 1982 constitution declared that the state was responsible for promoting *Putonghua* as the nation’s language, paving the way for a series of local and national policies targeting education, public service, and art (Article 19, 2004). Today, *Putonghua* is taught in all schools, dominates public announcements, and is the sole focus of language learning initiatives abroad. Teachers and broadcasters are required to pass a *Putonghua* proficiency exam with high marks. These measures have been matched by crackdowns on non-standard language use in the early 2000s. In 2001, a new language law designated *Putonghua* for

public use, and other non-Chinese languages, called *fangyan* 方言 in Chinese, for private use (*Zhonghua Renmin* 中华人民, 2005). In 2005, a new media law sought to eliminate overly vernacular language and code-switching. While content performed entirely in some *fangyan* is permitted in certain contexts, journalists, media personalities and actors are no longer permitted to pepper their language with phrases or slang from other tongues (Liu 2013, 69; 79).

It would be easy to interpret these policies and accompanying media reports as state attempts at linguistic erasure. Despite laws explicitly permitting *fangyan* use, it is entirely unambiguous which one the state sees as the national representative. Yet other evidence imply that the central government has not attempted to eradicate *fangyan* entirely. In contrast, local governments, with support from Beijing, have unveiled events meant to 'save the dialects' from the fast-paced urbanisation threatening the vagaries of local culture. In Suzhou, some primary schools, in collaboration with a 'Suzhou *fangyan* training center,' began experimenting with short daily lessons in Suzhou *fangyan* (*Suzhou fangyan* 苏州方言2012). In Beijing in 2014, the subway was adorned with public service announcements teaching passersby vocabulary particular to 'Beijingshua' (or 'Beijing-ese). In 2015, the city of Leizhou, in conjunction with hot-sauce syndicate Modocom, hosted its first annual 'Zurong *Fangyan* Film Festival'. Offering awards for films made exclusively in Chinese *fangyan*, they summarized their goals in a short sentence: 'Zurong Village Dialect Film Festival from beginning to end expressed the following idea: Love *fangyan*, love cinema, love home' (*Zurong fangyan* 足荣方言 (Zurong Dialect), 2016). Chinese academia has also contributed to these efforts. In 2013, the State Council's National Social Science Fund of China approved a research project to create a 'sound digital database of Chinese *fangyan*'. The database, designed to 'save' China's *fangyan*, is guided by the belief that it is the responsibility of the scholars and the state to protect their nation's heritage (*Quanguo* 全国 2015).

While at first blush these 'save the dialect' measures seem at odds with state efforts to promulgate *Putonghua*, I argue that both serve the same underlying goal: the promotion of a stark hierarchy between a standardised national language and all other Chinese *fangyan*. The hierarchy between national language and *fangyan* in China has its roots in the late nineteenth century. In the final years of the Qing dynasty, a state beleaguered by foreign imperialism and domestic turmoil, modern Chinese elites proclaimed that the nation's survival depended upon its ability to transform into a modern nation. For many of them, modern nations had a national language, and a lack of one was seen as proof of China's lack of national modernity. After decades of debate about the constitution of such a national standard, in 1925 reformers designated Beijing's language as the national standard; in so doing, what had once been one *fangyan* among many was suddenly transformed into the sole linguistic representative of the Chinese nation. The language's unique political status quickly seeped into the discourse of elites and the structures they built, quietly reinforcing and normalising the notion that the national language, because of its relationship with modern



Fig 6.2.a: ‘Leng shenr: Beijinghua.’ Advertisement in Yonghegong subway station, December 6, 2014. Photo by the author.

state-building, stood apart from all others. And as evidenced by the report from Qingdao and the policies it supports, the legacies of these earlier discourses still inform state actions today. By seeking to outlaw code switching and seamless mixing, or demonstrating disdain towards poorly-spoken *Putonghua*, the state and its affiliates continue to promote the strict hierarchical separation of *Putonghua* and *fangyan* just as their predecessors had done.

Fangyan preservation efforts also reinforce that same hierarchy. These measures are not meant to make *fangyan* serve the same communicative, cultural, or subjective roles as *Putonghua*; rather, they are geared towards preserving them solely as historical legacies. This framing has roots in early PRC language policy. After the Communist revolution of 1949, scholars associated with the new state began to justify the promulgation of a standard language—and the framing of *fangyan* as subsidiary branches—through a Stalinist model of history and language. This teleological view of history saw languages as direct representatives of the communities that spoke them, and maintained that only

national languages could ‘progress and develop’, whereas dialects could only be remnants of a stagnant past, curios to be placed in museums. ‘Save the dialects’ activities today reflect this view of history, presenting dialects as part of the nation’s history but only significant insofar as they contribute to a teleological narrative of eventual national unity. Even those advocating for the preservation of Suzhou fangyan confirmed this distinction: ‘*Putonghua* and *fangyan*, one is our country’s common language and script, the other is an important linguistic resource’ (Suzhou 2012).

In short, aggressive *Putonghua* promulgation strategies, including though certainly not limited to on-camera shaming, exalt *Putonghua* as the national language, while measures to ‘save’ China’s dialects subtly institutionalise *fangyan* exclusively as local cultural heritage. These policies are but two sides of the same coin. They draw a clear divide between the language that serves as national representative, and local manifestations of that national culture that should be preserved for posterity and little more. As the state and its allies have actively promulgated *Putonghua* as an archetype of Chinese national identity and carefully curated *fangyan* as little more than data, heritage, or private curiosities, the apotheosis of the hierarchy between national language and *fangyan* lives on.

It is critical to remember that the implications of these policies extend far beyond language. Designating *fangyan* as subsidiary ‘dialects’ and *Putonghua* as the ‘common language of the Chinese people’ implies that *Putonghua* can represent a unified sense of national identity and citizenship in a way that no *fangyan* could. Our Qingdao journalist and our ‘save the dialect’ aficionados are not simply concerned with linguistic taxonomies —it is a hierarchy of identity they wish to maintain. And in their actions, they ultimately reinforce today’s vision of Chinese identity under the current PRC state: an essentialised, homogenous identity where other representatives of national identity are held as subsidiary to the state-defined standard.

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6.3 The Hidden Language Policy of China's Research Evaluation Reform

Race MoChridhe

In February, China's Ministries of Education and of Science and Technology released two documents that reshaped the research landscape: 'Some Suggestions on Standardising the Use of SCI Paper Indexes' and "Some Measures to Eliminate the Bad Orientation of "Papers Only" (Ministry of Education and Ministry of Science and Technology 2020). Elaborating the academic reform that President Xi has pursued since 2016, they provide the first detailed steps for dramatically reducing the role of the Science Citation Index (SCI) in evaluating Chinese research (Sharma 2020).

For twenty years, the SCI—a prestige listing of 'high impact' scientific journals—controlled the careers of Chinese researchers. It and various derived indices are commonly used for university rankings and research evaluation (the UK, for example, uses SCI-derived data to allocate funding) (REF 2018), but China relied on the SCI to an unusual degree (Huang 2020). There, quotas for publishing in SCI journals governed hiring and advancement, pay bonuses, and even graduation from doctoral programs. In using the SCI as a 'gold standard', Chinese administrators sought to increase productivity, enhance national prestige, and benchmark the closure of gaps between China's research sector and cutting-edge work internationally.

To a significant extent, these goals have been met. China has risen rapidly up international rankings, and Chinese research productivity routinely exceeds the world average (Li and Wang 2019). Since 2016, China has been the world's largest producer of published research (Tollefson 2018), accounting for over a third of all global activity (Xie and Freeman 2018, 2). Since 2017, Chinese research has been the second-most cited (after US research). The *Nature* Index now ranks Beijing as the world's number one 'science city', with Shanghai as number five (the other three are American) (Jia 2020). Despite US status as the world leader for the past several decades, one analysis (Lee and Haupt 2020) concluded that US research outputs would have fallen over the last five years

except for collaborations with Chinese researchers, while Chinese outputs would have grown regardless.

So why change a winning formula? The ministries' announcements have focused on eliminating perverse incentives created by over-reliance on the SCI that saw researchers prioritising quantity over quality, nepotistically inflating citation counts, and falling prey to predatory journals (Mallapaty 2020). The Chinese government has, accordingly, allocated tens of millions of dollars to initiatives for improving Chinese journal quality and combating corrupt publishing practices (Cyranoski 2019). At the same time, commentators have noted the potential cost savings of de-centering SCI metrics (Creus 2020).

Another factor, however, has been largely overlooked. Ninety-seven percent of papers indexed in the SCI are in English (Liu 2016)—the *lingua franca* of scientific communication. To remain competitive in major international journals, almost all of the top research-producing countries now publish the majority of their articles in English, with the share of native-language publications declining every year in virtually every country (Van Weijen 2012)—except China.

This is not for lack of trying. The Chinese government has done everything in its power to channel its research outputs into English to boost their global impact, but, although it has been a decade since China technically became the world's largest English-speaking country (Coonan 2009), the quality of ESL instruction remains uneven (Baldi 2016). Studies show that even the most advanced L2 speakers of English experience disproportionate rejection rates in scholarly publishing (Pearce 2002), as well as a slew of other systemic barriers (Huttner-Koros 2015), compared to their native-English-speaking peers, and most of China's English students never reach such advanced proficiencies to begin with.

Moreover, the growth of ESL capacity in China has simply been outstripped by the growth in research. As Xie and Freeman (2018, 7) noted, between 2000 and 2016, 'China more than doubled its number of faculty and tripled its number of researchers—all of whom had to find venues for publishing'. China now graduates twice as many university students per year as the US and employs the largest number of laboratory scientists of any nation on Earth (Han and Appelbaum 2018), with the result that China is now the only country whose native-language scientific publication in domestic journals is rising *alongside* its growth in international, English-language publications (Xie and Freeman 2018, 5). China simply needs—and is creating—new university faculty and new labs far faster than it can create new English speakers, and it can no longer afford to limit growth in the former category to meet metrics that depend on the latter.

Reading between those lines, the shift in language policy embedded in the new assessment policy becomes clear, as it does not merely eliminate requirements to publish in SCI journals, but adds requirements that at least one-third of the publications used for evaluating researchers must be published in domestic journals (Xu 2020). Not all domestic journals publish in Mandarin, but nearly half of those identified as priority venues in the Ministry's

action plan do (Tao 2020), and, given the constraints in China's ESL systems, the Mandarin-language journal sector will doubtless expand faster than the domestic English-language one, such that a substantial increase in Mandarin-language publications is almost guaranteed.

Chinese authorities have repeatedly shown themselves willing, if not eager, to rewrite the rules of the international game. One thinks of efforts to challenge the dollar's status as global reserve currency (Bansal 2020) and notes that the status of English as scientific *lingua franca* poses a similar constraint on Chinese ambitions, bottlenecking new research capacity and disadvantaging Chinese researchers in the international arena. As one engineering professor expressed it, by encouraging Mandarin-language publications, 'This [policy change] will, to some extent, isolate the Chinese researchers from the global research community' (Mallapaty 2020)—a sentiment echoed by the chief managing editor of the Chinese journal *Research*, who suggested that Chinese researchers would still largely eschew journals published in Mandarin owing to their 'inaccessibility... to international scholars' (Jia 2019).

Such pessimism assumes, however, that China can only emerge into the world and not change it. For most of modern history, there was no single scientific *lingua franca* (Gordin 2015). Until the Second World War, English, French, and German all held substantial shares of global research activity, and a reading knowledge of two, if not all three, of those languages was a common expectation of professional researchers. After the war, German and French receded, but Russian remained a viable competitor to English in many fields through the middle of the century. Only in the 1970s did English emerge as *the* language of science. Unleashing China's full potential would not require replacing English as the hegemonic standard for scientific communication, but only establishing Mandarin alongside it in a bilingual research ecosystem, effectively claiming for the 2020s the role that German and French held in the 1920s.

If the Chinese Communist Party can establish the country as a world leader in AI, data science, robotics, and other twenty-first-century fields (Cher 2020), the world will not be able to ignore a third (or more) of its total research output, no matter what language it is published in, and the Party knows this. Putting Mandarin-language journals on an even footing with English-language ones in domestic assessments may be a modest first step, but it opens onto a road whose destination was envisioned years ago by academics like Chun-Hua Yan, the former associate editor-in-chief of the Beijing-based *Journal of Rare Earths*, who dreamed that journals published in Mandarin would one day be 'followed by scientists around the world' (Cyranoski 2012).

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6.4 War of Words and Gender: Pronominal Feuds of the Republican Period and the Early PRC

Coraline Jortay

Let us consider for a minute this 1953 new-style New Year's print (*nianhua* 年画) captioned 'His labouring work is the best'. On a first level, the print was described by its contemporaries as representing women washing clothes in a creek and chatting, while admiring a rather strong fellow among a mutual-aid team of male labourers coming back from the fields (Li 1954). The image was said to embody women's newfound freedom to contemplate better, self-determined marriage prospects under the new Marriage Law of the People's Republic of China (PRC). On a second level, the visual tension between two kinds of labour (the men tending to the fields and the women washing clothes) present in the image is echoed in its caption through the archetypal characterisation of the character 他 (*ta*) as 'him': his (the man's) labour is the best, a question that ties back to what was considered 'labour' (*laodong* 劳动), and what kind of women's labour was valued in the early PRC and beyond (Hershatter 2013, 195).

What is interesting then, to the historian of Chinese language politics, is that the very linguistic underpinning upon which rests both of these levels of interpretation— 他 as meaning unequivocally 'him' in referring to a man—was merely 30 years old at the time. What is more, in 1953 pronouns were still the object of explicit party directives aimed at regulating how to 'properly' refer to men and women. Not only would this caption not have made much sense as recently as three decades earlier: this seemingly most mundane word (他



Fig 6.4.a: Shang Husheng 尚沪生. 1953. His Labouring Work Is the Best. Source: China Visual Arts Project, University of Westminster.

for ‘he,’ and only ‘he,’ with another differentiated pronoun for ‘she’) was the subject of heated debates throughout the Republican period and the early PRC – debates the crux of which was not too far removed from today’s questions of gender-inclusive language.

But let us rewind.

Prior to 1917, there was no third person feminine pronoun in Chinese as an unequivocal translational equivalent for ‘she.’ In his 1933 *Kaiming English Grammar*, the great master of humour Lin Yutang discussed the colliding course that linguistic gender and social representations of gender could take in different societies:

It is strange also that, while the Chinese talk so much about sex distinctions (男女有別 [nan nü you bie]), they have not developed a distinction between he and she in their language, while the European people who talk so much about sexual equality should insist on this he-she distinction. The Chinese character for ‘she’ (她 [ta]) dates back only to 1917 (Lin 1933, 103–4)

Of course, that is not to say that speakers did not have vastly nuanced ways of referring to a third person feminine prior to 1917, especially given the prominent importance of gendered terms of kinship and occupation which *de facto* functioned as pronouns in an open-ended lexical category. However, ‘pronouns’ as a closed system of first/second/third person had not been an operational category prior to missionaries’ attempts at moulding the language onto the grammatical structures of Latin, English, or other languages which were most familiar to them. And indeed, the apparent ‘lack’ of gender concord and clear-cut gendered pronouns bothered missionaries very much, as is apparent in the words of American missionary Arthur Smith in *Chinese Characteristics* (1894, 86). Many bilingual dictionaries throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth century registered similar hesitations and colonialist hints at the view that Chinese would somehow be an ‘imprecise’ language because linguistic gender functioned differently than it did in other languages (Figure 6.4.b.).

This view that linguistic gender was somehow ‘lacking’—and acutely so in the pronominal system – came to infuse the textbooks of a generation of educated children who would grow up to become prominent linguists and writers, the proponents of ‘new literature’ and its Europeanised grammar in the May Fourth era. Figure 6.4.c. shows the English textbook that Liu Ban-nong – the famed ‘inventor’ of the Chinese character for ‘she’ and a prominent linguist who first recorded the oscillatory patterns of tones of various topolects – used as a teenager to learn English. In this 1893 textbook, *He, she, and it* are translated using the same character, which is then followed by an explanation ‘[when] designating men,’ ‘[when] designating women,’ and ‘[when] designating things and beasts’ (Tenney 1893, 11).

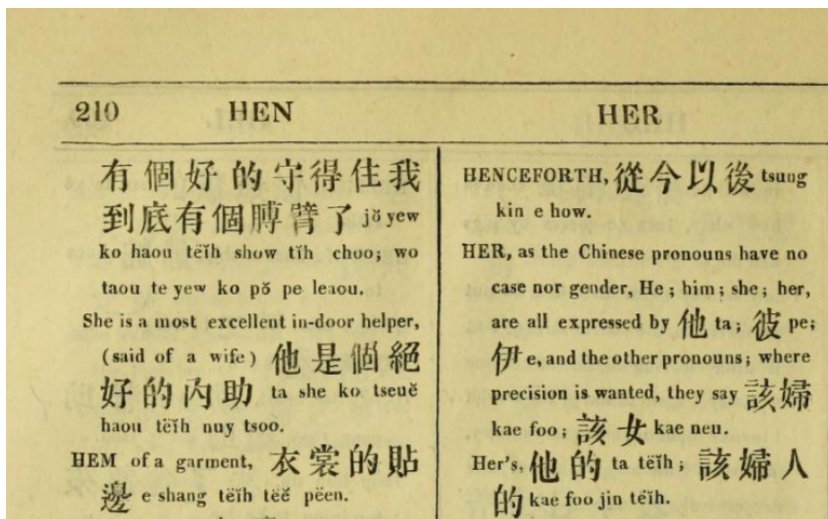


Fig 6.4.b: Entry for 'Her' in Robert Morrison, *A Dictionary of the Chinese Language* (1822).

LESSON XI.
Pronouns. 代名詞
Singular.

		Before a noun.	Alone.
I.	我	my. 我的	mine. 我的
you.	你	your. 你的	yours. 你的
he.	他 (指男人)	his. 他的 (指男)	his. 他的 (指男)
she.	她 (指婦女)	her. 她的 (指女)	hers. 她的 (指女)
it.	它 (指物件禽獸)	its. 它的 (指物)	its. 它的 (指物)
Plural.			
we.	我們	our. 我們的	ours. 我們的
you.	你們	your. 你們的	yours. 你們的
they.	他們	their. 他們的	theirs. 他們的

Fig 6.4.c: Pronominal Table in C.D. Tenney's 1893 *Yingwen Facheng*.

As for the origins of 'she' in Chinese, the story goes that Liu Bannong – facing difficulties translating fiction heavily laden with pronominal density – proposed the new pronoun during an editorial board meeting of *New Youth* as a way to forego recourse to expressions such as 'this woman said' instead of 'she said'. Other writers proposed a few alternatives of their own, some inflected with Japanese, some with Wu topolects, before new literature settled on using 她 as

'she'. Recent research on the topic acknowledges some degree of opposition to the new pronoun, but concludes that 'she' was quickly coopted on the road to 'linguistic modernity,' especially by women writers keen to make use of a new visibilising tool amidst the centrality of the 'woman question' (Huang 2009).

My research shows quite a different story: as early as 1920, a number of writers and activists were appalled by the hierarchies that the new set of gender-differentiated pronouns introduced in the language in the name of visibilising women. A frequent concern was that the 'woman' radical on the left-hand side of the pronoun (*nü* 女 in 她) introduced a pronominal hierarchy wherein men owned the 'person' radical (*ren* 人 in 他, formerly a general third pronoun) while women were now 'just women' and animals and things were 'cows' (*niu* 牛 in 牠). Many saw this pronominal hierarchy as intrinsically sexist, even asking whether marking linguistic gender was warranted at all. Anarcho-communist circles in the early 1920s rejected the masculine/feminine/neuter division and proposed their own 'common gender' pronoun. Essayist Zhu Ziqing reported that girl students often crossed off the 'person' radical in the new masculine pronoun, replacing it with a masculine (*nan* 男) out of spite (Zhu 1928, 109–110). The notable novelist Cheng Zhanlu argued that gendering pronouns inevitably pigeonholed people who eschewed the gender binary such as eunuchs into a forcible 'masculine' or 'feminine' (Cheng 1924). So many more examples could be cited, from playwrights decrying having to deal with discrepancies between how pronouns were to be voiced (*ta* in all cases) and how they were written in scripts (differentiated pronouns) to poets such as Liu Dabai using alternative pronouns in poetry where gender-inclusivity or indeterminacy required so.

Meanwhile, as soon as the *he/she/it* pronominal split became mainstream in the late 1920s, constructions akin to 'he or she', 'she/he', '(s)he', or even concatenated plural forms started to appear in the periodical press. They effectively worked to re-introduce an inclusivity or ambiguity that was the norm barely 15 years before. Many of these constructions lived in the periodical press throughout the 1930s and 1940s, although they always seem to have been the result of individual contributors' linguistic politics rather than any widespread editorial policy. If quantitative corpus studies would be needed to ascertain exactly how widespread they were, they had gained enough ground by the early 1950s to warrant their own set of directives when the central government started calling for the 'purification' of Chinese grammar and vocabulary (Altehenger 2017, 634) doing away with 'excessive' Europeanised grammatical features. Programs for normalising the written language were directly spearheaded by Mao's aide Hu Qiaomu, leading to the compilation of Lü Shuxiang and Zhu Dexi's 1952 *Talks on Grammar and Rhetoric* (*Yufa xiuci jianghua* 语法修辞讲话), which devotes an entire section to the question of 'he and she'. The manual specifies that forms such as 'he and she', 'he (she)', 'he or she' and concatenated plural forms should be thoroughly banned, and that forms such as 'men and women

workers' (*nan nü gongrenmen* 男女工人们) could be used as substitutes when the context required that emphasis on women be made. The *Talks on Grammar and Rhetoric* went on to become *the* manual of prescribed style for normalising all forms of writing for editors across the country.

In a similar fashion, in the lead-up to the drafting of the first *Scheme for Simplifying Chinese Characters* in the early 1950s, the possible re-simplification of gendered third-person pronouns into a single, pre-1917 gender-inclusive pronoun was debated, but *in fine* never materialised. When the *First Table of Verified Allographs* was jointly promulgated by the Commission of Chinese Script Reform and the Ministry of Culture in 1956, other gendered pronouns were abolished (the feminine second-person pronoun *ni* 妳 and the neuter third-person pronoun *ta* 牠). Interestingly however, the masculine/feminine pronominal dichotomy had been deemed – despite all the initial pushback initiated in anarcho-communist circles in the early 1920s – a category useful enough for the young PRC to keep...

Through all of these debates, Chinese language politics invite us to rethink familiar debates of our time on pronouns and gender-inclusive writing, whether they concern the singular *they* in English, the interpoint in French, or the -x ending in Spanish. These very controversies, which we generally assume to be recent predominantly Western, battles (and perhaps a whim of late-twentieth and twenty-first century feminists?) effectively took place in China starting one century ago. In this regard, China's pronominal feuds are illuminating: there, the gendering of pronouns and the pushback occurred over such a short period of time that no one could have argued that pronominal gender binaries were part of any 'natural and immutable' law of the language.

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CHAPTER 7

Covid-19

7.0 Introduction

How Wee Ng and Séagh Kehoe

When we reflect on the profound ways in which Covid-19 impacted our lives in 2020, it is difficult to know where to begin. Much has been written about how the pandemic has disrupted, halted, and even transformed ‘normal’ everyday life in the form of millions of deaths, economic loss, as well as unprecedented curbs on social interaction. Rupture, however, is only one part of the story. Integral to the ongoing devastation of Covid-19 are the continuities and retrenchments of many deep-seated patterns of oppression and exploitation (Hagen and Elliot 2021). We saw this in the PRC when the public anger and frustration that ensued after the tragic death of Li Wenliang, the doctor who first warned of the outbreak of a new deadly virus and was told by police to ‘stop making false comments’, was swiftly met with a familiar pattern of censorship, crack-down, and nationalist reframing by the state (Zhang 2020). We also saw it in Hong Kong, where the government’s restriction of public gatherings through disease control regulation became the latest in a string of measures designed to securitise and criminalise protestors as part of the ongoing political crisis (Ismangil and Lee 2020). And we saw it again in the orientalist rhetoric across politics and media about the management of the pandemic by the PRC, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, the use by Trump and many others of racist terms to talk about the virus, and surge of Sinophobic attacks around the world on people who ‘look Chinese/Asian’, all of which put into sharp relief longstanding

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racisms in the UK, US, and across Europe. Indeed, disasters are not ‘bolts from the blue’ but have long histories with deep roots within social life (Turner 1978).

The articles in this section examine how these dynamics of rupture and continuity have unfolded across Chinese and Sinophone worlds in 2020. From celebrity politics to economic pressures of Tibetan migrant workers, to the discourses and feminist activism around menstruation, what is explored here are the many ways in which pre-existing polarities and divisions have been further illuminated and exacerbated because of the ongoing pandemic.

During the early days of the pandemic, WeChat group chats and other social media spaces became key sites where citizens of the PRC, both at home and abroad, found and shared information with friends and family about case numbers, prevention and treatment strategies, governmental efforts, rumours, and much more (Chen 2020). Influencers and other celebrities occupied an important part of this discourse. Some, for example, used social media to initiate vernacular trends to protect against Covid-19, such as social distancing and good hygiene practices (Abidin, Lee and Miao 2021). Others, however, received backlash for boasting about overseas travel experiences, even when mass isolation regulations were in place, and for their ‘donation stinginess’ to the Covid-response. As Xu and Jeffreys argue in the first article in this section, such activities provide a remarkable context for thinking about celebrity-government-public relations and celebrity politics in China. By exploring both the wave of public support for and the tsunami of criticism of celebrity behaviours during the pandemic, they demonstrate how the PRC’s legacy of state controls over mass media entertainment, the promotion of socialist role models, and informal fan networks all collude to ensure that celebrity behaviour is regulated and used to promote government policy agendas.

The intersection of power, media and Covid-19 is seen again in Fan Yang’s article in this section. Yang explores how during the pandemic menstruation became a site of power negotiations between the state, hospital managers, and feminists. She describes how hashtag activism helped to mainstream the discourse of menstruation in order to challenge a pervasive culture of period shaming. Yang also draws our attention to the ‘hero’-making project, and its distinctly masculinity dimensions, at the core of so much state propaganda during the pandemic. Indeed, as Xie and Zhou (2021) have explored, state narratives of China’s ‘ordinary heroes’ are a well-established state narrative that seek to rewrite public memory during moments of national disasters.

While Fan Yang’s piece reflects on some of the gendered dynamics of the pandemic, Sonam Lhundrop examines the ways in which ethnicity and migration have converged in rTa’u, a Tibetan area of western Sichuan. In February 2020, rTa’u became a centre of attention in China and around the world due to the large number of coronavirus cases in the area. While some Tibetans saw the spike in cases as a form of karmic retribution for the economic activities of local residents, Lhundrop argues that this response was not only rooted in

prejudice, but also concealed the many ways in which the spread of the virus in the area was directly connected to migratory practices as a result of poor economic opportunity. This resonates with much of the work we have seen on how the already precarious lives of migrant workers have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic. Che, Du and Chan (2020), for example, have shown that at least 30–50 million migrants lost their jobs in late March 2020, far more than the local urban workers. For Song, Wu, Dong and Wang (2021) such experiences illustrate the systemic economic vulnerabilities, labour market inequalities and gender inequalities that migrant workers experience and the ways in which such oppressions have been exacerbated by Covid-19.

The relative neglect of the ways in which, during the pandemic, pre-existing inequalities have left some in far more precarious positions than others is far from unique to the PRC. Here in the UK, we have heard much about Covid-19 as the ‘great equaliser’ and of endless lockdowns as a story of everyone ‘being in this together’, but nothing could be further from the truth. Covid-19, like all disasters, has intensified socioeconomic inequalities (Wilson, Dwivedi and Gámez-Fernández 2020) as well as racial and class-based health disparities and vulnerabilities around the world (Sandset 2021). Sam Phan, in his article in this section, turns our attention to the ways in which Covid-19 has been linked with China and with people who ‘look East Asian’ and how this has enabled some to justify and normalise their racism towards China and East Asians in the UK and around the world. Phan’s article echoes observations by Yeh (2020) that such problems facing Chinese communities worldwide – and responses to them – today ‘cannot be contained within the borders of Chineseness’.

The more things change, the more they stay the same? Covid-19, far from a clean rupture with the world as we knew it, has re-entrenched many of the same, old patterns of power and oppression. None of this has gone unchallenged. Grassroots activists have adapted to the realities of the pandemic, as they always have done, by finding creative ways to continue confronting structures of injustice. We see this in this section in the case of the collective critiques of celebrity exceptionalism, tax evasion and wealth, the hashtag movements that challenged and sought to reframe the gender dynamics in China, the production of health information videos in rT’au local language in an effort to stem the spread of the virus, and the call for action to name and end Sinophobic rhetoric around the world. The fight to build a different world may have been forced to change tack, but it continues onwards, nonetheless.

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7.1 Celebrity Politics in Covid-19 China: 'Celebrities Can't Save the Country'

Jian Xu and Elaine Jeffreys

The Covid-19 pandemic provides a remarkable context and compelling case for thinking about celebrity politics in China. International celebrities have played an important role in poverty alleviation and disaster-relief efforts historically. Yet celebrity humanitarianism is often criticised as a 'self-serving' personal

branding exercise that promotes ‘neoliberal capitalism’ and perpetuates ‘global inequality’ (Kapoor 2012).

Celebrity humanitarianism has attracted major media and public attention in the context of the global Covid-19 pandemic. The most notable instance is perhaps the all-star ‘One World: Together at Home’ virtual concert organised by pop star Lady Gaga in April 2020. The concert raised US\$127 million for the World Health Organisation and its coronavirus response efforts (Beaumont-Thomas 2020). Around the same time, Madonna attracted negative publicity for describing the pandemic as a ‘great equaliser’ while sitting in a bathtub filled with rose petals (Lewis 2020).

Celebrity responses to Covid-19 in the People’s Republic of China (PRC) have attracted a wave of public support and a tsunami of criticism on social media. Singer Han Hong, founder of the Han Hong Love Charity Foundation, became a national heroine for raising over US\$19 million in donations from hundreds of celebrities to support healthcare efforts in Wuhan—the original epicentre of the coronavirus outbreak (Zheng 2020). However, many other celebrities have been accused of lacking patriotism and social responsibility, as we explain below.

What do online discussions of PRC celebrities in the Covid-19 context reveal about celebrity-government-public relations and celebrity politics in China?

Disgruntled netizens immediately started questioning the patriotism of celebrities as national public figures because some celebrities had left or allegedly ‘deserted’ China at the start of the coronavirus outbreak. In late January 2020, the PRC government called on Chinese citizens to quarantine themselves or self-isolate at home during the lunar New Year holidays. Yet many celebrities had travelled overseas with families or friends around the same time, and were accused of trying to escape the virus. Some celebrities, including actors Lu Yi and Xiang Zuo and singer Yang Chaoyue, posted their vacation photographs while expressing support for people living in Wuhan on their Twitter-like Weibo accounts. Their actions sparked an online outcry from fans and other interested audiences quarantined in China (Sina 2020a).

The online criticisms increased in scale when netizens started posting photographs taken at airports of alleged ‘celebrity deserters’ returning to China as the pandemic escalated overseas and the domestic situation improved (Sina 2020b). Such celebrities, including singers Cai Xukun, Han Geng and Wu Yifan, were negatively contrasted with Han Hong, who had stayed at home and raised money to assist the medical workers who were saving people’s lives at the risk of losing their own. Netizens condemned the celebrities who had left and then returned to China as ‘renegades’ and ‘traitors’, whereas Han was upheld as a patriot and good social role model, and called for a ban on the public dissemination of products and performances associated with the so-called traitors.

Online outcry subsequently centred on the question of whether celebrities’ donations to the Covid-19 response matched their sky-high salaries. Netizens

compiled a list of celebrity donors, ranking them according to the extent of their donations (Jiemian 2020). The Weibo accounts of celebrities who were identified as not donating, or not donating enough, were then bombarded with posts accusing them of ‘donation stinginess’. Such criticisms replicated public complaints about the perceived limited nature of celebrity donations when compared to their astronomical salaries following the 2008 Sichuan Earthquake. They also reiterated public criticisms of high celebrity salaries when compared to the salaries of ordinary Chinese workers surrounding the 2018 Fan Bingbing tax evasion scandal. Celebrity salaries became a renewed hot topic in the coronavirus context as netizens rebuked super-rich stars for failing to support China and the Chinese people through publicised donations in a time of national crisis.

Online calls for cuts to celebrity salaries, and higher salaries and public esteem for professionals in medicine and the sciences, coalesced around the slogan ‘Celebrities can’t save the country’. Professor Li Lanjuan, a Chinese epidemiologist who is regarded as a Covid-19 heroine, coined this slogan during a press interview. She said, ‘I hope that after the pandemic, the government will give high salaries to frontline scientists ... Celebrities can’t make our country stronger ... The prosperity of [China] doesn’t depend on celebrities, but rather on the talented people in science, education and medicine’ (Daynews 2020). In other words, celebrities are overvalued; their failure to ‘step up’ at a time of national crisis shows they do not deserve the income derived from public acclaim.

The recent expansion of formal controls over the PRC’s celebrity and entertainment industries, and the political importance of online public sentiment, adds weight to what might otherwise be viewed as simply ‘sour grape’ criticisms. In October 2014, President Xi Jinping delivered a speech stating that literature and arts should promote ‘core socialist values’, be creative and people-orientated, and serve the political agenda of the Chinese Communist Party. Artists and cultural workers are expected to pursue ‘professional excellence and moral integrity’ (*de yi shuang xin* 德艺双馨), an ideal that the Communist Party has promoted since the Mao era (Xu and Yang 2021). However, Xi’s speech was followed by new regulatory initiatives designed to promote professional ethics and social responsibility in the entertainment industries. Regulations issued in 2014 enjoined film, television, and radio employees to disseminate ‘positive energy’ by providing excellent products and presenting a good public image, and banned the appearance on broadcasting platforms of ‘misdeed artists’ (*lie ji yi ren* 劣迹艺人), that is, actors, directors, and screenwriters convicted by the public security forces for engaging in drug, prostitution or other offences (Reuters 2014). The PRC’s first Film Industry Promotion Law of 2017, for example, stipulates that actors, directors, and other persons in film should uphold virtue and art, comply with laws and regulations, respect social morality, abide by professional ethics, adopt self-discipline measures, and establish a positive social image (China Daily 2017). China’s first draft radio and

television law released in March 2021, which is currently seeking public advice, stipulates the National Radio and Television Administration (NRTA) has the right to restrict broadcasting of programmes associated with misdeed artists (Sohu 2021), which has made the comeback of the misdeed artists to the public eye harder than ever.

Government demands that celebrities display a positive social persona in exchange for a continuing career are reinforced by similar public expectations. The tax evasion scandal associated with Fan Bingbing, once China's highest-paid movie star, is a case in point. Online outcry over Fan's alleged use of 'yin-yang contracts' to evade tax, and thus failure to meet her citizen obligations, prompted a government investigation and resulted in Fan being ordered to pay US\$ 129 million in late and evaded taxes (Gittleson 2018). The NRTA then issued a Notice recommending major pay cuts for radio and television stars. The strength of public condemnation has ensured that efforts by Fan to re-establish her online presence have not been received positively to date. Public anger over the perceived failure of high income-earners to 'give back' to society has been reignited in the Covid-19 context because many people have lost their jobs or had their salaries reduced.

The dual exercise of top-down government regulation and bottom-up online public supervision ensures that China's celebrities have inherent 'star vulnerability' rather than 'star power' (Yu 2012). Scholars of celebrity politics in western societies have variously refuted the argument that celebrities are a 'powerless elite' because they have limited access to real institutional and political power (Alberoni 1962). Instead, they contend that contemporary celebrities have economic and social power that extends to the political realm because they can influence audiences and political agendas through media publicity, especially given the mediatisation of western democratic politics. In contrast, the PRC's legacy of state controls over mass media entertainment and promotion of socialist role models has ensured that even contemporary celebrities are expected to promote government policy agendas. This expectation is being reinforced not only through regulatory frameworks, but also through the informal means provided by digitally equipped netizens – fans, anti-fans and other interested audiences – who are keen to supervise celebrity behaviours.

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7.2 Mediated Menstruation: A Gender Perspective in the Time of Coronavirus

Fan Yang

Throughout the medical response to Covid-19 in the People's Republic of China, over 50% of doctors and 90% of nurses were women. However, across the rhetoric of 'soldiers fighting in the national crisis', representations of medical workers across mainstream media sidelined and even erased femininity in order to serve the masculine cause. There was much publicity around female medical workers having their heads shaved before their departure to Wuhan, the city in China that experienced the highest number of Covid-19 infections, and around a nurse coming back to work 10 days after experiencing a miscarriage and claiming the title of 'macho-man' for self-encouragement. In this masculinised morale-boosting propaganda that circulated nationwide, the physiology of female medical workers was rendered expendable, thus invisible and unattended. It was not until the hashtag activism # Sisters Fight Against Coronavirus in Comfort that was launched by feminist blogger Liang Yu on Weibo, the most popular social media platform in China, that companies and philanthropic funding began to deliver sanitary goods to hospitals in Hubei province. This hashtag activism not only catered to the real needs of female medical workers, but also brought women's menstruation to the fore of public discussion. I will argue that during the pandemic, menstruation became a site of power negotiations between the state, hospital managers and feminists. The hashtag activism helped to mainstream the discourse of menstruation and was intended to challenge the culture of period shaming. However, as we will see, the discussion of menstruation did not take place in an inclusive way, failing to take account of women who do not menstruate and people of other genders who do. In this way, the cisgender binary remained unchallenged across these public discussions.

Chinese state media ignored and sidelined the issue of menstruation among female medical workers. On February 17th, a nurse in Wuhan mentioned menstruation during her interview on CCTV13 but this reference was later cut out in the afternoon re-run. On the one hand, non-menstruating female medical workers fit the narrative of the masculine hero across publicity campaigns. 'Girl talk' such as menstruation should be confined to the private sphere rather than being made public, it appeared. On the other hand, if the menstruation of female medical workers was not visible, their material need for sanitary goods could thus be neglected. Sanitary goods for women were not included in the

governmental supply of anti-pandemic necessities. These necessities prioritised personal protective equipment, which claimed to be gender neutral, yet were actually based on male standards. For instance, the supply of only large sized protective clothes failed to take into consideration small-sized women, which increased their risk of infection given that the poor fitting protective gear allowed in air.

Hospitals functioned as legal recipients for donations of sanitary goods. But the elimination of menstruation from mainstream media representations blinded hospital managers, usually male, to the needs of female medical workers. As pointed out by Liang Yu, hospital managers at first turned down offers of sanitary goods by saying that 'these are not necessary' (Pan 2020). It was left to hospital managers to decide whether sanitary goods could be successfully distributed to female medical workers who were in urgent need of them but felt too awkward to bring it up. The power dynamics between male superiors and female inferiors as well as masculine ideals over 'shameful' female physiology were intensified across hospital spaces during the crisis. The interference by male hospital managers in the distribution of sanitary goods also included re-distribution of some sanitary goods intended for women to male medical workers. Period diapers were taken away by men for use during long working hours, despite the fact that they were not intended to be used in that way. Female medical workers had to ask Liang to request donations of sanitary pads instead of period diapers, as the latter would only end up going to male colleagues, causing a scarcity of sanitary resources for women. From rejecting to dividing up donations of sanitary goods, hospital managers inherited the logic from the state, that is, of ignoring women's physiology. The masculinisation strategy from the state to hospitals during the Covid-19 crisis neglected the particular needs of female medical workers.

The hashtag activism # Sisters Fight Against Coronavirus in Comfort was launched by Liang Yu, a feminist blogger on Weibo, on February 6th. After the case of the Feminist Five in 2015, in which five feminist activists were arrested because of their public campaign against sexual harassment, feminist activism in China shifted from offline to online. Weibo became the major social media platform for hundreds of thousands of grassroots feminist bloggers, with different scales of followers discussing and debating women issues. As of March 22nd, the hashtag mobilisation of donating sanitary goods succeeded in collecting 2,532,044.88 RMB, benefiting over 84,500 women (Liang 2020). The volunteers involved in fundraising the purchase and delivery of sanitary goods were mostly women. This female alliance was formed under the slogan 'sisters save themselves', which emphasised the marginalised status of female voices and the absence of governmental support for female medical workers during the pandemic. The highly efficient hashtag activism was credited by China Women's Development Foundation, the official charity organisation for poverty-alleviation and women's development under All-China Women's Federation (ACWF), in its post on Weibo. The dialogue between the grassroots and

the state could also be seen in ACWF's announcement of its agenda to include sanitary goods in the list of official emergency provisions (Huang 2020). The resistance against this instance of feminist activism was not from the state, but from anti-feminism networks on Weibo. These male bloggers attacked Liang and female volunteers for their high-profile campaign highlighting women's rights, which, to them, equated with man-hating. Although their verbal attacks bothered women involved in the hashtag activism, they were not discouraged, as they received discursive and emotional support from numerous feminist bloggers fighting back against misogyny on Weibo.

Since the wide circulation of the hashtag, feminist activism on social media has put menstruation, or 'the trifle under women's pants' (a comment on Liang's Weibo from a male blogger), on the table, and the donation of sanitary goods has even extended into a new campaign against menstruation-shaming. Various hashtag campaigns were launched on Weibo, such as # I'm a Woman and I Menstruate and # Menstruation Not Hidden to normalise the visibility of menstruation. Corporate powers, such as Libresses, also participated in and helped mainstream the campaign by exhibiting new commercials about sanitary pads under the slogan of 'menstruation not hidden.' The blue water used in previous commercials, exposed by feminists as a symbol of menstrual blood taboo, was replaced with red.

The visibility of menstruation is significant because, for many, it represents the visibility of femaleness, thus the visibility of women. In the publicity surrounding medical workers fighting like macho soldiers in a battle against the virus, female medical workers could only be seen when wearing masculine masquerade. The power negotiations around women's menstruation rested on the legitimacy of femininity in the masculine cause of fighting coronavirus. The related erasure of femininity led directly to the erasure of the contributions made by female medical workers, as shown in the all-male publicity of 'anti-pandemic heroes' and state nominations of anti-pandemic heroes in which 20% male medical workers seized over 50% of awards. To restore femaleness, feminist bloggers on Weibo launched hashtag activism. They not only successfully collected donations for sanitary goods, but also disseminated feminist discourses to resist the period shaming of patriarchal culture. These numerous sporadic grassroots feminist activities were the pivotal power to reframe the gender dynamics in China during the Covid-19. The binary categorisation of gender that dominated both state and feminist discourse, however, should also prompt reflection in order to further feminist critique of gender essentialism in patriarchal society.

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7.3 The ‘Wounded Weanling’: An Introduction to Daofu, the Epicenter of the Coronavirus Epidemic in the Tibetan Regions of China

Sonam Lhundrop

The name rTa'u (Daofu in Chinese) means ‘weanling’ – a young foal that has just been weaned. This county in the Tibetan area of western Sichuan is not well-known, but has recently become a centre of attention in China and around the world, due to the large number of coronavirus cases there. Suddenly, the county’s name seems apt: the place and its people have become fragile and vulnerable, like an unsteady weanling.

Until February 19th, the only information on the situation in Daofu consisted of daily government reports of the number of people infected in the county. But on February 19th, the Central Television News published an interview transcript titled ‘One Prefecture, 62 Reported Cases! Why Is There Such a High Concentration in Daofu (Ganzi Prefecture, Sichuan Province)?’ (Ganzi *Daofu yangguang shui an* 甘孜道孚阳光水 2020).

The following is an excerpt translated from the published transcripts, containing an interview with the head manager of the Ganzi coronavirus prevention team of Daofu county.

17th February. Ganzi Prefecture, Sichuan, has 5 newly-reported cases, all from Daofu County. As of midnight on the 17th of February, there have been a total of 62 reported cases, among which 57 are from Daofu County.

Question: What is the current coronavirus situation in Ganzi prefecture, and particularly in Daofu County?

Answer: Outside Daofu, there are five cases in total in three counties, which are Kangding, Seda, and Daocheng, all of which came from Wuhan (i.e., non-natives). As of midnight on February 17th, 57 cases have been reported in Daofu: two have been discharged from hospital. Additionally, there are 11 suspected cases and 16 asymptomatic cases, which may well turn into infected cases soon. All cases reported from Daofu belong to five townships and one town: Mazi, Kongse, Gexi, Geka, and Wari townships, and Xianshui Town, the county seat.

Upon discovering the first case on the 24th of January, inspection work has been systematically conducted, including identifying and separating those who had close contact with the infected. This work has enabled us to identify two sources for the initial spread of the epidemic. One is from a Mr. Luo who, before experiencing symptoms, traveled to places like Chengdu, Nanchong and Meishan, and returned to Daofu on the 18th. Subsequently, he attended multiple gatherings, resulting in several families becoming infected. This is identified as the main source of the epidemic. Another source is a truck driver, Mr. Jiang, who traveled to places like Ya'an and Chengdu around the 20th of January and who infected his co-driver.

Question: *What are some preventive programs that have been implemented?*

Answer: Based on initial data, all intimate and distant social contacts of the infected people from the above five townships and one town have been separated either in hospitals or at home. Thus, to prevent further infection, by midnight on the 17th of February, 339 intimate social contacts had been quarantined and medically inspected; 1,908 distant social contacts were being quarantined at home and medically inspected. A total of 8,463 social contacts, with or without symptoms, were medically examined. We have modified our 'wait until symptoms' method to 'Check all in advance,' so as to identify all sources of infection in the shortest possible period.

According to the medical examination results, since February, all infected individuals were identified among the 8,463 contacts. Until midnight on the 17th of February, a total of 7,018 contacts were medically examined, among whom there are 57 with initial symptoms. Results for 1,445 contacts are yet to come out.

Starting from the 17th of February, to enforce preventive measures, all in-coming and out-going vehicles are prohibited from driving through Daofu County; within Daofu County, all routes from and to those five townships and one town have checkpoints.

Daofu is located about 550km west of Sichuan's provincial capital, Chengdu, and about 250km northeast of Ganzi's prefectural seat, Kangding. It is on the southeast edge of Tibetan Plateau, and borders Kangding Municipality to the southeast, Danba County to the east, Luhuo County to the west, and Jinchuan County of Aba Prefecture to the north. It had a population of 56,943 in 2015, of whom 89% were Tibetans, and almost a third (27.4%) were urbanites (*Daofu xian renmin zhengfu* 道孚县人民政府 2017). The county has an average altitude of 3,245 meters and is divided into three ecological zones: in the east of the county are the Bamei grasslands and hills, inhabited by both nomads and farmers; in the south are the Zhaba canyons, occupied by farmers, and in the north are the Yuke high altitude grasslands, occupied primarily by nomads.

The coronavirus crisis has seen an outpouring of generosity from all corners of society, including efforts to disseminate public health information. Amongst Tibetans, an important part of this effort has been dedicated to translating public health information to people who speak minoritised languages that are different from standard Tibetan (Yu 2020). There have been several videos directed to Tibetans in Daofu who speak a language named after the county—rTa'u—a Tibeto-Burman language that is incomprehensible to neighbouring Tibetans, who refer to the language as 'Ghost Language' (Tunzhi 2019).

These videos are of great benefit to the 45,000 Tibetans who speak rTa'u. As a speaker of rTa'u language, I have conversed with several people from Daofu about these videos (*Zangdi yangguang* 藏地阳光 2020). Most of them expressed surprise, since there is practically no media in the language. One person said, 'It is such a wonderful feeling that people we do not even know would make such an effort to produce these videos in our mother-tongue, to educate us about this epidemic.' Another elderly man told me he was genuinely excited to hear the information in his mother-tongue, because it sounded more trustworthy.

There has been an outpouring of love and support towards Daofu people from other Tibetan areas, since Daofu has not only the highest infection rate in Tibetan areas, but also ranks second in the whole of Sichuan province, right after Chengdu City, the provincial capital. The following is a translated poem that was written to show support for Daofu people (*A Guoluo yangguang geci ping-tai* A果洛阳光歌词平台 2020).

Daofu: The Delightful Dharma-holder
by Tshering Norbu

Franky, I call this place The Delightful Dharma-holders
It is an achieved name:

where Dharma is wholeheartedly adored and karma is protected as the eyes
where unity is as undifferentiated as the fingers of one hand,
where wild animals befriend humans, and thus are conferred freedom,
where fathers behold wisdom and mothers soften the wildest souls,
where sons engage in trading and daughters are prized for their elegance.
Often, when the pilgrims (to Lhasa) arrive in Daofu
they are struck by the beauty
and wishes are made to be reborn in this place.
Oh! A snowless, sorrowful winter,
a terrifying epidemic engulfs this place,
daily increasing numbers reflect your worried face,
like an increasing flame slowly diminishing.
—continuing

Many Tibetans have sought answers as to why Daofu, in particular, has emerged as the epicentre of the coronavirus outbreak. Unfortunately, many of

their explanations are rooted in prejudices and shrouded in misunderstandings of Buddhist philosophy, which constitutes the core of the perceptual and ideological world of Tibetan farmers and nomads. In WeChat discussions, many Tibetans have interpreted Daofu's misfortune as karmic retribution for inhabitants' supposed lack of piety, as reflected in their economic activities: many Daofu Tibetans are traders and entrepreneurs.

It is true that Daofu people are good at business, but it is not clear whether this has anything to do with the spread of the coronavirus in Daofu. Perhaps instead we need to look at local history to understand the situation. In the 1980s, when the local economy first opened to the outside, Daofu became home to a booming timber industry. Although the lumber companies were owned by outsiders, people in Daofu exploited this opportunity by transporting logs to Chengdu. Then, when this industry was closed down in the early 2000s by strict environmental regulations, many Daofu people stayed in the transport industry, working for local mines and other industries.

In this context, it is certainly significant that both of Daofu's 'patient zeros' were local people who had been travelling for business immediately before they brought the epidemic home. It is perhaps a lack of local economic opportunity, rather than a fatal character flaw, which has wounded the weanling, and left this place and its people particularly vulnerable.

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7.4 Reflections on the Racialised Discourse Surrounding Covid-19

Sam Phan

The language that we use is extremely powerful and can influence the ways in which we perceive reality. Think about those times when immigrants have been intentionally referred to as ‘swarms’ or ‘invasions’, resulting in the dehumanisation and discrimination of millions of immigrants across the world. It was this same phenomenon that produced ideas of a ‘Chinese Invasion’ in the 1800s (San Francisco Chronicle 1873) that eventually led to the exclusion of Chinese people from the United States. We see the same old fears newly revived today.

Donald Trump, as well as a string of other Republican politicians, have adopted the term ‘Chinese Virus’ despite the World Health Organisation intentionally naming it Covid-19 in order to avoid the stigmatisation of a certain ethnic group or country (Kuo 2020; Gabbatt 2020). This racialisation of the virus stokes xenophobia and flames the already growing racism against Chinese people, home and abroad. It also echoes centuries-old ideas of the ‘Yellow Peril’ trope that depicts people of East Asian descent as an existential threat to the Western world. It was this fear that ultimately allowed U.S. Congress to pass the Page Act of 1875, a law that restricted Asian immigration, as well as the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882, the first American law that explicitly prevented all members of a specific group from immigrating on the sole basis of their ethnicity. In the present day, calling Covid-19 the ‘Chinese Virus’ can be just as dangerous.

Despite the epicentre of Covid-19 moving away from China months ago and the virus not being confined to a particular place or people, Covid-19 is still being linked with China and with people who look East Asian. The virus has been painted as an inherently Chinese phenomenon which has consequently enabled some people to justify and normalise their racism towards China and East Asians. This has then resulted in various instances of racism, including White House officials referring to the virus as the ‘Kung-Flu’ (Jiang 2020), Mike Pompeo tweeting that ‘China has a history of infecting the world’ (Pompeo 2020) and Donald Trump telling an Asian American reporter that she ‘should ask China’ when faced with a question concerning the coronavirus (ITV News 2020). If government officials adopt this racialised rhetoric when talking about Covid-19, then the connection between the virus and Chinese people will be reinforced.

It is precisely this racialisation of Covid-19—the linking of an entire ethnic group with a virus that has killed hundreds of thousands – that has led to the verbal and physical discrimination of East and Southeast Asians across the globe. In my own experience (Phan 2020), I have been verbally abused by strangers asking ‘if I liked to eat Chinese bat soup’ and have even had someone raise their hand to hit me whilst shouting ‘don’t give me the coronavirus!’ In my two decades of living in Britain, I have never felt so alien or violently discriminated against. And I am not alone in feeling like this.

Around the world, attacks against East Asians have been a common occurrence during this pandemic. Examples in Britain include Chinese takeaway owners being spat at (Ng 2020), an NHS nurse attacked on her way to an overtime shift (Staples 2020) and students being beaten up in racially motivated attacks (BBC News 2020; Bains and McGee 2020). Recent police data revealed that in Britain, hate crimes against Chinese people have tripled during the coronavirus outbreak (Lovett 2020). One thing has become clear, a racialised virus has resulted in racialised attacks.

Towards the beginning of the outbreak, some newspaper headlines were quick to racialise the virus, with French newspaper *Courrier Picard*’s headline ‘coronavirus chinois: ALERTE JAUNE’ (Chinese coronavirus: YELLOW ALERT) (Courrier Picard 2020), the German newspaper *Der Spiegel* running the headline ‘Corona-virus: Made in China’ (Der Spiegel 2020) as well as a headline from *The Wall Street Journal* calling China the ‘Real Sick man of Asia’ (Mead 2020). These derogatory headlines draw specifically on historical language that make reference to concepts and ideas of China being subordinate, inferior and a threat to the world.

Moreover, the speculation around how Covid-19 originated is also heavily tinged with racist ideas of Chinese people being the ‘exotic’ and ‘uncivilised’ other who have caused this pandemic. It is still a commonly held belief that it was the ‘exotic eating habits’ of Chinese people that led to the emergence of Covid-19. Michael Caputo, the spokesperson for the US Department of Health and Human Services wrote in now-deleted tweets ‘millions of Chinese suck the blood out of rabid bats as an appetiser and eat the ass out of anteaters’ (Kaczynski et al. 2020). For Asians everywhere, these misguided perceptions are not unfamiliar, and it is clear how patterns of Sinophobia and racist ideas have been recycled to fit current narratives.

Another consequence of racialising Covid-19 is that it shifts the blame towards China, and thus fails to look introspectively at the failures and shortcomings of our own governments in addressing the pandemic. The pandemic has revealed so much about the underlying systemic racism and inequality that exists within our own structures. Finger-pointing only acts as a distraction from these problems and adds to the plethora of misinformation and misunderstandings that surround the coronavirus.

The implications of the coronavirus are already exhausting enough for East Asians without having to face coronavirus-related racism. The choice to racialise

the virus is intentional and has devastating real-life consequences. We are all impacted by the coronavirus and it is important that we work together to end it, rather than allowing divisive language to incite blame, fear and xenophobia.

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CHAPTER 8

Chinese Propaganda Posters

8.0 Introduction

Harriet Evans

Chinese posters—such as the several hundred in the University of Westminster’s archive of the China Visual Arts Project— are invariably referred to both in China and abroad under the generic category of ‘propaganda posters’ (*xuan-chuanhua* 宣传画). One key assumption informing such a description is that between their image and slogan, posters conveyed a clear message, the meaning of which was immediately transparent to its viewers. Stephanie Donald argued that posters in the Mao era mediated the relationship between party propaganda and everyday experience by constituting a ‘red sea’, ‘an immersive aesthetic field through which the Party disseminated extraordinarily powerful visual metaphors for the revolution-in-progress’ (Donald 2014, 658).

Thinking about posters through this lens, however, is problematic, for a number of reasons. Recent scholarship has explored how propaganda should be seen as much more than a tool of coercive top-down governance: ‘it was also a window through which society became more legible, predictable and controllable’ to the political and bureaucratic elite (Farley and Johnson 2021, 4). Nor was there any automatic linear link between the intentions of propaganda producers and their publics. As Pang Laikwan argues, the ‘making of the propaganda involved much contestation and negotiation, and the reception and

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production of it created even more discrepancies from central ideology' (Pang 2017, 14). Any cursory perusal of the posters in Westminster's collection, or for that matter in Stefan Landsberger's (1995), could support this argument. While most, if not all poster images, were accompanied by captions and slogans urging a particular response from the viewer, their immense variety—aesthetically, technically, in use of colour, and of course thematically—as well as the diversity of publics to whom they appealed would imply the impossibility of a uniform relationship between the poster and its multiple viewers. While the ultimate conceit in centrally directed poster production and dissemination might have been to thwart responses 'such as critique, desire, irony or resistance' (Donald 2014, 661), the public was far from the docile subject of such controls.

Little research has been conducted into viewers' responses to posters of the time, but there is some empirical evidence to support this argument. For example, Pang Laikwan (2017, 109) refers to how images of the beautiful female bare-foot doctor could evoke passionate longings on the part of a young man in the 1970s. A similar longing was described by male viewers' fan mail to Pan Jiajun, artist of the famous 1972 oil painting 'I am a petrel' (*Wo shi haiyan* 我是海燕) that I discussed in an earlier publication (Evans 2016, 94–95). Another reference is the evidence from the well-known Cantonese poster artist Zhang Shaocheng that choice of colour, line, and composition in conditions when editorial guidelines were extremely strict, could convey desires and longings that were obscured in the surface image of the poster, thereby creating space for different audience responses (Evans 2016, 97–98). In a more recent publication, Landsberger notes that peasants largely turned 'a blind eye to [the] political messages' of posters (Landsberger 2019, 214).

So, given the diversity and multiplicity of poster images across time, aesthetic composition and theme, what generalisations can be made about their status as powerful items of the visual culture throughout the entire Mao era? As Stephanie Donald and I (1999, 1–6) argued, the ubiquity of posters in public, work, and domestic spaces throughout the Mao era constituted them as a powerful visual discourse producing knowledge about key aspects of political and social life. One common thread running through all of them concerns their temporality. Whether in depictions of collective agriculture, industrial labour, health education, childcare or family life, posters all celebrated the bright future of socialism in images of hard work and commitment supported by symbolic references to transcendental authority depicted by rays of the red sun. Of course, one interpretation of this would derive from what one might call a postcolonial reading of the poster images, as a particular aesthetic component of the politics of culture celebrated by the newly independent government of the PRC. The postcolonial theorist and historian Robert Young argued some time ago that postcolonialism can be seen as 'a wide-ranging political project to reconstruct Western formations, reorient ethical norms, turn the power structures of the world upside down, refashion the world from below' (Young 2012, 20). In the proud moments of the early 1950s when many in China, and by no

means just the national leaders, were celebrating their ascendancy to a newly independent national stage, having defeated the forces of imperialism and colonialism, the poster scenes of crowds of energetic young workers and peasants marching towards a bright future could become images of celebration, or even happiness, as Maria-Caterina Bellinetti argues in her article included in this collection. Resituated in the context of their times they can be read as triumphant images of national and political success in taking on and challenging the international forces that since the nineteenth century had forcibly maintained China's subordination. Political and military victory was assured, if not by the bright red sun in the east, then certainly by the collective strength of class and ethnic unity. Alongside such scenes of celebration and pride, the grubbiness and scarcity of the present was absent from all images. The enemy, whether military or class, was only ever implied, unless it appeared in metaphorical or cartoon form.

Reflecting on the posters at the time of their production and display, there is thus a striking paradox between repeated references to them as fixed 'propaganda' and their diversity and complexity as an aesthetic form. This paradox is implicit in Amy Barnes' analysis of the British Library Collection of Chinese Posters, in which her generic reference to the propaganda of posters cannot account for the diverse range of styles and themes included in this small collection (Barnes 2020). It takes on a particularly poignant form when associated with the brutal distance between idealised poster images of abundance and fertility and ordinary people's real lives during the famine years of 1959–1962 (Galikowski 1998, 93–6) Cassie Lin's reflections included in this Review also show how posters from the less fraught period of the 1980s can trigger memories about a less difficult personal history and upbringing. These images from the 1980s are less often noted in the literature but seen together with earlier images, they provide interesting insights into changes in colour use and composition following the end of the Cultural Revolution.

Fast forward to the afterlife of the posters in the twenty-first century, a further paradox concerns why the images of posters repurposed and reproduced for commercial, artistic and educational purposes, have been reduced from their initial diversity and multiplicity to what appears to be a truly limited range. This range is coterminous with the dominant soundbites about the Mao era: the gender neutrality of bodily images, the uniformity of dress, and the predominance of an impassioned youth. Much the same is true of the countless artistic reimaginings (by many of the same artists) of Mao's image, which also work around a tiny cluster of themes. Mediated and remediated over the years for purposes as diverse as nightclub publicity, patriotic education, film, and fine art, the multi-layered meanings offered by the intricate and mobile combination of colour, line, composition, and slogan have effectively been distilled into dominant images of exuberant youth, arms raised in anticipation of future victory. Compare for example, the aesthetic of Westminster's image 'Revolutionary proletarian right to rebel troops unite!' with Wang Guangyi's 'Great Criticism WTO' (2005) (see



Fig 8.0.a: Left: National Fine Art Red Revolutionary Rebels Liaison Station. 1966. Revolutionary Proletarian Right to Rebel Troops Unite! Source: China Visual Arts Project, University of Westminster. Right: Great Criticism WTO (2005), by Wang Guangyi. Reproduced with the permission of the artist.

Fig 8.0.a.). It is worth bearing in mind, moreover, that these images appear in a cultural, media, and political environment in which critical public discussion about the Cultural Revolution is not permitted. Nor does the mainstream media environment in the West seem particularly interested in bringing to light the complex issues buried in unspoken memories and experiences of the recent past in China. It is therefore through this reduced range of images that young people growing up in China today, as well as non-specialist commentators in the West, come to comprehend what the Cultural Revolution was about. Given the widespread media slippage between the Cultural Revolution and the Mao era, the implications of this in narrowing down the historical narrative available to young people growing up in China today are even more serious.

Then there is the commodified, political and affective repurposing of posters as items within the generic category of China's 'red legacy'. Emily Williams (2017) has discussed the work of China's officially approved Red Collectors' associations and suggests that far from producing a coherent narrative of the Red Era, their efforts to collect and display 'red relics' 'fragment the very idea of narratives altogether'. For some collectors, it is quantity and taxonomical techniques that occupy pride of place in their collections. By contrast, the well-known pioneering collector Mr. Dong Zhongchao is inspired by a nostalgic desire to bring poster and 'relic' to life by pairing up poster image with the material object depicted in it and temporarily abandoning the contemporary emphasis on individual competition to return to a moment of greater equality associated with the Mao years (Williams 2017).

'Authentic' red relics now fetch sometimes spectacular prices, and indicate the extent to which the 'red' has ironically morphed into a fully commodified and profitable entity in which workers and peasants are no longer proud messengers of a new world, but reminders of a past that is politically silenced

as a site of critical enquiry. We recall the argument of the prominent Beijing-based feminist cultural critic Dai Jinhua who describes in her text 'Imagined Nostalgia' how nostalgic images represent a longing produced by the prevalent anxiety that imbues society and provide a temporary space of relief where the present is allocated to an imagined past (Dai 1997). Nostalgia and commercial interest are inextricably enmeshed in the work of the red collectors. If they are united in approaching collecting as a moral project linking the past with the present, this is not inconsistent in their view with their pursuit of commercial interests or political patronage (Williams 2017).

As the Chinese Communist Party celebrates its centenary year, the poster retains the aesthetic qualities that inspired its initial production, but is refashioned for audiences unable and unwilling to attempt to excavate what it signified at the time. However, it retains an importance as part of an invaluable historical archive that needs to be preserved, the painstaking work of which Freja Howat described in her article in this section. As direct references to the Cultural Revolution and the Great Leap Forward famine are excised in the new edition of *A Brief History of the Communist Party of China*, recently published to celebrate the CCP's centenary, the significance of the poster as a source of insights into a complex and difficult history becomes even more crucial to record and analyse. While the repurposing of poster art across different sites of creativity and market exchange—from fine art, the hospitality industry, to the treasured displays of the red collectors—cloaks the poster in mantles and temporalities that effectively disguise its initial purpose and focus on futurity, it points to ways in which different constituencies in contemporary China are in their different ways attempting to reveal rather than hide a difficult recent past.

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8.1 The Chinese Visual Arts Project: Graduate Work in Records and Archives

Freja Howat

Working over a period of five months in 2018–19, I joined the Records and Archives team at the University of Westminster to help implement the digitisation and digital preservation of its collections. Founded as the UK's first polytechnic institution, the University has collections spanning over 170 years. My role was, needless to say, varied.

When I told people that I worked in an archive, most people imagined me seated among a load of boxes in a dark, dusty strongroom. This was partly true, but popular visions of archives are based on myths that do not do service to the active labour that goes into providing access to collections via outreach and digitisation. Archives are not static repositories—the work around the University's Chinese Visual Arts Project exemplifies this point.

Founded in 1977 by the writer and journalist John Gittings, then Senior Lecturer in Chinese at the Polytechnic of Central London (now the University of Westminster), the collection comprises a staggering 843 posters acquired from Hong Kong and mainland China, dating from the 1940s to the 1980s, alongside a wealth of books, objects, and ephemera. The collection was used and built upon as a teaching aid for the Polytechnic's classes in Chinese language and politics and is still used today for similar purposes by Senior Archivist Anna McNally for a range of courses at the University of Westminster engaging with visual and material cultures. I worked with Anna to deliver outreach sessions designed to offer students a deeper understanding of the ways in which archives are constructed, and how collections are attributed with meaning and value.



Fig 8.1.a: Central Academy of Fine Arts Combat Team. 1967. Smash the Old World and Build a New One. Source: China Visual Arts Project, University of Westminster.

These sessions often engaged with the propaganda posters, which encompass a wide range of styles, responding to the frequent changes in the political climate. Created in the red and black graphic woodblock style that has become so synonymous with the Cultural Revolution, posters such as ‘Smash the Old World and Build a New One’ (1967) (Fig 8.1.a.) portray the elimination of China’s old traditions under the Communist regime. By the mid-1970s, these posters began to shift in style. More posters began to promote healthcare, education and industry such as ‘Put Birth Control into Practice for the Revolution’ (1974) (Fig 8.1.b.), a message that took on new significance following the introduction of the one child policy (1979–2015).

Accompanying these posters are a number of propagandist toys such as a puzzle cube of Vietnamese children planting a bomb for American soldiers (Fig 8.1.c.) and a pair of dolls that depict the Red Guards, a mass paramilitary social movement mobilised by Mao in 1966 and 1967, during the first phase of the Cultural Revolution (Fig 4). There are also objects that detail the everyday, such as bus tickets and receipts; pins featuring Mao; matchbooks depicting



Fig 8.1.b: Artist unknown. 1974. Put Birth Control into Practice for the Revolution. Source: China Visual Arts Project, University of Westminster.



Fig 8.1.c: Puzzle cube. c.1970. Source: China Visual Arts Project, University of Westminster.

Chinese monuments and lingerie (Fig 5). These materials have received less interest than the posters, yet they resonated with me as I felt they had just as much to say about the culture and politics of China during this period.

Whilst considering the transformation of political narratives overtime, students also reflected on the wider context by which the collection was formed and how it portrayed China from Western perspectives. It is for this reason that I became involved with digitising this aspect of the collection; to increase the visibility of the collection as a whole, which when seen in its wider context as a teaching aid also raises questions about what was then the Polytechnic of Central London; Why were these materials collected?; How and why did they inform study about China and its peoples? Questions surrounding the nature of the collection and how it came into being continue to grow and evolve as the collection is catalogued, distributed, and engaged with.

I set to work photographing these objects and played around with 3D modelling. Although we thought it could be an interesting way for researchers overseas to get an idea of the materiality of an object (Fig 6), producing 3D models



Fig 8.1.d: Red Guards, c.1967. Source: China Visual Arts Project, University of Westminster.



Fig 8.1.e: Bra. c.1966–1976. Source: China Visual Arts Project, University of Westminster.



Fig 8.1.f: Work in progress 3D Model of Red Guard Doll. Source: China Visual Arts Project, University of Westminster.

was not without its issues. Firstly, a 3D model does not replace the materiality of engaging with an object first-hand; secondly, not everyone has the expenses or access to a machine that is powerful enough to produce or view 3D models. This led me to think about lower tech solutions such as .gif making; accessible to anyone with a mobile phone. Without being able to physically handle the materials first-hand, this would at the very least improve access to the collection. In addition to this, the University of Westminster has recently implemented a new online catalogue which enables users the choice between English and Chinese. This is a development that will fundamentally alter the ways in which audiences engage with the collection and how it is managed.

By considering the ways in which this collection has been acquired and the channels by which it continues to be distributed, audiences are offered a new context for viewing the collection. It allows us to think critically about the appropriation of the word 'archive', about differences between digital and physical objects, and also about the accessibility of material and the impacts of digitisation on non-European collections that have been attributed Westernised standards of archival value.

Note

A version of this piece was previously published on the History of Art and Design Blog, University of Brighton.

8.2 Women Model Workers and The Duty of Happiness in Chinese Propaganda Posters

Maria-Caterina Bellinetti

On February 14th, the death of Liang Jun was reported by international media (BBC 2020). Liang, a woman born from a peasant family in Heilongjiang in 1930, became a Chinese national hero thanks to her work as a tractor driver. During her life, Liang was glorified by state propaganda as a model worker and, in 1962, she became the face of the one yuan banknote where she is portrayed while driving her tractor. The glorification of working women was systematically employed by the CCP in its propaganda strategies in order to promote the Socialist cause and bring more women into the workforce. The story of Liang Jun, her popularity, and the use of her image prompts us to wonder what it means to look at the representation of women in Chinese propaganda posters on International Women's Day.

Women have been a central part of modern Chinese political discourse since the May 4th Movement between 1910 and 1920. Right from its birth in 1921 in Shanghai, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) welcomed the feminist ideology of the Movement and included in its political agenda the promotion of women's rights. In 1922, the Party embraced the celebrations for International Women's Day and with it the call for gender equality and the right for women to vote. A few years before, in 1919, a young Mao Zedong, also influenced by the May 4th Movement, had criticised the ways in which traditional Chinese society treated women. In his famous essay *Miss Zhao's Suicide*, Mao argued that Miss Zhao, a young girl promised in marriage to an old widower, did not actually commit suicide but was murdered by society. The three circumstances in which Miss Zhao found herself caged were Chinese society, her family, and the family of the man she did not want to marry. 'Within these triangular iron nets, however much Miss Zhao sought life, there was no way for her to go on living,' noted Mao (1919), 'The opposite of life is death, and so Miss Zhao was obliged to die.'

Despite the proclaimed good intentions and the attempts, some successful, to include and ameliorate women's living conditions, the Party fell short. Women's issues were frequently dismissed in favour of the Socialist Revolution or the freedom of the country—especially during the war against Japan—and this contributed to the prolonged, hard-to-overcome existence of patriarchy. Propaganda posters, just like other forms of visual representation such as woodcuts and photographs, were not an exception. Created by a Party and an ideology that were male-oriented, the posters presented a view on the world of women that did not correspond to and eventually failed to alter the status quo of Chinese society. Women's representation in posters was constructed through a male-gaze: when women were represented as leaders, they were in charge of other women, not men; when they were learning how to read and write, they were usually taught by their sons. Even if the Party was advocating for



Fig 8.2.a: Han Meilin 韩美琳. 1960. Hard Working Sister-in-law. Source: China Visual Arts Project, University of Westminster.



Fig 8.2.b: Fan Zhenjia 范振家. 1964. If You Want Blossoms Full of Foliage, Study Good Management Techniques. Source: China Visual Arts Project, University of Westminster.

women's equality, the visual representation of women remained stuck in the old narrative that presented them through their primary roles as mothers, sisters, and wives.

In the posters, women were predominantly young and beautiful, and their work efforts were directed to the family or the State. More interestingly though,



Fig 8.2.c: Wang Dawei. 1975. Women can hold up half the sky; surely the face of nature can be transformed. Source: China Visual Arts Project, University of Westminster.

they were always happy. When working in the fields or chiselling stone blocks with perfectly combed hair and red cheeks, a happy and determined smile appeared on their faces. Similarly, when women were portrayed while taking care of the family and performing their duties as wives, mothers, and daughters, they looked happy and gracious. In Communist visual propaganda, happiness lost its private connotation and became a public, national affair. Women were happy because, and thanks to, their work for the country and the Party. Being happy, therefore, became a duty.

The duty of happiness reads like an oxymoron, but, according to Gerda Wielander (2018), it was and still is a central part of the Chinese propaganda system. While, as Wielander (2018) argues, in the 1950s the focus of the Party was on ‘building a happy society,’ in more recent years ‘social stability and regime maintenance have become the main goal.’ The importance of happiness can be seen as part of the *emotion work* that characterised the CCP’s propaganda efforts since the Anti-Japanese War (1937–45). Defined by Arlie R.

Hochschild (1979, 561) as ‘the act of trying to change in degree or quality an emotion or feeling,’ *emotion work* was frequently used by the Party to create a sense of unity in the people and the hope for a bright, happy future under the guidance of the CCP. In her essay *Moving the Masses: Emotion Work in the Chinese Revolution*, Elizabeth J. Perry (2002, 120) noted that Mao Zedong believed that ‘mass ecstasy [...] was efficacious not only for revolutionary struggle, but for dramatic economic breakthroughs as well’.

Over the decades, women like Liang Jun were glorified by the Party for their work and family achievements and portrayed accordingly. Based on the awareness that a positive attitude and contagious enthusiasm were strong psychological weapons to mobilise the people in political and economic campaigns, the Party systematically exploited happiness throughout its visual propaganda. Women’s reality was not as joyous as modern Chinese propaganda depicted in the posters. Behind the smiles, the perfectly combed hair, and the rosy cheeks, Chinese women fought, struggled, and suffered as many of them have narrated in their memoirs. If in propaganda posters women’s happiness became a duty, in the real world it was too frequently an unreachable state or at least a very arduous journey.

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8.3 A Throw Back to School Days

Cassie Lin

Going to school in China can be quite different from the UK. The first time I noticed these differences was during my early days living in England. It was 3.30 p.m. on a weekday. I saw a bunch of schoolgirls storming through a shopping mall in the city centre, in their cute winter school uniform, nicely fitted

jacket, check skirt, white shirt and tie. They were all wearing make-up, beautiful long hair styled in different fashions, and shiny nail polish on their fingertips.

I was a little surprised for two reasons: 1. It was only 3.30 in the afternoon, are these girls are off school already? 2. Make-up is allowed?

I couldn't help but recall my own school days back in China. I spent six good years in one of the best secondary schools in our province. A renowned secondary educational institution, like my old school, normally comes with endless study hours, a hideous uniform, and countless student regulations. For example, having long hair was strictly forbidden; girls can only have their hair cut almost the same short length as boys, let alone wear make-up and accessories. And romantic relationships are not allowed; if 'young love' is found (that's how it was written in the student regulation handbook, as funny as it sounds), it could cause disciplinary action.

As a student in China, at least from my personal experience, your grade is your life, nothing else matters. There are quite a few fixed standards for being a 'Good Student' in China, but academic performance is surely the main one. In school, we normally start the day from 7.30 a.m. and finish by 9.30 p.m. with a 10-minute break between each class, and two-hour lunch and dinner breaks. It can be worse in senior years; students must sacrifice their weekends for mandatory studies in school.



Fig 8.3.a: Zhang Tianfang 张天放. 1982. Comply with School Discipline, Comply with Public Order, Comply with National Laws. Source: China Visual Arts Project, University of Westminster.

In the 1980s, China established the policy of ‘Nine-Year Compulsory Education’, which the government funds. It includes six years of primary education, starting at ages 6 or 7, and three years of junior secondary education (middle school) for ages 12 to 15. Most students choose to continue another three years of higher secondary education (high school) for ages 15 to 18. And after that, they will encounter the most challenging moment in their entire student life: The National Higher Education Entrance Examination, also known as *gaokao* 高考 in Chinese terms.

In modern China, *gaokao* is socially and culturally significant, and is much more than simply an university entrance exam. For some of the young students coming from a less competitive social background, *gaokao* is the ‘only way out’. From the beginning of a Chinese student’s school life, they will encounter a concept again and again from teachers, parents and peers, and that’s that ‘achieving a top grade in *gaokao* means ‘going to good a university’, then ‘having a high-paid job’ after graduation, and eventually ‘securing a richer social status’.

Gaokao is a payback for all those long study hours, numerous textbooks and papers, gender-blurred school uniforms and un-happened ‘young love’ over the years, if you get a good result in the end, of course. It’s an extremely harsh exam, with strictly secretive preparation, and immediate disqualification if an examinee is late or caught cheating. *Gaokao* gets a lot of national and international criticism in terms of the educational system it represents. It is criticised for overlooking the development of creative and diverse learning abilities among young students, and for encouraging monotonous repetition across a



Fig 8.3.b: Yu Zhenli 于振立. 1982. Get to School on Time, Do Not Be Late, Do Not Leave Early, Do Not Play Truant. Source: China Visual Arts Project, University of Westminster.



Fig 8.3.c: Artist unknown. 1980. Study. Source: China Visual Arts Project, University of Westminster.

select few academic subjects. However, in China, *gaokao* seems to be the only fair system so far, for students, coming from families rich or poor, educated in private or public schools, to pursue future opportunities by their own hands. They are placed on the same starting point when sitting this exam, their performance, and the final result are the only aspects that are going to determine which university they are attending and nothing else.

And after years, when we've finally grown up, we finally realise *gaokao* really wasn't the 'only way out,' there are a lot more other obstacles than just a bad exam result in life, we look back to the school days, and think maybe those days filled with endless exam papers are not so bad after all.

Editors and Contributors

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Cultural China 2020 is a unique annual publication for up-to-date, informed, and accessible commentary about Chinese language, cultural practice, politics and production, and its critical analysis. It builds on the University of Westminster's Contemporary China Centre blog, providing additional reflective introductory pieces to contextualise each of the eight chapters.

The articles in the *Review* speak to the turbulent year that was 2020 as it unfolded across Cultural China. Thematically, they range from celebrity culture, fashion and beauty, to religion and spirituality, via language politics, heritage, and music. Pieces on representation of China in Britain and the Westminster Chinese Visual Arts Project reflect our particular location and home. Many of the articles in this book focus on the People's Republic, but they also draw attention to the multiple Chinese and Sinophone cultural practices that exist within, across, and beyond national borders.

The *Review* is distinctive in its cultural studies-based approach and contributes a much-needed critical perspective from the Humanities to the study of China. It aims to promote interdisciplinary dialogue and debate about the social, cultural, political, and historical dynamics that inform life in China today offering academics, activists, practitioners, and politicians a key reference with which to situate current events in and relating to China in a wider context.

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