CULTURAL CHINA 2021

The Contemporary China Centre Review

Edited by
Séagh Kehoe and Gerda Wielander

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Introduction

Gerda Wielander and Séagh Kehoe

Welcome to *Cultural China 2021*. A year on from our inaugural volume, Covid-19 is still dominating everyday life for many people across the world, none more so than in the People's Republic of China (PRC) which continues to enforce a zero-Covid policy with increasing difficulty and against a backdrop of mounting criticism from the general population to public health advisers. If Covid-19 seems elsewhere to have to have slipped into the background, it is only because of the Russian invasion of Ukraine which has implications for China, Taiwan, and the international world order.

It is in this wider context that we write this introduction to *Cultural China 2021*, our unique annual publication for up-to-date, informed, and accessible commentary about Chinese and Sinophone languages, cultural practice and production, and its critical analysis. Looking back on the year 2021, the following events stand out in memory: the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) centenary celebrations; the Hong Kong police banning the annual vigil commemorating the Tiananmen Massacre; the Chinese state's denouncements of Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen's National Day speech after she vowed that her government would not bow to pressure from the PRC; the deadly rainstorms in central China that left dozens dead and thousands trapped without electricity; the announcement of the three-child policy; and the disappearance and carefully orchestrated reappearance of Peng Shuai after she accused retired Vice Premier Zhang Gaoli of sexual assault. The year 2021 also marked the 50th

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anniversary of 'Ping-Pong Diplomacy', with various friendship matches, exhibitions, and other events held across Beijing to commemorate the occasion. At the Tokyo Olympics, China came close to topping the gold medal tables, while at the Paralympic Games, the country finished atop the gold and overall medal tally for the fifth time in a row. Meanwhile, on social media, 'lying flat', denoting a desire to disengage from the intense social competition and work pressures of China's 996 culture, claimed the title of slang word of the year.

The different chapters of this year's review are organised around the themes of health and medicine, environment, food cultures, children, film, red culture, and activism, showcasing the best examples of our now well-established blog.

The first three chapters are intrinsically linked: the distinction between food and medicine is blurred in the context of Chinese culture more widely and Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) more narrowly, and the 'medicinal' properties of foodstuffs is a recurring topic in everyday Chinese conversations. The impact of the environment on food production and food safety is a big topic for middle classes across the world, whose main concern has shifted from having enough to eat to eating the right thing. Food is also a core element in feelings of belonging and being part of a community. All these themes are addressed in the twelve pieces that make up the first three chapters of the review. In terms of conceptual approaches, the pieces share a concern for the boundaries that are created between 'inside' and 'outside', the urban and the rural, the separation of bodies and substances from others, and anxieties over authenticity, change, and security. Some of the pieces also invite reflection on the role of the researcher when it comes to romanticising indigenous or authentic practices.

In the initial stages of Covid-19, when China's handling of the coronavirus appeared exemplary to the rest of the world, the PRC sent care packages to students abroad and the CCP hailed a new era of public health in China, as Emily Baum points out. This was a major reputational victory: no longer was China the 'sick man' of Asia, but its management of Covid-19 was hailed as evidence that a clear strategy coupled with swift and uncompromising decision-making – possibly facilitated by its non-democratic processes – were conducive to controlling the pandemic. In her chapter, Baum deals with the link between Chinese medicine as a unique approach to the treatment of diseases and nationalist sentiments in modern Chinese history. Baum invokes acupuncture anaesthesia as a unique example of Chinese medicine practice played in US–China rapprochement and China's soft power image more widely. Even though its efficacy could not be verified in clinical trials, acupuncture anaesthesia contributed to feelings of nationalist pride as it appeared to prove that China was able to develop its own solutions independent from established Western medical science. TCM continues to play an important role in China's soft power toolkit; it is also invoked as shared heritage when reaching out to an imagined Chinese cultural community, as Baum reminds us.

The role of TCM was first promoted during the Mao period which led to an expansion of the use of medicinal animals, as we learn from Liz P.Y. Chee's

piece. This 'faunal medicalisation' has its roots in the strong Sino-Soviet relations of the 1950s, as well as the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution. While originally only certain parts of animals were considered to have medicinal powers, over time the logic of production (i.e. the breeding of the animals and the need to avoid waste) meant that medicinal powers became ascribed to larger parts or even the entire animal, rather than specific parts of it. Chee sounds a cautionary note against romanticising indigenous medicines and calls for a 'de-sanctification' of so-called traditional practices. As she points out, indigenous medicines have evolved and today have strong ties to states and the pharma industry, and are tied into transnational trade networks, not all of them legal. She also points out the role of 'faunal medicalisation' in zoonoses, that is, the transmission of diseases from animals to humans.

Sophie Xiaofei Guo, on the other hand, engages with the work of 'virophil' artist Pei-Ying Lin whose work centres on the relationship between humans and infectious agents. By staging 'virus dinner performances', Lin wants to promote a positive attitude to our relationship with viruses. Via the medium of food, participants in Lin's dinner performances gain a sensory experience of viruses entering the body. As Guo explains, Lin's work can be understood as part of the 'microbial' turn that has occurred in the biological sciences at the turn of the 21st century which sees infection as the result of ecological disturbances rather than an attack of a pathogen that needs to be eliminated. Guo puts Lin's work into the context of biomedically engaged arts practice which emerged in Taiwan in 2009 and has gained momentum since 2017. Lin's work also provides an interesting extension of the concept of 'faunal medicalisation' and the inherent medicinal qualities of all that we ingest.

Lin's friendly embrace of the virus (any virus) stands in stark contrast to the zero-Covid-19 approach pursued in the People's Republic, where imported frozen goods were tested for Covid-19 (The Economist, 2022), and faceless people in hazmat suits are both feared and revered. Returning to the context of the pandemic, Dino Ge Zhang's piece on WeChat group chats as epidemiological space discusses how, in the early stages of the pandemic in locked-down Wuhan, WeChat groups, initially created for grocery shopping and information sharing, became field-sites of social-viral-technical epidemiology, as Zhang puts it. Zhang illustrates how these spaces, intended to provide practical support, became sites of intense affect, creating a parallel 'affective plague' to the virus-induced pandemic in the city. Rather than providing practical and emotional support, doom-scrolling social media accounts often had a negative effect on individuals. The state was quick to label this negative affect a corrosive force with the potential to undermine social unity as well as individuals' immune systems. At the time of writing this Introduction, several major Chinese cities have been under severe lockdown for weeks, no doubt providing rich new data on the role of social media whose perusal, as Zhang points out, is not a life-choice, but essential in order to be able to organise the most basic necessities of life.

Caroline Yiqian Wang's piece on eating videos engages with another aspect of social media use criticised by the Chinese government. Originally an import from Korea, eating videos or *chibo* 吃播 were a big thing on social media platforms between 2015 and 2021. The concept is simple: film yourself eating a range of dishes and post it on social media or, as the audience, watch other people eat. The practice started to be criticised from 2021 with an ensuing 'crackdown' on such posts, ostensibly because they promoted a culture of waste and indulged an escapist mentality. However, as Wang points out, this disregards the positive effects these social media posts had and the positive affect they created. As most were accompanied by a live chat function, they provided a much-needed sociality for single people whose isolation was exacerbated during lockdown. And as many such posts were effectively amateur cooking shows, they also imparted much-needed basic skills training in a relatable manner to a young generation of urbanites who had never cooked for themselves.

A fear (rather than an embrace) of toxins also lies at the heart of two female poets whose work Justyna Jaguscik analyses. Zhai Yongming's and Zheng Xiaoqiong's poetry deals with the topic of food anxiety not as a result of scarcity or famine but as a result of food production scandals which have heightened fears over food safety in China. While these anxieties are real (as were the scandals of poisoned food that gave rise to them), the proposed solution is interesting and warrants critical examination. According to Jaguscik, fostering villagers' emotional connection with the countryside may be a first step towards creating a healthier living environment seemingly laying the responsibility at the door of the rural population whose practices potentially endanger the urban. The importance of an emotional connection to the land also lies at the heart of the community garden project in Lancheng (Taiwan) discussed in Shaw-wu Jung's piece. Here, the elderly population of a small community with a stagnant economy received a boost through the project of creating an organic community vegetable garden. Through the process of creating this garden, residents started to re-engage with their agricultural roots and awakened traditional farming methods, Jung contends.

Accompanying food anxieties among the urban middle classes is a desire for 'authentic' or simple foods like the potato, which is the focus of Jacob Klein's alliterative article. A recent Western intruder into the Chinese larder, the humble potato is a case study of the way state intervention taps into cultural values around food, in particular the centrality of grain in governance, family ties, and ancestor worship. In 2015, a state project was launched to turn the potato – introduced to China in the 17th century, widely disliked, and its consumption associated with being poor – into a new superfood with medicinal qualities in an effort to transform the potato into a staple food for the Chinese nation by raising its status to the same heights as that of grains like rice and maize. While the campaign bore all the hallmarks of state intervention (apparently, it was a citizen's duty to eat potatoes, as Klein points out), potato promoters also tapped

into the emerging market for so-called authentic or 'pure' foods of impoverished inland areas, now rebranded as 'heritage'.

What is branded 'authentic' or 'pure' often has been derided as *luohou* 落后 or backward, as is the case with *shaoguo* 烧锅, a type of cooking using a biomass stove with significant air quality implications. Shaoguo is mainly used to cook extremely simple staples like *mantou* 馒头 (a type of steamed bread) or soup made of boiled water and flour. Erin Thomas relates how returning migrants have developed a nostalgia for what is not necessarily considered tasty but familiar food which has, in turn, contributed to a continuation of this cooking tradition with biomass stoves even installed in new housing blocks. Thomas considers this a positive 'creation of a consciousness about rural conditions' whose upholding seems to be the sole responsibility of older women.

This same appetite for simple foods by an urban population also drives the migrant workers in Sam Berlin's study to learn how to make local delicacies, allegedly part of their own heritage, to sell in eastern cities of China. Many of these small-scale entrepreneurs are newly unemployed former factory workers and find themselves jobless as the result of rapid development but stalling social mobility: the so-called middle-income trap. Berlin adopts an optimistic perspective about the chances of these less than affluent *getihu* 个体户 (small-scale entrepreneurs) returning to the factory floor in the future who, for now, are content in the knowledge that development will come. That this knowledge is no longer certain is set out with sobering clarity in Rozelle and Hell's *Invisible China* (2020) which identifies the segregation of the rural and the urban in crucial areas like health care, education, and parental education as key reasons why the aspirations of Berlin's interlocutors may well not be fulfilled, as they may be unable to upskill to meet the requirements of China's future labour force.

Laying the responsibility for safe food production at the door of the rural (often ageing) population is another example of this crucial binary that lies at the heart of the Chinese society and economy, that is, the clear separation of the urban and the rural which was enshrined during the Mao period and which continues today. Focusing on the other end of the ecosystem, Adam Liebman's piece on waste separation based on field work in Kunming, south-west China, identifies clear continuities in the way waste collection and separation is built on the separation of people into different categories, where peasants who entered the urban areas for waste collection were considered dirty, unhygienic, and unsightly – despite being classified as the most revolutionary class in the 1960s – and barred from entering the urban areas at certain times of the day. In the early days of reform and opening up, garbage units within *danwei* structures were converted into other, more lucrative spaces, leading to waste expunged into the streets, while in the 2010s locked 'smart' garbage bins have closed off a crucial sector of the economy for the poorest, so vividly and sympathetically evoked in Jia Pingwa's novel *Happy Dreams* (2017, translated by Nicky Harman; the original was published as *Gaoxing* 高兴 in 2007). Jessica

Imbach reminds us that 'smart' technology is not a concept of the new millennium. 'Smart villages' were already fantasised about during the Mao period and were a recurring trope in socialist science fiction from the 1950s and 1960s. Just like 'smart' cities today, they imagined a reliance on technology to achieve a Maoist green utopia which resonates with current articulations of state environmentalism, as Imbach points out. Then and now, the taming and controlling of nature by humans lies at the heart of the project.

Turning to film in 2021, many will recall US-based director Chloé Zhao's historic win at the 2021 Oscars, where she became the first woman of colour to win Best Director. While Zhao's win was initially met with praise and celebration by many in China, including Chinese state media, it was swiftly censored after an interview from 2003 surfaced where Zhao referred to China as 'a place where there are lies everywhere' (Davidson 2021). The 2021 Oscars themselves, meanwhile, were not broadcast at all in Hong Kong for the first time in 50 years. While Hong Kong's leading broadcaster explained the move as based on 'commercial reasons', others cited *Do Not Split*, a nominated documentary about the Hong Kong protests and the increasing control of Beijing as a likely reason for the broadcast ban. The various and complex entanglements of Hong Kong film and the Chinese state are clear to be seen in the case of the *Storm* film series, as Alvin Hoi-Chun Hung discusses in this volume. The series, which is produced by filmmakers from Hong Kong but primarily directed at the Chinese market, moves away from Hong Kong's crime film tradition to using film to transform people's legal consciousness and educate them about the dangers of corruption. In this sense, they chime in neatly with Xi's 'anti-corruption' drive and serve broader attempts to strengthen CCP legitimacy. Yet, as we see in Alvin K. Wong's piece, Hong Kong film nonetheless continues to occupy a unique place in Sinophone cultural production, one that is 'not always in sync with the dominant logics of nationalism, global capitalism, and Sinocentrism.' Wong focuses on Jun Li's *Drifting* (2021), a film about homelessness and economic precarity in a post-2019 Hong Kong that is still wrestling with the aftermath of social upheavals, political uncertainty, and the global pandemic. The film, as Wong argues, in its manifold visualisations of homelessness and the brutal processes of neoliberal dehumanisation in Hong Kong, offers a trenchant cinematic diagnosis of dispossession and Sinophone resistance. The third piece in this chapter, written by Jie Li, shifts attention from production and representation to questions of cinematic dissemination and amplification. Turning to the role of film in the making of Mao's personality cult, Li shows us the range and complexity of audience responses to Maoist cinema, noting that while many young people were inspired to mobility as revolutionary pilgrims to meet Mao in person, others were less enchanted and harboured critical, even subversive, thoughts.

Discussion of the Mao era and its various legacies continues in the next chapter where scholars consider new approaches to the study of 'red culture'. Marc Matten's piece, for instance, focuses on the often underappreciated role

of Mao-era books, or more specifically book covers, in disseminating political ideas, as well the production and modernising process of the materials themselves. Jon Howlett's piece, too, shows how *Menus and Resources for Western Cuisine*, a recipe book for train staff published in 1978 by the passenger department of the Guangzhou Railway Bureau, provides an entry for exploring the history of the short-lived Hua Guofeng era (1976–1978) on its own terms. Both pieces speak to the ways in which artefacts provide valuable insights into the Mao and early years of the post-Mao period. But so, too, have the many afterlives of the 'red culture' become a topic of much discussion in recent scholarship (Leng and Chen 2021; Li and Zhang 2016; Williams 2022). We see this in Steven F. Jackson's piece, which revisits key themes across propaganda posters in our very own University of Westminster's China Visual Arts Project and considers their pedagogical value in contemporary classrooms, particularly in the way posters might be used to reflect on the discourses about ethnicity and nation in China today. Focusing on the place of Mao-era 'red culture' in contemporary China, Ruichen Zhang's piece considers the repackaging of Chinese propaganda posters as Covid-19 memes on social media. Here, we see the enduring, playful, and multifaceted reworkings of 'red culture' as a means of constructing new kinds of public discourse and online participatory media.

The final theme in this volume reflects on issues of social (in)justice and calls to action. The first two pieces focus on racism(s) in the UK. Freya Aitken-Turff, for instance, explores the impact of both longstanding and Covid-19-compounded Sinophobia in London's Chinatown within a broader context of widespread problems of under-resourced support services, gentrification, and invisibilised local histories. Tan's piece examines the various formations of racisms that exist across timelines, geographies, and generational divides, charting their various connections and disconnections across 'model minority myth', 'new Yellow Peril', xenophobia conflations, Islamophobia, the Atlanta spa shootings, Black Lives Matter, and white supremacy. Both pieces call attention to the necessity of naming and interrogating structural power. How to do this is very much the issue at the heart of the third piece in this chapter, which looks at the gender politics of NGO volunteering in contemporary China. Here, Jing Y. and Derek Hird illuminate the ways in which state and market discourses of self-reliance, psychological self-care, and various forms of 'emotion management' work to obscure broader questions of structural change. Focusing on discourses of 'female wisdom' in one Guangzhou-based NGO, they argue that such practices have the effect of both entrenching gender norms while also complicating attempts to expose state patriarchy.

Cultural China 2021 therefore provides another rich menu of insightful pieces about the less attention-grabbing yet no less pertinent and important social, cultural, political, and historical dynamics that inform life in cultural China today. Whether you are an academic, activist, practitioner, or politician, we hope that *Cultural China 2021* helps you situate current events in and

relating to cultural China in a wider context and may inform your engagements and policymaking practices. Enjoy!

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CHAPTER 1

Health and Medicine

1.1 Acupuncture Anaesthesia as Medical Diplomacy

Emily Baum

In the early days of the Covid-19 outbreak, the Chinese government sent hundreds of thousands of care packages to students studying overseas. Stuffed with packets of herbal capsules, face masks, and disinfectant wipes, the unexpected gifts were a thinly disguised attempt to conjure nationalist sentiment in the wake of rising racism abroad. 'The motherland is by your side,' the care packages boasted, pointedly reminding students that their time spent overseas would never diminish the blood ties they maintained to their ancestral homeland (Cheng 2020).

The Covid-19 pandemic was not the first time the Chinese government sought to use medicine for nationalist ends. As historians have long pointed out, medicine in China has frequently stood as a symbol of the nation writ large, and the adoption of different medical modalities has accompanied the waxing and waning of subsequent political regimes. Throughout the 19th century, the outbreak of epidemics, combined with the intensification of colonialism, had once marked the Qing empire as the 'sick man of Asia' (Rogaski 2021). By 1949, however, the rise to power of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) had ushered in a new era in public health: one in which the Chinese people would overcome their past humiliations and walk on their own two feet.

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Throughout the early decades of the PRC, the CCP viewed medicine – and *Chinese* medicine in particular – as an alluring vehicle for the cultivation of nationalist feeling. But even more than this, Chinese medicine offered the CCP the opportunity for a possible diplomatic coup, a way of signalling to the Western world the creative potential of Mao Zedong Thought. If the CCP could independently devise a revolutionary form of medical treatment – one that had no antecedent within scientific biomedicine – then they could prove to the capitalist West that Chinese forms of knowledge (inspired, of course, by the theoretical innovations of Maoist doctrine) were equally, if not more, effective than those of their Western counterparts.

Perhaps the greatest feat of medical diplomacy undertaken by the CCP was the development and subsequent international promotion of a technique known as 'acupuncture anaesthesia' (*zhenci mazui* 针刺麻醉) (Dimond 1971). As its name suggested, acupuncture anaesthesia (AA) was a procedure in which acupuncture needling would serve as a replacement for, or supplement to, conventional medicinal anaesthetics. In truth, the appellation was a bit of a misnomer. Unlike pharmaceutical anaesthesia, acupuncture would neither put the patient to sleep nor completely eliminate all physical sensation. Instead, AA was more of an analgesic than an anaesthetic, dulling the pain of the surgical intervention while enabling the patient to remain aware of, and responsive to, the manipulations of her body.

For the Communists, AA represented the fullest embodiment of Maoist medicine. It was inspired by indigenous forms of treatment and was entirely distinct from Western modalities. At the same time, it was low-tech and did not require years of training or elite scholarly knowledge. And because patients remained conscious throughout the procedure, they could work in collaboration with their doctors to ensure the surgery's success. In its form, function, and execution, AA served as proof that Maoist ideology was not just a vessel for innovation but, more importantly, an alternative imagining of medical modernity entirely.

The CCP lost no time in promulgating the advances of their miraculous discovery. Aware that AA was an 'exceedingly good opportunity to propagandise Mao Zedong Thought,' the Ministry of Health worked in close conjunction with national propaganda organs to ready themselves for the impending visit of American president Richard Nixon in the winter of 1972 (Shanghai Municipal Archives B244-3-319-13). Indeed, AA was surprisingly close to the top of the list of activities planned for Nixon's week-long tour. A colour film featuring the technique was hurriedly produced in time for his arrival, and Nixon's own physician, Walter Tkach, spent an afternoon at a Beijing hospital where he witnessed three acts of surgery carried out under AA.

The procedures that Tkach and later American delegations would witness while in China were more than mere medical operations; they were performative acts of surgical 'theatre', each unfolding according to some predetermined

Figure 1.1: Patient preparing for surgery under acupuncture anaesthesia, accompanied by his Little Red Book. 1971. Courtesy of the Paul Pickowicz Collection, University of California, San Diego.

script. Patients would walk into the operating room unassisted, accompanied only by the inevitable presence of a Little Red Book that they clung tightly to their chests. During the surgery, they drank tea, ate slices of orange, and made small talk with their flabbergasted spectators. And when the procedure concluded, the patients sat up – evincing no pain whatsoever – and walked unassisted out of the room. As Tkach later recalled, he had 'seen nothing like [it] in 25 years of association with surgery' (Medical World News 1972).

Tkach and visitors like him were sufficiently persuaded by the spectacle that they trumpeted the virtues of AA back home. As the surgeon Samuel Rosen (1971) wrote in a *New York Times* article, 'I have seen the past and it works.' Others, like the Chinese American physician Frederick Kao, pointed to AA as evidence of the long-standing efficacy of Eastern forms of healing. Inspired by his own research into the procedure, Kao would go on to establish *The American Journal of Chinese Medicine* to more effectively describe the applications of acupuncture in a biomedical language (Lambert 1992). To be sure, not everyone agreed with such rosy assessments as these, and many Americans who travelled to China insisted that the whole act was a hoax. But an equally vocal cohort was fully convinced of its efficacy, and they looked to AA as a way to bridge the gap between the medical – and political – worlds that separated China from the West.

Over time, however, and despite the brief furore that had arisen over the procedure, interest in AA would taper off almost as quickly as it had begun. Clinical trials in the US would go on to prove inconclusive, with no ready-made explanation for why such a technique should work. And with the death of Mao Zedong in 1976, there was no longer a need to promote the values of Maoism or the achievements of Chinese communism to a curious West. Instead, as China continued to 'open up' to the outside world, the research and practice of AA ground to a gradual (and invariably unceremonious) halt.

Nevertheless, while AA itself may have experienced only a fleeting moment of infamy, one lesson the CCP learned from the affair was the effectiveness of Chinese medicine for patriotic and diplomatic ends. If the experience with AA had proven anything, it was the ability for Chinese medicine to conjure up powerful imaginaries of alternative paths to health – and to galvanise attachments to one's ethnocultural roots in the process. With this in mind, the care packages that arrived on American soil during the early days of Covid-19 were hardly an unprecedented phenomenon. They represented, instead, the logical extension of a long trend in Chinese soft power: one that saw medical applications like acupuncture as a simultaneously nationalistic and diplomatic tool, capable of creating an imagined cultural community while foregrounding the independence and strength of the modern Chinese state.

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1.2 The 'Affective Plague': WeChat Group Chat as an Epidemiological Space

Dino Ge Zhang

This essay is primarily concerned with WeChat group chats as an epidemiological space. As a backdrop to this discussion, we must start with the statement that WeChat is not a platform of preference in China but one of necessity. Not installing WeChat is not simply social suicide – for some, a digitally reclusive lifestyle can be even more desirable – but it comes with harsh inconveniences that can literally immobilise. For instance, in the new regime of contact-tracing 'health code' infrastructure (de Seta 2020), in many locations you are only given the choice to scan the code with WeChat, otherwise you cannot get on the bus/train, enter the mall or wet market, nor board your flight. If you are without your WeChat-installed smartphone, your mobility is immediately brought to a halt, which was indeed the case for many elderly people (Sina 2020). WeChat is 'super sticky; because of its convenient "mega-platform" that is a "one-stop gateway to more than twenty functions"' (Chen, Mao, and Qiu 2018: 8–9); however, the other interpretation of this super-stickiness is that you are stuck with it, happily or not.

WeChat can be a chore, but I am not going through all the socio-technicities of those chores here. Instead, I will focus on one aspect of it, perhaps the most relatable to those who live outside the WeChat regime. WeChat group chats as social designations are bound to have inclusions and exclusions. Some are more intimate like small groups of friends, family, or colleagues, while others are massive anonymous groups made for arbitrary and ephemeral reasons that range from sharing memes among strangers, maintaining hobby activities, to facilitating group-buying vegetables. The messiness of group chats became glaringly clear during the lockdown as WeChat group chats became the sole infrastructure for organising, purchasing, and distributing grocery supplies within local communities; and sharing crucial real-time information about new lockdown measures or which hospitals have available beds, all of which are necessary for survival. These group chats also accelerated into an emotionally pulverising whirlpool of extreme affects: anxiety, fear, anger, lethargy, and so forth. All active group chats, no matter large or small, intimate or anonymous, became a live field site (if not a laboratory) of social-viral-technical epidemiology. But do not expect an exposition from such a short essay, I can only sketch some ideas and my current ongoing research.

While most Wuhan residents were at home, the aforementioned affective projectiles, often inflected with the circulation of short videos depicting whatever was going on the streets and in the hospitals, penetrated (and spread across) WeChat groups of all kinds from the most established connections of family and close friends to the most transient groups that you forgot you were part of. I will spare readers the details of the potentially traumatising

videos and many chatlogs that followed them (to give one prominent example that went viral, a Wuhanese woman threw a tantrum and condemned the supermarket food delivery for its bundled sale of rice and toilet paper/soy sauce in a WeChat group chat (Wen 2020)). Indeed, many informants, when reflecting upon the intense affects a year on, still felt reluctant if not outrightly avoiding recollection.

Luo Yu (2020) from *New Weekly* published an article entitled 'In the Face of a Storm, Do Not Infect Yourself with the 'Affective Plague" on 31 January (a week into the Wuhan lockdown). The article blames doom-scrolling social media (especially WeChat, as group chat notifications are mostly muted anyway so they were often consumed much like a *timeline*) for spreading various ugly affects such as anger and anxiety, and suggests digital detox to offset the burden of information overload and abundance of idling time at home. He writes,

> Anxiety is passed around, infecting the credibility of constantly spreading and 'confirmed' rumours…information overload leads to…[unconstrained] 'excessive sympathy' (translation author's own).

Affects (including 'excessive sympathy') are seen as corrosive forces, against not just social unity but also the individual immune system.

The whole resurgence of technophobic discourse (previously evidenced by campaigns against internet addiction (see Zhang 2013)) is best encapsulated under the red banner of 'the harm of smartphones is worse than coronavirus' (*shouji zhihai shenyu xinguan* 手机之害甚于新冠病毒) – a propaganda slogan that was widely ridiculed on Weibo at the time.

The diagnosis for *shoujibing* 手机病 or the smartphone malaise, has been made, and the prescription has been given – look at your phone less. I would argue digital detox has not worked as intended (during normal times, let alone during a pandemic) as the alternative is not actually that appealing. One informant (a 65-year-old Wuhan resident) responded to my question on digital detox and smartphone use during the lockdown, as follows:

> To be honest, smartphone was my lifeline in isolation—I cycled through different things to do on the phone, singing Karaoke, watching Tiktok… I even earnt some cash by completing the daily quests on those apps (specific versions of Tiktok reward viewers with points for watching ads in between videos, which can be then accumulated and exchanged for cash) …The problem, or rather how I rid myself of troubles, was talking to/socialising with people on WeChat. Don't get me wrong I talk to people face-to-face all the time [during normal circumstances]. By keeping the social to the minimal on WeChat—I still checked on friends and family's health—I was able to avoid all the emotional stuff you mentioned, even with my own daughter…The problem is really WeChat… or putting too much energy into trying to maintain connections via WeChat [groups].

If group chat was the poison, was the remedy Tiktok? Smartphones seem to both torture and save us at the same time.

After I finally left Wuhan in July 2020, Tony D. Sampson (2020) updated his theory on social media and virality during the Covid-19 crisis: 'virality is resolutely non-metaphorical'. While repurposing Gabriel Tarde's theory of social contagion and positing a very aptly placed critique of Le Bon's *The Crowd*, Sampson's 2012 book seems to pre-empt any further discussions by Chinese public intellectuals using Le Bon to criticise mass hallucination during image-events – during the Wuhan lockdown, Le Bon was again evoked as the prophet who predicted the fragility of mass affects (Huang 2020). If Le Bon represented 'an aristocratic expression of fear against the rise of democratic movements in the nineteenth century' (Sampson 2012: 83), the numerous quotations and evocations of Le Bon in contemporary China point to its own intellectuals' deep-rooted fear or distrust of the crowd (in an epidemiological setting, let alone in the context of social movements).

What I can only suggest, following Sampson, is an epidemiological space where biological contagion, thought/affect contagion, digital infrastructure, local lockdown mapping, tracing the infected, and tracing the affected can all be stacked in a new cartographic system. Instead of reducing social relations to the same system of metaphors – whether it is the blackhole-ish nullified masses (from the cynical eye) or the presupposed hope of a unified people (in a celebratory tone) – our experiences during the Wuhan lockdown undoubtedly testified to the 'tensions between attractor and attracted in processes of magnetization' (Sampson 2012: 91) that Tarde highlighted. A viral video of a hellish scene in a hospital did not just trigger fear and panic, but instead impulsive outbursts of emojis, *biaoqingbao* 表情包 (Chen 2016), debates, 'Wuhan add oil', and other kinds of diversions, all of which 'persist beyond the saying that they fall under the magnetic influence of hypnotic images' (Sampson 2012: 85).

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1.3 Accounting for the Animals: Faunal Medicalisation in Modern China

Liz P. Y. Chee

In my recently published book *Mao's Bestiary: Medicinal Animals and Modern China* (Duke University Press 2021) I have traced an aspect of Chinese medicine and pharmacology that has been surprisingly neglected despite its controversial character, or maybe because of it. Although the book went to press just at the onset of Covid-19, and does not deal directly with zoonotic disease, it helps fill the gap in our knowledge of how and why 'medicinal animals' have proliferated in the modern period, arguing that the early Communist period is an overlooked watershed.

My main argument is that while animals (alongside plants and minerals) were accorded medicinal value from ancient times in China, their use expanded and transformed as they became a resource for state medicine in the Mao period. What the book calls *faunal medicalisation* was a process that, by the current century, would contribute to the endangerment and extinction of animals as far afield as Africa and South America, but had roots in Sino-Soviet relations, The Great Leap Forward, the Cultural Revolution, and other phases of the first few decades of Communist rule. One of its aspects was the institutionalised 'farming' of formerly wild-caught animals for their parts and tissues, partly to

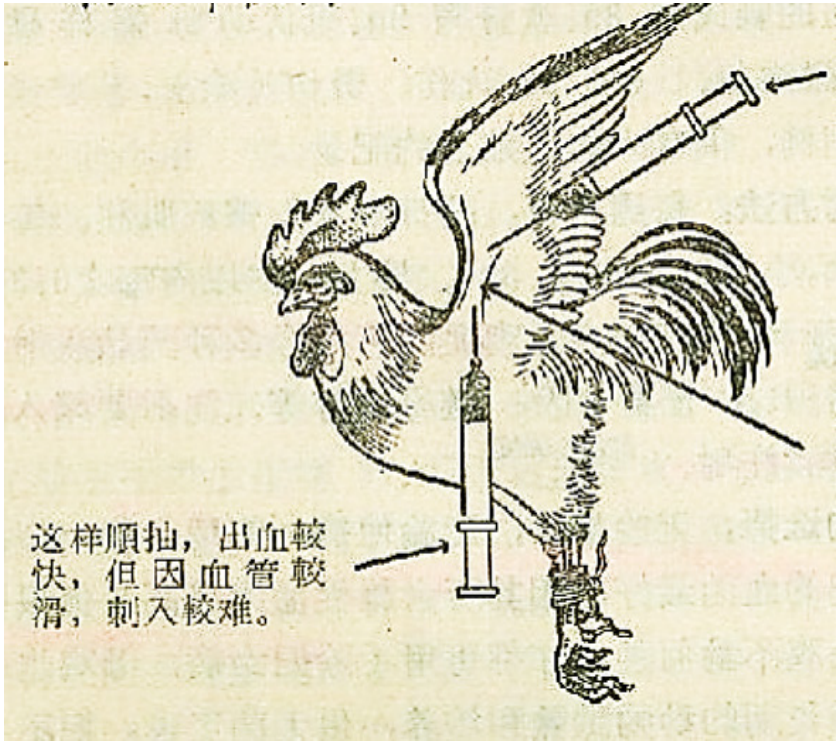

Figure 1.3: Chicken Blood Therapy as introduced to the Chinese population during the Cultural Revolution. Source: Qinghai Sheng Ba Yi Ba Youdian Zaofan Tuan Bianyin, Jixue Liaofa 青海省八一八邮电造反团编印,鸡血疗法 [8–18 Postal and Telecom Rebel Corps of Qinghai province] (1967).

fuel increased overseas exports which survived despite trade embargos. Farming also increased the number of species marketed as medicine. Even for 'traditional' medicinal species, the logic of production sometimes meant infusing even more body parts with curative powers. The Tokay Gecko, for example, was first farmed for its re-growable tail, but is today sold as a whole body on a stick. Scientific studies also expanded treatment regimes and delivery methods, and labs worked on substituting the tissue of more common animals for those facing extinction through medicalisation (e.g. water buffalo horn used to replace rhino horn). Faunal medicine made the transition to capitalism under Deng's reforms, with bear bile farming – a technology likely pioneered in North Korea – becoming the signature and most controversial of all faunal drug industries.

Mao's Bestiary also provides background on the broader but equally neglected field of drug-making and discovery in the PRC, which encompassed flora as well as fauna. This included the absorption of famous older brands like Tongrentang into the Communist pharmacy, and the training of a new class

of pharmacists and pharmaceutical researchers who would straddle the line between the traditional and biomedical. Soviet pharmacology would also serve to validate and help expand Chinese use of animal (and herbal) medicines, starting with cross-border deer farming, but extending to the export of Russian 'tissue therapy' and a wider shared interest in hormonal and blood therapies largely outside the realm of Western biomedicine. Modern Soviet medical theories mixed with references from classical Chinese texts would help spur the signature animal drug innovation of the Cultural Revolution, Chicken Blood Therapy, which forms one of the book's case studies. While Chicken Blood Therapy is remembered today as a unique eccentricity, motivated by political zealotry, the book contextualises it as one of many examples of hybrid faunal therapies of the late Cultural Revolution, using toads, geese, insects, and other types of animals both wild and domestic. Their inventors' claims that animal tissue could act as powerfully as antibiotics and other Western drugs, even curing cancer and other diseases testing the limits of biomedicine, would help set the stage for the many exalted curative claims of the present day which drive the illegal and legal wildlife trades.

This book grew out of a trip I made to a bear farm on the Chinese-Laotian border in 2009, a story I relate in the Introduction. The spectacle of sick bears being rendered into medicine, which in turn becomes commodified as gifts, led me on a journey to Chinese archives and into the company of Chinese physicians and drug manufacturers willing to discuss issues they know to be controversial even in the past tense. As a Chinese Singaporean I am both a lifelong user of Chinese herbal medicine and an inhabitant of one of the world's great rainforests, whose biodiversity is eroding as fast as that of 20th-century China. While the continued medicalisation of animals is only one of many causes of the defaunation of Southeast Asia (which is occurring more rapidly than deforestation), historians and anthropologists studying Chinese and other indigenous medicines can no longer turn a blind eye to the ecological and material effects of practices that intrigue them theoretically, especially as they evolve into what Laurent Pordie and Anita Hardon (2015) have called 'Asian industrial medicines', with strong ties to states, pharmaceutical manufacturers, transnational trade networks, and in the case of wildlife, criminal gangs and zoonoses. My book is not a history of this time, but one that I hope will clarify and demystify, and in some sense de-sanctify, practices too easily sold as 'traditional' and ahistorical.

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1.4 Art after Pandemic: Reimagining Virus in Pei-Ying Lin's *Virophilia*

Sophie Xiaofei Guo

The Taiwanese artist Pei-Ying Lin started her thought experiments about viruses as early as 2011. From *Smallpox Syndrome* (2012–2015), *Tame is to Tame* (2016) to her latest work *Virophilia* (2018–ongoing), Lin imagines an alternative future when disease pandemics become common occurrences. Instead of using the 20th-century metaphor of war for describing the relationship between humans and infectious agents, which still pervades the realm of science and mainstream media today, Lin's work embraces an ecological perspective and a positive attitude to our relationship with viruses.

Conceived two years before the Covid-19 outbreak, *Virophilia* is a prescient project imagining new ways of viral encounters in the future. It registers a radical rethinking of the ontology and epistemology concerning the body and human–microbe relationship via a set of culinary designs that engage viral agents as active ingredients. Borrowing methods from speculative design, Lin has staged numerous 'virus dinner performances' with invited participants from different cultural backgrounds, in order to probe the cultural logic behind their diverse attitudes towards virus and disease.

On 20 June 2020, Taiwan Contemporary Culture Lab (C-LAB) staged an online virus dinner performance under 'quarantine conditions'. Meals that were specially designed to engage viruses as ingredients were delivered to around

Figure 1.4a: Pei-Ying Lin, 'Virophilia Dinner Performance Quarantine Edition', 20 June 2020, C-LAB, Taipei. Courtesy of C-Lab.

Figure 1.4b: Pei-Ying Lin, *Cookbook for the Virophilia-ists in the 22nd Century* Table of Contents, 2018. Courtesy of Pei-Ying Lin.

15 participants for them to consume from their homes in Taipei, while Lin remotely provided the instructions from the Netherlands to the participants on how to experience their virus food.

The project consists of a future cookbook (known as the *Cookbook for the Virophilia-ists in the 22nd Century*), an installation of scrolls listing the names of all known virus species to date (published by the International Committee on Taxonomy of Viruses), a video that shows the process of a Taiwanese female performer consuming her virus dinner, and a live dinner performance that involves participants from the public experiencing the viruses in their food.

Though invisible to the human eye, microbes surrounding and inside the human body, coexisting and co-evolving with us, as the artist believes, are far greater in number than we generally recognise. *Virophilia* therefore is intended to facilitate the perception of viral existence and generate proactive (instead of passive) relationships with viruses, especially with the infectious ones, by means of culinary design, and via the intimacy of the dining encounter.

In the performance, Lin created a scenario of a cross-temporal collaboration between what she called 'the government of earthlings' from the future of 2210 and the C-LAB from 2020. Imagining herself as a representative of this fictional government, the artist wanted to reach back in time in order to save the 'vulnerable group of viruses' from being wiped out from the planet. For this government, the hierarchy and binary relationships between humans and non-human creatures are altered. As the smallest of all the microbes, viruses are neither fully dead nor fully alive but exist on a spectrum of liveliness. They are parasites that cannot replicate without the host cell of other living beings.

Nevertheless, the 'government of earthlings' treats them on an equal footing with other living beings.

The virus meal consisted of three courses. The first course called the 'Unique Mayonnaise' contained influenza viruses that had been injected into raw egg yolks so that they would replicate. As the participants consumed the mayonnaise with the egg yolks, they felt a hot and slightly tingly sensation in their throat, marking the moment when the virus particles began penetrating the host cells and triggering responses from the body's immune system. The artist imagines that by 2042, dishes like the 'Unique Mayonnaise' could protect the eater from seasonal flu. Via the medium of food, the participants would gain a sensory experience of viruses entering the body.

The second and third courses both involved the change of texture, flavour, and morphologies of food as its ingredients had undergone the process of what the artist called 'viral fermentation'. Lin envisions that by 2037 this could be widely achieved through a precise control on virus strains so that the degree and timing of viral infection of the ingredients can be accurately managed.

More radically, the artist imagines a future where human beings themselves take part in what she calls the 'ecosystem cuisine' as a source of nutrition for other earthlings to enjoy. Humans participate in the ecosystem of recycling, circulating, and exchanging energy and nutrition with other living beings. In this system, humans become the fodder of beings, subject to the use of others (Steel 2018: 160). *Virophilia* is designed in a way that resonates with philosopher Jane Bennett's ecological conception of the body, which argues that 'it is not enough to say that we are "embodied." We are, rather, an array of bodies, many different kinds of them in a nested set of microbiomes' (Bennett 2010: 113).

Lin's conscious making of a microbial body and the imagining of a viral future takes its epistemological root in the moment of what science historians have called the 'microbial turn' in biological science since the turn of the 21st century. At the beginning of the 20th century, the microbe was perceived in adversarial terms across science, medicine, and culture as an enemy to be eliminated from the human body; in the 21st century, the relationship between microbes and disease has been increasingly reconfigured from the 'microbe's eye view' and in ecological terms (Sangodeyi 2014). Microbiologists have developed the theory that infection is a result of ecological disturbance as opposed to an attack by a pathogenic agent (Lederberg 2000).

In the face of the Covid-19 predicament, however, Lin's imagining of a biofuture for positive relationships between humans and viruses may sound overly utopian. But this intentional rendering of simplicity, fictionality, and provocation is a strategy that Lin deploys from the discipline of speculative design. This method intends to transform the participants into 'citizen-consumers' and encourage them to critically engage with the 'fictional products, services, and systems from alternative futures' (Dunne and Raby 2013: 49).

The artist's recent success in staging this performance in Taiwan right in the middle of the Covid-19 pandemic is worth reflecting on in its own right. The participants' receptive attitude towards the idea of the human body as microbial

and their demonstration of trust in consuming the virus meal needs to be understood in relation to the institutional, cultural, and sociopolitical changes that have occurred in post-SARS Taiwan.

After the painful lesson of the 2003 SARS epidemic, the government has fundamentally improved its epidemic prevention system to ensure that it is well-prepared for the possibility of a coronavirus-related pandemic (O'Flaherty 2020). The aftermath of the SARS crisis also saw the development of government-funded biomedical research projects. Taiwan in 2005 launched a national project to develop the country as 'Biomedtech Island—an Asian hub for biomedical technology' (Liu and Gardner 2012).

In the cultural sphere, the government has sponsored art projects and institutions that take an interdisciplinary approach and engage ideas of innovation with Asian and Taiwanese cultural specificities. The C-LAB is such a case in point. It was founded by the Ministry of Culture in 2018. Its programmes have so far shown a strong focus on digital art and technologically informed, experimental art practices and debates. Biomedically engaged art practices started to emerge in Taiwan in 2009 and proliferated from 2017 following an increase in the number of biomedical research laboratories as well as more opportunities for international exchange (Chiu 2020).

Through a collective effort to stop the spread of Covid-19 from as early as mid-April 2020 without a lockdown and managing to avoid domestic infection for 200 days, the trust demonstrated in the process of the dinner performance perhaps mirrored the institutional trust, civic solidarity, and the qualities of what Byung-Chul Han called 'civility and responsibility towards others' within this Asian civil society during the pandemic (Han 2020). This was the case until very recently, when Taiwan experienced a sudden surge in cases due to complacency and vaccine shortfalls (Tan 2021). Medical authorities from Taiwan have advocated for a shift in mindset in the face of the coronavirus, suggesting that humans might have to try coexisting peacefully with viruses (Wang 2020). The ecological approach to viruses as a major epistemological shift suggested in *Virophilia* might not be as utopian and far-fetched as it seems.

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CHAPTER 2

Environment

2.1 Embodied Activity and Intimating Environment: A Report from LanCheng, Taiwan

Shaw-wu Jung

In an interesting article, de Boeck (1998) explores how in building ecological space, local people make sense of their material, symbolic, and metaphoric worlds. To put his insights in a context in which a successful reconstruction of a community garden in LanCheng, a small village literally at the centre of Puli township, Nantou County in Taiwan, brings forth a sensitivity to its environment, I will examine how vegetables, as part of the environment seen every day by the residents, are the material world by which abstract cultural elements such as forward-looking environmental consciousness are localised. This case drives us to focus on the embodied activity that tethers grand and new ideas such as environmental justice to local sensibility.

From 2013 through to 2016, I joined a project at the National Chi Nan University in Taiwan. The project built on a community-based, participatory action research method, looking for ways to boost community action. As part of this, I led a team of research assistants and students to LanCheng. Not unlike the majority of rural villages in Taiwan that have experienced outbound migration, especially young people going to the cities looking for jobs, LanCheng has seen an ageing population and stagnant economic activities over the past decades.

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There is a community park, a 30m^2 piece of land, quite small, located just opposite the activity centre and the community kitchen, a government-sponsored welfare service providing lunch a few times a week for the elderly and those who cannot afford lunch.

However, there were no resources to maintain the park, to the effect that it had fallen into disuse. The pavement had become disused, and the premises were in poor condition. Gradually, trash had been discarded there, and weeds grew everywhere. Snake bites were also occasionally reported. No one regarded the park as safe and relaxing anymore.

After discussing with and getting permission from the secretary-general of the Community Development Association, a member-based civic organisation, our team decided to renovate the park as part of our collaborative efforts. But first of all, we asked the residents for their opinions about what the park should look like. Among them, the idea of a vegetable garden stood out, where they could both grow vegetables and do exercise. The initial and principal reason for this was that the community kitchen could use the yields from the garden and help reduce the financial responsibilities of the Association. Given the fact that since the 1990s, various branches of government have poured resources into the so-call Integrated Community Building policy with the aim of encouraging community involvement, communities have transformed themselves to something like funding competitors which must follow the guidelines of the funders, leaving little room to do what they liked. Financial self-sufficiency was certainly the first step for the community to gain flexibility and control over its own agenda. There was also consensus that the vegetables should be edible and organic, and not grown using industrial pesticides. A vision of this place: 'a vegetable garden-based park and a park-like vegetable garden' was brewing (e.g. Follmann and Viehoff 2015).

As soon as the Association and our team had reached an agreement on converting the park to a community farming garden, our team and residents jointly began digging soil, removing the bushes, and cutting down the trees behind the gazebo. Within a few days, several parallel beds had been cultivated, with seeds of different vegetables planted. Compared with just talking during the meetings without any real sense of outputs, the activities on the field were swift and efficient, mainly because of the fact that many of the participants had done some sort of farming at some point in their life.

Friendly farming was the approach we used to tend to the garden, even though there was no consensus on what it really meant in practice, let alone the term 'sustainability' that friendly farming aims for. Without the use of agrochemicals and synthetic fertilisers, we had to devote considerable labour and time to weeding, for one thing, and needed do it on a daily basis. Students usually weeded particular sections in the morning, but weeds in other areas were removed by others in the afternoon. We had no idea who cleared them. Residents would come to the garden offering us suggestions on how to weed in a more efficient way, and more often than not, brought with them tools to weed. We once saw an elderly woman sitting on a stool removing the weeds

Figure 2.1: Images of the vegetable garden in the initial stages. Photograph courtesy of the author.

on the roadside by the garden. The weeds on the roadsides were so visible and were seen by residents as a mark of 'negligence' and 'laziness', or a sign of 'waste land', as the old lady put it. Traditional agricultural habits required workers to constantly attend to the land, as if it were an extension of the self. Now it seemed the garden had become something gathering attention in the community through weeds' visible materiality, to use anthropologist Tim Ingold's phrase (2006), so as to (re)build sociality.

The garden produced everything from ginger to pine, mushrooms, and many kinds of vegetation that I did not recognise. Then came diverse insects, and amphibian and reptilian species. Frogs and dragonflies were also spotted, which in turn attracted families with children to come close to the garden. We gradually learned that the routine activities passed down from the past generations, such as ploughing, planting, and weeding by manual labour, contributed to an ecosystem that supported many species. Old-fashioned farming practices in this tiny garden were perhaps the most 'natural' way to manage the land.

The garden started off from the belief that providing free meals for the elderly with the vegetables planted by the residents themselves was self-sustaining in a way. But vegetables were not passive, only waiting for humans' care and intervention. They grew, they connected, with air, soil, and water, and in the end, they transformed from seeds to crops, but they also assembled humans as well as non-humans into a lively network. It is important to recognise, however, that the garden was a place where practices of physical exercise, aesthetic

judgements, cultural habits, and, of course, state governance intermingled. It began as a state-funded project and was a place of ideologies, to be sure, but it was a place of other practices too because planting vegetables always took growers outside the predictable world to continuously attune to the possibilities of human and non-human factors. This echoes recent concerns of anthropologists who have been interested in the ways a novel world of humans and plants support one another to solve many of the environmental problems humans have created under the logic of extracting profit from the exploitation of natural resources (e.g. Hartigan 2015; Ingold 2006; Marder 2013).

Other things happened as plants and people began to interlink. When the most mundane and deserted scenes were made buoyant again, a renewed sense of protecting and maintaining this ecology may have a direct impact upon villagers' identity. As the old lady said, 'I tend all of the species, and would pass them on to my children.' While the garden did not start off with the goal of initiating ecological consciousness among residents, in the end, it did show a promising way that ecological resuscitation in a neglected community can be linked with its agricultural past. Here, we saw clearly the importance of taking seriously local sensibilities and traditional agricultural nodes, and the bringing together of concrete objects, plants, engaged residents, and communal spirit in the implementation of grand and new environmental ideas.

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2.2 'Sometimes We Have Some Toxins': Eco-Anxiety in Chinese Female-Authored Writing and Cultural Activism

Justyna Jaguscik

In the 2010s, following the global virality of Chai Jing's 柴静 movie *Under the Dome* (穹顶之下 *Qiongding zhi xia* (2015)), which addressed the impact of air

pollution on children's health from the perspective of a concerned mother, the independent documentary film became the artistic medium most associated with environmental citizen activism in the PRC. However, similar concerns have also long been voiced in other media forms less accessible to global audiences unfamiliar with the Chinese language, such as poetry.

When in 2007 I began my research on Chinese female-authored poetry, neither of the two authors I focused on, the acclaimed poet Zhai Yongming 翟永明 and the rising star of migrant workers' poetry Zheng Xiaoqiong 郑小琼, had yet to be discussed from an ecocritical perspective. In fact, their texts already displayed increasing eco-anxiety. For example, in her 1999 poem 'How to Take Care of a Baby?' (拿什么去关爱婴儿? *Na shenme qu guan'ai ying'er*?) Zhai Yongming questioned the impact of pollution on younger generations' health. In contrast to the deeply personal tone in Chai Jing's documentary, Zhai's text displays an affinity with the feminist ethics of caring, taking up notions of human vulnerability and dependence on human and non-human others. The poem comments on the unresolvable dilemma of mothers who have no alternative to feeding their babies contaminated food.[1] They are aware of the environmental drama they are witnessing when 'before [their] eyes milk turns into dioxin' and 'plastic turns into garbage' (Zhai 2011 [1999]: 314). However, years of intense industrialisation at the expense of the natural environment have deprived the lyrical 'we' of healthy ways to sustain and protect life on Earth:

> Sometimes we have some toxins
> We eat some rust
> Some DDVP
> (Zhai 2011 [1999]: 315)

They also realise that their minds have been contaminated by past toxic ideologies, such as an uncritical belief in progress, because sometimes their 'mouths ramble some industrial charms' (Zhai 2011 [1999]: 315). Nevertheless, these charms lack magical powers, nor do they grant preservation from destruction or failure. Zhai's poem lays bare the older generations' lack of agency in the face of the environmental crisis. The poet, who came of age in the Mao era, questions also her own responsibility for the condition in which they hand over the natural environment to the younger generations.

'How to Take Care of a Baby?' shows that roughly half a century after the last catastrophic famine in the PRC, and in a time of abundance of affordable food, the issue of malnutrition in children may, again, become acute. Indeed it happened in 2008, the year of the milk scandal, when contaminated infant formula led to cases of fatal kidney damage in babies. Zhai shared her grief over the incident in 'The Child's Dripping Song' (儿童的点滴之歌 *Ertong de diandi zhi ge*), which reads like a dark, disturbing lullaby. The first stanza of the poem describes a dying baby boy from the perspective of his mother, who sits next to him at the hospital bed: 'little Shi Jie has three tubes in his head' (Zhai 2013: 21).

His mother bemoans the calamity, and her pain amplifies with the realisation that she poisoned her baby with the infant formula.

The anonymous child from Zhai's 1999 poem becomes, in a ghostly manner, Shi Jie, the baby unintentionally fed to death by his mother. The 'Song' quotes from the morbid imagery of gothic tales when it compares the profit-driven managers of milk companies to bloodsucking vampires:

> Some people drink the baby's blood some people share profits
> . . .
> 2008's milk is vampires' saliva
> 2008's excess is the problem
> (Zhai 2013 22)

2008 was not only the year of the milk scandal, but also the year of the devastating Sichuan earthquake and of the Beijing Summer Olympics. Thus, the word 'excess' in the quote may be referring to much more than the food safety incident alone.

The same year, Zheng Xiaoqiong wrote 'Pedestrian Overpass' (人行天桥 *Renxing tianqiao*), a long prose poem inspired by her work in factories in the manufacturing hub of the Pearl River Delta:

> ... plutonium replaces calcium in the production of saliva, soft silvery tin floats in the air, rushing into your lungs and blood vessels, arsenic eats up your sexual desire, mercury has killed the algae and fish in the rivers ...
>
> Toxic petroleum shines on our diseased bodies, toxic fumes and waste have contaminated the semen of our men.
> (Zheng 2008: 95, 99)

This is only one of many examples in Zhang's oeuvre that depict the transformation of matter by the chemical substances that penetrate it. Drawing upon her personal experience, the poet writes about the deleterious impact of industrial waste and pollution on workers' health. The daily contact with iron parts and tools in factories exposes them to the risk of accidents and injuries. Almost invisible, but no less dangerous, is the exposure to toxins that can lead to infertility.

Since 2007, environmental concerns have accompanied my research visits to the PRC. This was not only as a literary theme, but also due to the impact of pollution on my daily life. My academic friends based in Beijing have embraced vegetarianism because of worries over meat safety, and eating out has become increasingly challenging. When in 2019 I met the social scientist and labour activist Lü Tu 吕途, she told me that recurring incidents of food poisoning were a turning point in her career. Lü recalls the experience that changed her perception of the countryside:

> In 2009 I began to organise the Workers' University in the village Pinggu ... When I had classes, I stayed overnight in Pinggu. One day, I bought tantalisingly fresh cucumbers from a vendor next door. That evening I suffered from severe food poisoning. When the pain became unbearable in the middle of the night, I had no other choice but to clean out my stomach. (Lü 2019)

Lü realised that the pastoral image of the countryside some of us cherish has long fallen out of sync with the reality of 'toxic insecticide and the smell of pesticide in the air when fruit is ripening' (Lü 2019).

Lü is mainly known for her new workers' trilogy (Lü 2012, 2014, 2017) and her work for the Picun-based NGO Migrant Workers' Home. In her texts she elaborates on the emotional homelessness and instability that endangers the existence of many migrant workers. Following the spike in eco-anxiety, Lü's attention shifted from a critique of urbanisation to rural reconstruction work. With her singer-songwriter husband, Sun Heng 孙恒, Lü began a new project that focuses on reviving the tradition of village songs. Since 2019 they have been organising workshops with villagers who write their own texts, such as those created by the inhabitants of the Stone City Village (石城之村 *Shicheng zhi cun*):

> Stone wall, stone house, the small village made of stones
> One stone, four ounces oil, otherwise the grain won't grow
>
> Walnut scent, chestnut taste, old trees count a hundred years
> Valleys filled with fresh air, and the stones smell sweet too
> (quoted in Lü 2019)

Lü and Sun hope that the fostering of villagers' emotional connections with the countryside may be the first step toward creating a healthier living environment for those, mainly older women and children, left behind by urbanisation.

These examples illustrate a growing ecological awareness on the part of engaged citizens and activists. The state's agenda has also changed, and currently the PRC is affirming its commitment to green development. Concurrently, other globally known phenomena, such as greenwashing, have appeared. My last example comes from the short play *Ocean Hotpot* (海水火锅 *Haishui huoguo*) by Chen Si'an 陈思安. Her work was commissioned by the 2019 Edinburgh International Festival, which asked five writers to share their views on the global climate crisis. Chen's absurdist piece invites the audience to the Committee for Global Ecological Balance and Environmental Promotion, where the protagonist applies for an environmental grant. He plans to turn the warming sea around the Yong Le Island into a seawater hotpot and successfully sells his costly environmental project as an ecological start-up. The play pokes fun at the superficiality of much of environmental politics. One could wonder

if the playwright was targeting the organisers of the festival too? Environmental art sells and wins grants for funds, in the PRC and elsewhere.

Note

[1.] Unless otherwise noted, all translations from Chinese are by the author, J. Jaguscik.

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2.3 Garbage Bins Are for Containing People Too

Adam Liebman

Four categories of post-consumer waste: dry, wet, recyclable, and hazardous. In 2019, news stories about Shanghai residents being forced to sort and deposit their household waste according to these categories rippled through the international news media (Kuo 2019). The rules included limited times for dropping off waste and confusing categorical requirements, leading to complaints of inconvenience, unfair penalties, and state overreach. This effort to improve waste separation in urban China was rolled out in 46 pilot cities in 2020, including Kunming (CCTV 2020), where I engaged in waste fieldwork on and off throughout the 2010s.

Figure 2.3: A newly installed waste station in an upscale residential area in Shanghai, 2019. Courtesy of Goeun Lee.

Garbage bins function as a crucial nexus that connects the state with two different social groupings. On one side are relatively well-off urbanites who generate and deposit most post-consumer waste (the main focus of media coverage); while on the other side are large populations of waste workers, both formal and informal, who make a living through handling this waste (mostly missing from media coverage). As such, looking at changing bin designs, aesthetics, and the politics of their placement provides a lens into shifting urban political ecologies in contemporary China. Below is a brief history of garbage containment efforts in Kunming that includes both social groupings to help contextualise the recent initiative.

1965. The frenetic scrap collection campaigns of the Great Leap Forward had passed, but an ethos of thrift and material reuse was still widely promoted for its potential to help the nation industrialise. In this context, the Kunming sanitation bureau set out to unify regulation of the city's system of collecting food waste and distributing it to villages outside of the city for use as pig feed or fertiliser. The bureau drafted a report for the city's leaders comparing three methods: either setting up a costly system of workers, facilities, and vehicles to collect and transport the waste; allowing peasants to continue entering the city to pick up waste collected by urban workers; or continuing to allow peasants to collect food waste directly from residential areas, cafeterias, and restaurants, while adding some new restrictions.

In the last method, the most economical, three 'drawbacks' listed are especially revealing:

1. Peasants going to people's courtyards to collect food waste is a fragmented process, which takes more time and wastes labour power.
2. The times when peasants enter and leave the city cannot be guaranteed, influencing urban aesthetics and appearance.
3. When peasants themselves go to courtyards to collect, usually they will not seriously clean the buckets and containers, influencing the environment and hygiene.

The cleanliness of 'buckets and containers' for collecting food waste (precursors of black-box garbage bins) thus appears to be a larger concern than are peasants who appear reduced to their only use: labour power. Peasants are seen to be as potentially polluting in the city as rotting food waste, and the report makes it clear that the state's efforts to systematise waste collection are often tied to projects of containing devalued people as well as matter.

1978. Deng Xiaoping had taken over leadership of the Communist Party in the wake of Mao's death, markets had emerged for selling surplus agricultural products, and many Kunmingers were enjoying a new abundance of fruits and vegetables. But with this small shift from scarcity to abundance came a proliferation of stinking garbage, straining Mao-era systems of collection and reuse. A report from this year hints how this process played out. To improve 'urban aesthetics and sanitation', the sanitation bureau constructed 216 new garbage repositories in which waste could be deposited and partially contained before being transferred to larger garbage dumps. However, twelve of these new repositories had been demolished by work units and neighbourhood associations that were seeking to expand their businesses. One repository was replaced with a business selling cold drinks, another with a restaurant selling rice noodles (a Yunnan speciality). Clearly, some work units had been quick to take advantage of new economic opportunities, and they were not allowing the city's new waste infrastructure to impede them.

Without these repositories, some city residents were left without a designated place for disposing of garbage and had to merely leave it nearby. This not only influenced the city's appearance. More seriously, it blocked roadways, prevented garbage trucks from getting through, generated a rotting stench, and 'raised the ire of the masses'. The sanitation bureau required offending work units to reconstruct the repositories. In this way, the responsibility of the local state can be seen shifting: from overseeing the conversion of waste to value and containing the dirt and stench of devalued things and people, to a fuller battle with merely attaining elusive containment.

1998. The city began to install in public spaces garbage bins containing two separate sides: one for 'recyclable waste' and the other for 'non-recyclable waste'. The new bins were part of the city's efforts to not only appear more modern and hygienic, but also more 'green' and 'ecological' as it prepared to host the World Horticulture Exposition the following year. Yet, both sides of the new bins soon came to be used for all waste, as urbanites noticed that both sides were dumped

back together into the same vehicles, making clear the state's lack of an actual recycling system. Practices that functioned to 'recycle' waste were still widespread, but increasingly occurred through waste workers and garbage pickers pulling out waste of value to sell to informal scrap traders, as well as through lower-income urban inhabitants habitually saving and selling their scrap in ways that avoided the state's bins altogether.

2011. While beginning fieldwork for this project, I encountered a particularly interesting manifestation of the pairing of ecology and modernity: a hefty, bright green garbage bin, with posters on three sides showing utopian green cityscapes underneath fluffy white clouds, floating bubbles, and a mix of English ('Environmental protection'), pinyin (*Shengtai huanbao*), and Chinese characters (*shengtai Kunming, lüse Kunming, yuanlin Kunming* 生态昆明，绿色昆明，园林昆明 [ecological Kunming, green Kunming, garden Kunming]). As I got closer to the can, its plexiglass screens retracted and a mechanised female voice loudly and repeatedly instructed me to 'protect the environment, take care of hygiene' (*baohu huanjing, aihu weisheng* 保护环境，爱护卫生).

Later I found a news article that reported on the project: '48 Smart Garbage Cans Enter Cuihu [Park]' (Zhou 2011). Of course, smart-cans! After all, this was an era when teens sold kidneys to acquire iPhones and other coveted digital devices. Smartness was an emergent idiom of the time, indexing modernity, innovation, and global connectedness. Yet, the stated goals of the smart-can pilot project were more modest: handling growing quantities of waste, preventing the wind from blowing garbage out, containing foul odours, providing space for public service advertisements, and providing light at night so the cans and messages could still be seen. Access to the contents of the bins was restricted by locks, making it almost impossible for the large numbers of garbage pickers active in the park to identify and pull out items that could be sold as scrap. Thus, while the cans' affects were designed to help produce ecologically conscious, modern waste disposers, the project also was enclosing one of the most important material means enabling the urban poor to eke out a living in the city.

2021. When journalists and scholars turn their focus to new approaches of garbage sorting and containment, they would be wise to consider two important questions highlighted in this history. First, how are both the formal and informal infrastructures used to process waste changing in connection with new containment regimes, if at all? And second, how is the approach shifting waste workers' burdens of handling valueless waste while also shifting others' access to waste of value?

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2.4 Revisiting the Maoist 'Smart Village'

Jessica Imbach

The phenomenal rise of Chinese science fiction since the 1990s coincides with not only China's transformation into the world's second largest economy, but also growing global awareness of the environmental crisis. Several contemporary works, including the science fiction blockbuster *The Wandering Earth* (*Liulang diqiu* 流浪地球, 2019), in fact thematise climate change and other ecological problems very explicitly (Imbach 2021). Yet, an ecological perspective is central to most science fiction media. Lawrence Buell has argued that 'no genre potentially matches up with a planetary level of thinking "environment" better than science fiction does' (Buell 2009: 57). But what is perhaps particularly intriguing about science fiction is the ways it often 'thinks environment' through technology. While current debates on 'green technology' and 'clean energy' give this line of speculative imagination new urgency and relevance, science fiction also helps us locate shifting views on nature and technology in their specific historical and political contexts.

An important trope in this respect is the 'smart village', which appears mainly in socialist science fiction from the 1950s and 1960s. Agricultural themes of course dominated socialist literature until the end of the 1970s. But what makes these stories about high-tech country life and bio-engineered abundance stand out from other literary texts of this period is, among other things, not only their temporal setting in the (near-)future, but also their reliance on technology to achieve the Maoist green utopia. Although some of these texts imagine advances that seem quite absurd to us today (and we should keep in mind that many of these texts were written as 'children's literature'), these visions of techno-pastoral utopianism continue to resonate with current articulations of state environmentalism and its promotion of 'ecological civilisation' (*shengtai wenming* 生态文明).

The most well-known smart village of the 1950s can be found in Tian Han's play *Rhapsody of the Ming Tomb Reservoir* (*Shisanling shuiku changxiangqu* 十三陵水库畅想曲, 1958/2000). Its last act offers a rare explicit vision of China's socialist future as it was being envisioned in mainstream culture production during the industrialisation efforts of the Great Leap Forward. In Tian Han's industrialised arcadia, China has found a cure for cancer and an anti-ageing formula, everybody can afford folkloric silk gowns, people travel in private helicopters and 'Beijing' cars, there is commercial space travel, and when people want to enjoy a scenic ride on the reservoir lake they have 'atomic boats' at their disposal. The play gained fame, as it was that same year turned into a movie directed by Jin Shan 金山, which also included live footage of Mao and other party leaders participating in the construction of the reservoir. The cinematic adaption develops a more explicit agricultural utopia by adding, for instance, a genetically engineered tree that can simultaneously produce a variety of different fruits.

The subgenre of the scientific discovery novel captures perhaps even more vividly the unfettered scientific romanticism and techno-pastoral aspirations of the 1950s. An interesting example is Chi Shuchang's short story *Elephants without Trunks* (*Gediao bizi de daxiang* 格调鼻子的大象, 1956), which centres on a farm village in the Gobi desert that has developed a method for breeding pigs the size of elephants and also produces other culinary delights such as oranges with invisible skins. Such techno-pastoral dreams were, however, not limited to remote and rural locations. For instance, Zheng Wenguang's 郑文光 utopian vignette *Ode to Communism* (*Gongchanzhuyi changxiangqu* 共产主义畅想曲), which was written in 1958, but describes the 30th anniversary of the People's Republic in 1979, depicts not only a new world illuminated by a second artificial sun, but also describes how Beijing 'is no longer a crowded and noisy city, but has become a beautiful garden' (Zheng 1958: 24, 22).

Today, these techno-pastoral narratives remind us of the large discrepancy between the utopian aspirations of the Maoist industrial revolution and its devastating humanitarian and environmental consequences. They reflect not only the Maoist idealisation of the countryside, but also an instrumental and anthropocentric view of nature as an infinite and malleable resource. However, we can trace a similar conjunction of industrial utopianism with pastoral romanticism in current articulations of state environmentalism. Xi Jinping's ubiquitously quoted phrase 'blue rivers and green mountains, are mountains of silver and gold' (*lüshui qingshan jiushi jinshan yinshan* 绿水青山就是金山银山) may sound benign, but its poetic rhetoric belies the much more martial reality of China's new 'green technocracy' and its use of technological means for environmentally unsustainable and politically coercive ends (Li and Shapiro 2020). The continued relevance of Maoist eco-utopianism is also made explicit in the conceptualisation of the current stage of socialist development with

Chinese characteristics as 'ecological civilisation,' which, as numerous Chinese think tanks and party historians have elaborated, is seen as a continuation of Mao's 'industrial civilisation' (*gongye wenming* 工业文明).

In contemporary science fiction, however, we can encounter a darker and more ambivalent take on techno-pastoralism. For instance, Han Song's recently published *Mountain Camp* (*Shanzhai* 山寨, 2020) is a mysterious fable about a group of writers and literary scholars who go to a conference in a remote research centre in the mountains and become the only survivors of some inexplicable Armageddon event.[1] In a certain sense, it is an allegory on the limits of literature to understand the world – the title, which in contemporary Chinese means 'knock-off' also alludes to the story's play on imitation and originality – and the participants at one point bemoan the fact that no science fiction writer was invited to the conference to make sense of their absurd predicament. But the story also stages a confrontation with the techno-pastoral fantasies of the past, although in Han Song's industrialised landscape AK47s melt into 'warped Arabic numerals' and deer have no skulls and so their brain matter 'cascades over their bodies like a waterfall' (p. 21). With technology and nature constantly shapeshifting and mutating in unpredictable and incomprehensible ways, *Mountain Camp* is probably closer to Lovecraftian horror than Maoist eco-utopianism. It depicts a 'thinking environment' that stands in sharp contrast to the environmental thought of 'ecological civilisation'.

Note

1. An interview with Han Song on *Mountain Camp* and a short introduction by Song Mingwei, to whom also go my thanks for graciously sending me a copy of the story, can be found here: http://www.chinawriter.com.cn/n1/2020/0701/c404080-31765879.html

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CHAPTER 3

Food Cultures

3.1 Repositioning Potatoes in the PRC

Jakob Klein

In 2015, China's Ministry of Agriculture announced a strategy to transform the white potato (*Solanum tuberosum*) into a staple food for the Chinese nation. Policy documents and promotional literature allege the benefits of raising the potato to the status of grain staple on a par with rice, wheat, and maize. These include furthering national self-sufficiency in grain, helping to alleviate rural poverty, boosting the nutritional health of the population, promoting environmental sustainability in agriculture, and modernising food production.

In this article, which draws on two previous publications (Klein 2019; 2020), I do not assess the successes or claimed benefits of potato 'stapleisation' (*malingshu zhulianghua* 马铃薯主粮化/ *zhushihua* 主食化). Suffice it to say that there is no evidence of a national surge in potato-eating since 2015. Instead, I explore some of the cultural dimensions of the state's attempts to convince the Chinese to eat more potatoes and embrace them as a staple food. How have potatoes historically fit in Chinese foodways, what new meanings do potato-promoters attempt to attach to the tuber, and what might potato promotions tell us about the role of the party-state in China's contemporary food culture?

It is hard to overstate the importance of grains and grain foods to Chinese politics, culture, and social life. The success of the harvests of rice, wheat and (at one time) millet, and their collection, storage, and distribution have been

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central to the operations of Chinese states and their attempts to realise the long-standing moral imperative to 'nourish the people' (*yangmin* 养民). In households, cooked grain (*fan* 饭) has been the core feature of daily meals. Typically, people cook and serve unseasoned grain separately from side dishes (*cai* 菜) of vegetables, legumes, and animal flesh. Grain has been vital to the sustenance of human life in this historically largely agrarian society. The sharing and eating of cooked grain foods also nourish relationships of family and kinship. Offerings of cooked grain similarly sustain the ancestors and strengthen their ties with living descendants. *Fan*, be it of rice, wheat, millet, or maize, has stood for 'food' itself.

This is not to deny the significance of taro, sweet potatoes, and other roots and tubers. The white potato originated in the Andes and was first introduced in China in the 17th century. By the end of the 19th century, it had become a widespread crop, especially in many inland and highland areas in the south-west, west, and north. Here, its resistance to drought and frost made it popular among farmers, who exchanged it with other farmers and developed numerous local potato cultivars, some of which have recently become state-protected heirloom varieties. Unlike grains, until the 1990s potatoes received little attention from Chinese states or crop scientists. Nevertheless, by the 2000s China's annual potato crop was larger than that of any other country.

Known by a variety of names, including *yangyu* 洋芋 ('foreign tuber'), *tudou* 土豆 ('earth bean'), and *shanyaodan* 山药蛋 ('yam egg'), white potatoes have become integrated into regional cuisines. Popular potato foods include 'stir-fried potato slivers' (*chao tudousi* 炒土豆丝) and 'three fresh flavours of the earth' (*di san xian* 地三鲜), a dish of sauteed potatoes, aubergines, and green peppers common in China's north-east. In parts of Yunnan in the south-west, vendors of barbecued and deep-fried potatoes line the streets of towns and cities, serving them with a variety of dipping sauces they often make themselves.

However, the potato has typically not been regarded in China as a staple food, but as an ingredient fit for side dishes or snacks. Where and when it has been consumed as a core staple, it has often been treated as one of necessity, not of choice. People in Yunnan have told me that they were 'raised on maize and potatoes', meaning that they grew up in an impoverished, mountainous area. One young woman who had moved to Kunming, the provincial capital, described to me how she was ridiculed by friends in Kunming for being a potato lover from north-east Yunnan, a notoriously poor part of the province.

State-backed promotions of potatoes encourage the acceptance of the potato-as-staple through productions such as popular science books, cookbooks, trade fairs, and a documentary film, *A Bite of Potato* (*Shejian Shang de Malingshu* 舌尖上的马铃薯, 2015) made in the style of the popular *A Bite of China* series. A key language deployed in these promotions is that of nutrition and health. Potatoes are lauded for being a great source of potassium, vitamin C, and other minerals and vitamins. Some books even claim that the potato helps people to keep slim, avoid hypertension, and protect against certain cancers – claims

Figure 3.1: Deep-fried potatoes at a Kunming street market, 2019. Photograph courtesy of the author.

meant to appeal especially to relatively affluent, sedentary urban populations. The potato, from this perspective, is a modern superfood.

Another language used is culinary, suggesting that people's aversion to the potato as a staple food is not only to do with its symbolic associations with poverty, but also that its taste and texture may not fit easily with Chinese embodied senses of a proper staple food. One culinary approach taken is that potatoes are easily integrated into existing diets: most of the potato staples promoted are familiar foods such as steamed bread or noodles, where a percentage of the wheat or rice flour ordinarily used has been substituted with potato flour. But some of the promotional media celebrate traditional potato staples from rural inland China, such as 'potato dough balls' (*yangyu momo* 洋芋馍馍) from Shaanxi and 'potatoes boiled in an iron wok' (*tieguo zhu yangyu* 铁锅煮洋芋) from Gansu.

Potato promotion is in some ways reminiscent of the social engineering of the high socialist decades of the 1950s–1970s. Yet despite the flourishing of high socialist and nationalist rhetoric under Xi Jinping, the party-state's commitment to a 'socialist market economy' is evident in the potato promotions. Chinese dietary culture is to be modified through state guidance and market mechanisms, not through central planning and rationing. Some of the cookbooks and pamphlets do suggest that it is a citizen's patriotic duty to eat potatoes to enhance the nation's health and its food security. Nevertheless, state

promoters of potato-eating are essentially competing in a marketplace of ideas about diet, health, and cooking, one which includes, for example, low-carbohydrate diets that advocate avoiding potatoes to lose weight.

Even the emphasis on local Chinese potato traditions in some promotional material is less an element of state-sponsored patriotism than a recognition by potato-promoters of the growing desires among middle-stratum Chinese for the 'authentic', 'pure' foods of impoverished rural inlands. These desires are themselves driven in part by a crisis-ridden food system that the party-state has notoriously struggled to regulate. Together with potato 'stapleisation' itself, such desires have created new opportunities for entrepreneurs, local officials, and gastronomes in marginalised areas such as north-east Yunnan to repackage their potatoes and potato foods to tourists and urban markets as emblems of local heritage and traditional cuisine, even as these actors may themselves be uneasy about being branded as 'potato lovers'.

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3.2 Feeding the Future: The Politics of Aspiration in a Chinese Market Street

Samuel Berlin

> *I wanted to choose an industry where people needed the product every day, so I decided to make food, because people have to eat every day. The way I see it, regardless of how bad the economy is or how bad it might become, I can make food. So, for example, the most inconspicuous thing on the street, mantou* 馒头, […] *that is the kind of thing people really need in their lives. Even if you don't buy anything else, you still have to buy mantou.*

Doing my doctoral research on Taohua Street,[1] a fading market street in a Shandong county seat was, in a way, easy. As Mr Cai, the shopkeeper in the quote above, notes, *everyone has to eat*, everyone including me, and I ate my way through fieldwork. I arrived in Shandong interested in why people choose to work for themselves – what the aspirations are that guide them out of factories and into the stalls that supply local workers and canteens. As I visited shops for breakfast buns and noodle dinners, I found myself at one point in a broad set of relations that incorporates self-employed small traders into a massive

economic project. People like Mr Cai cope with the precarity engendered by capitalist economics by seeking niches. They make themselves important to the routines of local workers and residents in the areas surrounding Taohua Street and quite literally maintain the workforce by feeding workers from nearby factories and offices. In doing so, they become nodes of production and consumption that produce value and keep it travelling around the economy.

Small-scale entrepreneurs (*getihu* 个体户) have historically played a major role in Chinese economic reform. They were pioneers who, during a period of mass collectivisation, left the countryside to peddle wares in urban areas despite anti-capitalist stigma (Hsu 2007). Today, however, they form a much smaller part of the economy and exist lower down the pecking order. How should we understand the relationship between small-scale entrepreneurial aspiration and the situation of these traders within a national, developmental, and globalised economy?

In my 2021 thesis,[2] I argue that aspiration is a major motivator behind developmental labour, guiding workers through the vicissitudes of a tumultuous economy. This may seem obvious – of course people work to pursue better futures – but aspiration highlights the contradictions inherent to the coexistence of rapid development and stalling social mobility. On Taohua Street, aspirations appear quite separate from desires for fame or fortune, when what can be desired is limited by what appears realistic for people of limited resources, and aspirations are often modest or even experienced vicariously on behalf of other people's futures. People either delay their own gratification in favour of what appears to be a predestined triumphant future for the economy, the country, and future generations, or they learn to desire within the bounds of what is possible in their circumstances. Both produce action to realise one's own interests, constricted as they may be. This action, I argue, is political. It represents an *everyday class politics* that can be hard to see when the enemy is not an exploitative boss but the low standard of living that development will remedy.

On Taohua Street, most people see their jobs as, well, jobs. They are a means to an end. Mr Li, who rises at 3am every day to make tofu and soymilk for the breakfast rush, confided in me while stirring coagulant into fresh soymilk early one morning that *he does not actually care for tofu*. Migrant families from Qinghai and Shanxi, who set up shops selling Lanzhou pulled noodles (*lamian* 拉面) and fried bread (*bing* 饼), complain that they had little choice but to learn to make their local delicacies and move eastward to earn a living, even as they shiver at open counters through biting Shandong winters working at jobs they hate, even if their children cannot join them in their toil.

In contrast, there are others who see their shops as luxuries bringing freedom beyond the shackles of the factory or the farm. Self-employment allows shopkeepers to stretch their schedules to fit their families' needs. The shops also provide opportunities to pursue creativity and sociality. Compared to where these traders have been, this is the good life.

Figure 3.2a: Photograph of Taohua Street in Autumn. Photograph courtesy of the author.

Ms Xu's parents put their savings and much free labour into supporting their daughter's sushi and curry shop catering to local schoolchildren, and Ms Xu happily dedicates her meagre free time to developing new recipes. Mrs Yang, a retired teacher, set up a shop to sell her favourite treats – fruits, nuts, and cakes. Perched on her open shopfront, she chats with former students and their parents as they walk home or peruse the market. Friends come to catch up over walnuts and dried persimmons while Mrs Yang waits for customers. But the shop is not just a hobby. Mrs Yang uses it to lure in customers and, as they pay, she delivers her life insurance sales pitch, using the profits to top up her small pension.

Living in a turbulent economy, few on Taohua Street understand their jobs as permanent. They jump between workplaces, in and out of salaried positions (dagong 打工), sometimes working for themselves or setting up businesses with spouses, siblings, or cousins, but always with an exit plan. Exit plans and side-hustles are a focus of conversation with friends, neighbours, and relatives. Perhaps some shopkeepers will return to the factories when their businesses finally become untenable. Others will move away, maybe elsewhere in Shandong or, they dream, back home. Few are drawn to the megacities, so often presumed to possess boundless magnetism for people looking to better their fates. They imagine Beijing, Shanghai, and even Qingdao or Jinan as too fast-paced, too expensive, and too unliveable and unwelcoming.

Figure 3.2b: Image shows a motivational poster in a jianbing guozi 煎饼果子 (savoury pancake) shop. It reads 'Those who conquer the world will be like this: In the beginning, they will they will try to find paradise in their dreams, but in the end, when they are unable to find it, they "will build it themselves. – Eat a jianbing guozi and go conquer the world!'" Photograph courtesy of the author.

For those on the lower rungs of this economic system, one's own future is unreliable. The economy will continue to boom and bust. But in this developmental context, the future of the nation *feels* certain. This is, in the vein of Massumi's (2010) description of the paradoxical logic of threat, another 'future birth of the affective fact'. Here, difficult labouring presents are legitimated and motivated by knowledge that development *will* come, development that is of course created by difficult labour carried out in the present.

When possible paths forward feel limited, this foreknowledge of a general future to come enables the formation of aspirations that can be acted upon through labour. As I see it, the actions of the traders of Taohua Street in the present amount to an *everyday politics* of building a better future in pursuit of these traders' desires and dreams, tempered as they may be by the harsh realities they face. This striving, this labouring for a better future, might not resemble the mass politics of yesteryear. Still, against the limitations of the present, aspiration motivates action in service of one's own interests or those of valued others. The everyday politics of aspiration has formed the basis for China's rapid

development. These moments of agency may pass without notice, but leave their trace in your bowl of curry, bag of soymilk, or spring onion pancake.

Notes

1. Pseudonyms have been used for all names.
2. My doctoral thesis was titled *Developmental Politics and Everyday Life: Working and Aspiring on Taohua Street* and was completed at the School of Geographical Sciences, University of Bristol in 2021.

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3.3 China's Eating Videos and the Rising Number of Single-Person Households in the Age of Urbanisation

Caroline Yiqian Wang

Amidst the global food crisis and skyrocketing trade tensions, the Chinese government has begun to wage war on domestic eating videos and live streams (*chibo* 吃播). Last August, Chinese Central Television (CCTV) reproached *chibo* for encouraging over-consumption, promoting disordered dietary patterns, and losing 'traditional Chinese virtues' of thrift and frugality. Other party-state mouthpieces followed, criticising this rampant phenomenon with President Xi Jinping's remarks on Chinese food security and anti-waste campaigns. According to the *People's Daily* (2020), more than 1.26 million eating clips were posted on *Douyin* (the Chinese version of Tik Tok), 25% of which wooed viewers with 'big stomach king' labels (*dawei wang* 大胃王). The total viewing volume of these videos hit 33.2 billion, with several clips reaching over 7 billion views.

The question then arises: given the many entertainment options at their fingertips, why are contemporary Chinese citizens obsessed with watching people devouring on screen? This essay briefly introduces the development of *chibo* in China and discusses its sociocultural values under the backdrop of Chinese post-reform urbanisation.

Chibo is a direct translation from the Korean term, *mukbang* (the combination of *meokneun*/eating and *bangsong*/broadcast). In 2014, one CCTV news programme introduced the 34-year-old Korean *mukbang* influencer 'the Diva' (Park Seo-Yeon), who earned as much as 9,000 US dollars per month by eating huge quantities of food in front of the camera every day. The programme also commented on the promising market of Korean mukbang industry and showed multiple clips; soon after, Korean eating live streams began to go viral in China (Choe 2019; Qu 2021). Initially, domestic video-sharing websites (like Youku-Tudou, Ac Fun, and Bilibili) only 'transported'[1] *mukbang* recordings. The localisation of *mukbang* did not occur until the government espoused the domestic live-streaming industry and e-commerce in late 2015 (Qu 2021). In less than a year, *chibo* was flourishing and had inundated major live-streaming platforms, including Douyu, Kuaishou, and Huya. These companies signed up popular broadcasters and marketed them as internet celebrities to loyal fans. Video-sharing websites continue to be crucial venues where viewers can see people eat Chinese stir-fries, fast food, snacks, etc. According to an independent media poll (Fengniao Survey 2020), all 2,445 respondents had seen *chibo* before, with 77.13% of them identifying as frequent viewers. Undeniably, *chibo* was a burgeoning media industry before the official criticism eventually hit last August. Responding to this signal with strict self-censorship, major media platforms immediately took down the eating videos and labelled both 'big stomach king' and '*chibo*' as sensitive keywords that block all search results.

Returning to the discussion, why do these videos attract viewership? First of all, regarding *chibo* as a kind of gluttony is a misinterpretation. Most broadcasters do not start eating right away but begin with placing and introducing dozens of dishes. Having clean and organised plating is the basic requirement for *chibo*; to gain more clicks, broadcasters often prepare visually appealing and diversified cuisines (Choe 2019). Such table arrangements closely resemble prototypical Chinese family banquets. Due to China's agriculture-centred and lineage-based history, extended families with generations living under one roof often gather around a large table and share 8–16 communal dishes (Farquhar 2002). Meals are further interpreted as cultural signs and everyday performances: multi-course banquets generally embody affluence and well-being, while single servings signify scarcity and misery (Farquhar 2002; Qu 2021).

However, after forty years of reform and opening-up, China's household structure has undergone dramatic changes, simultaneously affecting the country's eating routines. In 2015, the percentage of single-person households had risen to 12.57% (Li, Fan and Song 2020). These 'empty-nest youths' with similar demographic characteristics – in the range of 20–35 years old, living alone in first-tier cities, busy commuters, having few social contacts, experiencing high levels of anxiety and stress – often have no choice but to adopt the undesirable, humble mode of isolated eating since multi-course meals are neither practical nor convenient (Liu and Luo 2019). 'Big stomach king' *chibo* offers a virtual alternative. Watching broadcasters finishing up a whole table of foods helps

these solitary city dwellers temporarily escape from their humble meals and brings them back to hearty family banquets. These eating shows satisfy their gastronomic voyeurism and vicarious desires for enjoying various tastes and an opulent life.

Apart from sensory pleasures, interactions and companionship involved in *chibo* appeal to empty-nest youths as well. In Chinese food cultures, sociality lies in the heart of dining. Group eating enables participants to form parasocial relationships and tighten up emotional bounds. Unfortunately, eating alone deprives modern citizens of their opportunities to have intimate conversations and receive affective support (Lasmane and Antonova 2019; Li 2021). This lack of interpersonal engagement can be made up by multimodal communications facilitated by *chibo*. Typing in live chat rooms, listening to broadcasters' responses, and reading other viewers' comments all promote the active sociality of single eaters. These live chats 'link online and offline worlds' and transform isolated eating into a jointly conducted activity (Choe 2019: 2). Real-time flying comments over uploaded videos (*danmu* 弹幕) further shatter geographic and temporal boundaries between virtual audiences. These virtual chit-chats between viewers are very similar to those informal discourses that happen at real dinner tables. In other words, *chibo* not only replenishes the missing dishes but also fills in the place of separated friends and family members.

During the Covid-19 lockdowns, many broadcasters started to include live stream cooking in their *chibo* (Qu 2021). This phenomenon reflects another transformation of Chinese foodways in the age of rapid urbanisation – the loss of home cooking inheritance. Like most food cultures, home kitchens are pivotal to 'authentic' cooking methods and unique family flavours. Nevertheless, as teenagers' participation in housework gives way to academic workloads, and city migration brings forward generational separations, few people in China today spend time in home kitchens with experienced family members. Many millennial youths coming to alien cities barely know how to cook properly. As a result, when they were trapped in their single apartments during the pandemic without the possibility of takeaways or going to restaurants, preparing food became a huge issue. On spotting this, some *chibo* broadcasters quickly launched amateur cooking shows. Novices as well, these broadcasters fumbled with simple stir-fries and stews like most young viewers do. Surprisingly, slip-ups (*fanche* 翻车) became amusing, informal, and relatable moments. Many viewers post 'It's exactly me' or 'It's as if I saw myself cooking' in danmu. Since broadcasters have to 'eat their fruits,' their *chibo* videos are also seen as reliable tests for recipes. If one dish is easy to make and looks delicious, viewers can replicate it by following the broadcaster's recipe. For some empty-nest youths, *chibo* became a crucial venue for acquiring cooking skills from peers, rescuing them from the fractured lineage of home cooking and plight of solitary city lives.

Instead of clamping down on *chibo* and condemning it as a crime of waste and harmful entertainment, I would like to regard it as a mass cultural phenomenon

in response to the country's rapid urbanisation and its associated livelihood issues. Three essential elements of current eating broadcasts – overeating, multimodal interactivity, and amateur cooking tutorials – target urgent needs of empty-nest eaters in major cities across China. Taking a big picture approach, we should also consider the influences of city migration upon traditional Chinese eating patterns and home cooking lineages.

Note

1. 'Transport' (*banyun* 搬运) refers to the activity where Chinese internet users who either live overseas or have access to virtual private networks (VPN) record or download foreign videos and reupload them on domestic websites.

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3.4 Tasting Home in Henan: Exploring Identity Through Shaoguo

Erin Thomason

Aunt Wang had accompanied her son and his young family as domestic support while her son worked in an urban area. When her first daughter-in-law left because of divorce shortly after the birth of her grandson, she took on the boy's full-time care in the absence of his mother. When I asked her what kinds of foods she ate and how she cooked them, she laughed and said, 'Me? I am so *luohou* 落后 (backward or uneducated), I still *shaoguo* 烧锅.'

Shaoguo is both a method and an appliance specifically constructed in Henan homes.[1] The term *shaoguo* is used specifically in Henan and neighbouring provinces to refer to the use of a large stove that burns agricultural refuse to heat a large wok.

I had come to study in a small village in rural Henan province as part of my doctoral research studies investigating the lives of left-behind children and their caretakers, but it seemed that the only conversation that locals wanted to have was about food. I came to realise that food matters not only in the *what*, but also in the *how* and *who*: that is, how is a good meal made? And who is responsible for its making?

I have focused on the method of *shaoguo* in particular because of *shaoguo's* multivalence to local people. At once a superior and inferior cooking method,

Figure 3.4: Photograph of a *shaoguo*. Photograph courtesy of the author.

it can represent the complex ways that rural people feel about themselves and their way of life.

Biomass stoves, because they make use of agricultural waste and dried twigs, are assumed to be the most basic of technologies and require only a primitive kind of knowledge. Gas and electric stoves, on the other hand, reliant on purchased materials and electric or natural gas infrastructures, were assumed to be an ideal of modernity.

Meaning 'backward', 'undeveloped', or 'to lag behind', the term *luohou* is inherently comparative. To 'be behind', one must always be behind something or someone. *Luohou* is utilised in conversations about economic development. This echoes scholarly and popular accounts describing rural space as failures of modernity.

Rural ways of cooking are – as the conversation with Aunt Wang suggests – imagined as barriers to rural reconstruction and technological advancement. Several provinces have launched campaigns to change rural cooking practices, citing air quality concerns and environmental waste.

Biomass stoves were also understood as dirty because they required the storage of agricultural waste. Dried corn stalks and piles of dried cobs usually sat in the kitchen space, attracting mice and spreading a fine dust throughout the kitchen. This dirt was criticised as unsightly and contrary to an orderly and neat rural space.

Despite the widespread acknowledgement of the failures of biomass stoves, however, most rural women, particularly older rural women, continued to cook with recycled agricultural waste and even preferred this way of cooking. *Shaoguo* was economical, making use of the corn and wheat waste products that were otherwise unused. *Shaoguo* also used a thick iron cooking surface and therefore imparted iron into the daily soups made in them. This nutritional content was important for poor families who did not have regular access to iron-rich foods.

Perhaps most importantly, *shaoguo* created a superior flavour in staple foods. *Shaoguo* is useful in the cooking of two Henan staples: *mo* (steamed bread in Henan dialect, *mantou* 馒头 in Mandarin) and *hetang* (soup in the Henan dialect, made from boiled water and flour, *miantang* 面烫 in Mandarin).[2]

For wheat-consuming Henan people, these humble staples were not only the food they most enjoyed, but also the foods which felt most like home. Migrants returning from the rice-based cuisine of the south expressed cravings for local staples. In one family meal I attended, the migrant Dawei, recently returned from Guangzhou, stated that even though he did not like the flavour, the bland thick soup, *hetang*, was a part of an experience of being home. 'When I am home I drink *hetang*, it's not that I like (*xihuan* 喜欢) it, it's that I am used to (*xiguan* 习惯) it.'

In multigenerational families affected by migration, older women undertake the majority of food preparation while their daughters-in-law work in the townships and urban centres. Despite the physical demands placed upon older women, these novel divisions of labour facilitate the conservation of traditional

cooking methods such as *shaoguo*. Recently a spate of new urbanised housing units has radically changed the area immediately adjacent to my fieldsite, yet, with few exceptions, new housing in the village continues to have biomass fuel stoves. Younger couples expect the older women of the family to cook most of the meals and thus provide a kitchen optimised for rural cuisine. One family I knew owned an urban-style apartment in the township with a modern gas-fuelled kitchen, but they stayed in their village house so that the older woman could continue to cook in a familiar kitchen with a biofuel stove.

What do cooking methods tell us about belonging in rural spaces affected by migration? For rural people, at once excluded from modernity because of poverty and welcomed into rural life for the same reasons, *shaoguo* is an exemplary indicator of their very exclusion from larger orders of urban or cosmopolitan belonging.

In rural China, *shaoguo* produces unique affordances for community and family belonging – throwing the regional differences in food preferences into stark relief. As particularly immobile and even impractical, biomass stoves are ill-suited to densely populated and fast-paced urban life, creating stark differences in the everyday food of rural and urban areas. Displaced from familiar sensations, returning migrants desire nostalgic foods from their childhood to re-enact a familiar sense-scape and recreate home even if much of their rural homeland has changed. These desires, shared by migrants returning home, have the potential to create a consciousness about rural conditions that may not have been possible without the displacement of migration.

Migration has radically reconfigured gender- and age-based roles and has helped to solidify older women's roles as the provisioners of food. This has supported the conservation of 'traditional' cooking methods like *shaoguo*, so that newly built homes continue to have biomass stoves despite many younger women's concerted efforts to obtain more modern appliances such as washing machines and refrigerators. As these older women are also cooking and caring for young grandchildren, they hold a prominent role in socialising the next generation into what good food tastes, smells, and feels like.

Shaoguo is at once empowering and disenfranchising, as *shaoguo* is imparted with both positive and negative valences. Despite disparaging labels of backward or dirty, older women in rural Henan maintain creative resistance in their cooking tradition that displays the profound resiliency of taste, comfort, and habit. *Shaoguo* is central to the practice of creating home.

Notes

1. In other areas in China, cooking fires may be referred to by the more general term *shaohuo*, to tend a fire (see Oxfeld 2017: 54). In Henan and its neighbouring provinces, however, the replacement of *huo* with *guo* makes the term specifically about cooking, usually referring to the improved cooking stove I describe here.

2. In Jiatian Village and other areas of Henan, people speak a non-standard dialect. While the dialect is a derivative of Mandarin, many words such as *mo* and *hetang* are regionally specific.

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CHAPTER 4

Children and Parenting

4.1 What is a 'Good Child'? Raising Children in a Changing China

Jing Xu

In the summer of 2011, I packed up my life and an unruly toddler and returned to China to do field research at a private Shanghai preschool. It was an interesting time to be a new parent, particularly one living between China and America. Yale law professor Amy Chua had just published her memoir 'Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother,' and so-called Asian parenting styles – involving ferocious discipline, frequent shaming, and even corporal punishment, all in the single-minded pursuit of academic success – were a hot topic in mainstream American media.

Unsurprisingly, Chua's book was quickly translated into Chinese – but with an interesting twist. In place of Chua's original eye-catching title, the Chinese edition was entitled simply 'Mothering in the United States.' Even more surprising to me was the memoir's icy reception across the Pacific. By the time I arrived in Shanghai, many mothers in the preschool where I was conducting my fieldwork had already read the book, yet when I asked what they thought of it, they said that Chua's parenting style did not resonate with their experiences at all. If anything, they found the 'tiger mother' approach rather depressing, if not outright bizarre.

As a fellow millennial Chinese parent, I shared their sentiment. The 'tiger mother' archetype capitalised on and reinforced certain long-held stereotypes about Chinese people in the West, but many of these stereotypes are long out of date. What I hoped to discover through my fieldwork was how this change had taken place. What does it mean to be a good child in 21st-century China? And what, if not strict obedience, do today's Chinese parents want from their kids?

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Back in the early 1990s, when the anthropologist David Y.H. Wu surveyed Shanghai families about their parenting practices, he found that raising obedient children was still the paramount priority (Wu 1996). A good child was an obedient child, something Wu attributed to a mix of influences. On the one hand, he saw parents' focus on discipline as a response to widespread concern at the prospect of a generation of 'spoiled' only children. On the other, he saw in it the influence of what he called China's 'authoritarian, collective, and nationalistic' culture (Wu 1996: 25).

By the time I conducted my own fieldwork some two decades later, however, I found a very different parenting landscape (Xu 2017). When asked what moral traits they valued most in their children, 41% of my respondents said 'sociableness', followed by 'kindness and caring' and 'independence'. 'Obedience' was the least popular choice: just 2% of parents said it was the most important trait for their children to learn (Xu 2017: 157).

These results hint at a changing conception of what it means to be a good child in China. Although concern about spoiled singleton children never went away, strict disciplinary solutions – known in academic circles as 'authoritarian parenting' – have fallen out of favour in the country. Instead, since the early 2010s, Chinese parents have sought to instil in their children good social behaviours and a sense of independence.

This process should not be understood as a linear development towards so-called Western, individualistic parenting styles. It is true that 'Western' child-rearing approaches have been repackaged and sold to urban middle-class consumers as authoritative and scientific. It is also true that these texts, with their emphasis on children's autonomy and socio-emotional intelligence, have shaped Chinese parenting values. But Chinese parents do not blindly absorb or follow Western models. They deliberately evaluate these ideas and compare them against their own circumstances.

Chinese parents' aspiration to cultivate more sociable children, for example, did not just arise from a desire to mimic Western parenting styles; it is at least partly the product of a declining faith in academic performance as the sole determinant of their kids' future. In recent years, as competition in schools and on the job market has grown fiercer, many Chinese have come to believe that academic credentials are no longer enough to distinguish job candidates, and interpersonal skills are increasingly seen as an important indicator of a child's future success.

The desire to cultivate greater independence, meanwhile, is related to the same fears of spoiled only children that once led parents down the disciplinarian road. In particular, many young parents expressed anxiety that their children were too sheltered, and that their inner psyches had become too vulnerable. Independence thus took on new meaning: not a sign of disobedience, but of self-reliance and psychological resilience. This resilience is particularly prized given the fierce competition and challenging road parents see facing the next generation.

Yet, if parents' understanding of what makes a good child is changing, many schools' definitions of what makes a good student remain stuck in the past. Young parents looking to nurture their children's independence or preserve their creativity often have to compromise their ideals in the face of an approach to education that still prioritises conformity and obedience.

For instance, one mother expressed her concern at the preschool's penchant for putting on tightly choreographed performances. Her three-year-old son's class had spent a month rehearsing their dance routine for the Children's Day holiday. 'They're children, not athletes,' she complained. 'I would like to see them doing things naturally and spontaneously, and I think that might be more beautiful than an impeccable collective dance where every child has to move in the exact ways their teacher told them to. It's like a robot show' (Xu 2017: 165).

The school system is not the only harsh reality facing today's parents. Many of my interviewees found it particularly hard to cultivate morality in their children in a broader social environment that still encourages winning at all costs. Parents cherished the ideal that children should be innocent and pure, expressing their 'natural' goodness and kindness without being polluted by the hypocrisy and artifice of the adult world (Xu 2020). Yet they also feared that innocent, genuinely kind children would not be fit for the real society that awaits them.

That reality helps explain a seemingly contradictory phenomenon: while Chinese parents may individually reject the 'tiger mother' approach, they have spent the past decade signing their children up for ever more intense workloads and tutoring classes. In the most extreme case I witnessed during my fieldwork, a five-year-old attended eight extracurricular classes in a single weekend. But the motivation for this arms race is not necessarily intrinsic. Rather, many parents feel forced to push their children, even as they worry that raising a good child is not always the same as raising a good student. Rather than resorting to convenient cultural stereotypes, we need to understand how Chinese people navigate the dilemmas and challenges in the world's most competitive educational environment.

Middle-class parents at a private preschool in Shanghai should not be taken as representative of the entire country, but anxieties regarding what it means to raise a 'good' child in today's China are quite common whether you are in a major metropolis or rural county seat. Unfortunately, more than a decade after I began conducting my research, the problems I first observed in 2011 have only grown more acute. Chinese parents rarely want to think of themselves as authoritarian 'tiger mothers,' but they also know that the real world is no place for sheltered kittens.

Note

A version of this essay was previously published with Sixth Tone under the title 'Where Have China's "Tiger" Parents Gone?' and can be found at: https://www.sixthtone.com/news/1008749/where-have-chinas-tiger-parents-gone%3F

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4.2 Chinese Childhoods, Then and Now

Carl Kubler

Childhood in China is undergoing a revolution. On 31 May 2021, just a few years after ending the decades-old one-child policy (*yihai zhengce* 一孩政策) that had defined much of urban family planning from the 1980s until 2016, the Politburo of the CCP announced that in an effort to combat falling birthrates, a new three-child policy (*sanhai zhengce* 三孩政策) would replace the existing limit of two children allowed per family (Ni 2021). Also this year, new restrictions on online gaming for netizens under the age of 18 have erased millions in stock value from publicly traded gaming companies such as NetEase (*Wangyi* 网易) and Tencent (*Tengxun* 腾讯), as officials seek to curb gaming addictions among minors (CNN 2021). A roughly contemporaneous crackdown on for-profit after-schooling tutoring for elementary and middle school students has made even larger waves as government authorities seek to reduce financial and mental health burdens on parents and children, cratering the share prices of private education firms such as New Oriental (*Xin Dong Fang* 新东方) and TAL Education (*Hao Wei Lai* 好未来) and leading many to wonder what changes are next in store for China's youth (BBC 2021).

Although the specifics of these policies are new, efforts to reimagine and remake Chinese childhood are not. Since at least the early 20th century, Chinese thinkers and policymakers have framed the wellbeing of China's children as a key litmus test for the health of the nation. 'To understand the degree to which a particular culture is civilized,' wrote leading intellectual Hu Shi 胡适 in 1929, 'we must appraise…how it handles its children.' Essayist Lu Xun 鲁迅 similarly implored Chinese audiences to 'save the children' in his 1919 *Diary of a Madman* (*Kuangren riji* 狂人日记), calling for a modern nation led by a community of future adults not yet schooled in feudal society's cannibalistic ways. Recent historical scholarship has shown that such exhortations were more than just rhetoric, with a variety of educational programmes and social reforms aimed at improving children's welfare taking shape over the first half of the 20th century (Tillman 2018; Zarrow 2015).

Figure 4.2a: Textbook illustrations. The image on the left depicts children as soldiers, coloured in by a child from Northeast China during the Second Sino-Japanese War. The image on the right shows a rhyming lesson about children's love of guns. Source: Andong sheng jiaoyuting 安東省教育廳 [Andong Province Bureau of Education], *Changshi: Chuji xiaoxue* 常識. 初級小學 [General knowledge: Lower-elementary school] (1946, 1: 35, 36).

As I have argued elsewhere (Kubler 2018), these exhortations took a dramatic new turn in the wake of the Second Sino-Japanese War, as Communist educators placed a new labour-oriented ideal of childhood at the centre of the nation's modernising project. Prior to the 1940s, Chinese intellectuals and educators had largely treated childhood as a protected sphere, which was putatively insulated from the harsher realities of adult life, but the devastation of war had both ruptured that insulation and made the reconstruction of the nation – with the full participation of all its citizens, regardless of their age or social station – a matter of existential importance. Just as productive labour had become what one historian calls a 'condition of social citizenship' in the first half of the 20th century (Chen 2012), in the postwar years this criterion of inclusion trickled down to encompass children as well.

Visual media were particularly powerful in facilitating this inclusion and shaping children's nascent worldviews. Lower-elementary literacy textbooks combined rhyming moral lessons about patriotism and national duty with striking images of children in adult roles – as farmers, soldiers, factory workers

Figure 4.2b: Textbook cover showing children in modern, adult roles. *Gaoji xiaoxue Guoyu keben* 高級小學國語課本 [Upper-elementary Mandarin textbook], vol. 2. 1951.

– and invited young readers to imagine themselves in service of the nation. 'I love guns, I love guns' began one lesson. 'There are pistols, rifles, and even machine guns; they protect my home.' Many surviving textbooks from the era show that children actively coloured in the parts of the images that most resonated with them, while leaving other parts, like the bodies of enemy soldiers, devoid of colour.

Historians of childhood have long debated the extent to which the concept of childhood, as a separate and protected sphere of social development, is a modern societal invention, as French medievalist Philippe Ariès controversially contended in the 1960s. Regardless of which side of that debate one stands on, however, recent developments have made clear that notions of childhood in China have continued to be reimagined and redefined into the present day. Although the construction of a modern Chinese nation may have lost much of the existential urgency that motivated societal changes in the mid-20th century, as Chinese policymakers envision new contours for state and society in the 21st century, the well-being and productivity of Chinese children remain inseparable from the well-being and productivity of the Chinese nation – and arguably even more so than before.

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4.3 Children and War Education in Maoist China (1949–1976)

Orna Naftali

War culture has had tremendous power in shaping modern understandings of the nation in the PRC. But the role of children's education in the creation of that culture has received little attention (Naftali 2021: 254).[1] Most studies that have tackled this issue focus on media and literary works, and argue that in Maoist publications, youth were typically portrayed as 'small soldiers' – a trope that all but supplanted both indigenous, Confucian notions of children as incomplete human beings and modern, romantic images of the 'innocent child' introduced from the West in the first half of the 20th century. This claim echoes that of scholars who have looked at Cold War cultures elsewhere in the world and argue that in countries of the Eastern Bloc, children were accorded

more aggressive roles than in the West, where the myth of the 'defenceless child' predominated mainstream culture. In a recent article in the *Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth* (Naftali 2021), I challenge this assumption by highlighting the complex nature of the discourse about children, youth, and political violence in Maoist-era China.[2]

The roots of modern Chinese debates about the role of children in military struggle can be traced to the first half of the 20th century. Most scholars (see, e.g. Farquhar 1999; Donald 2005; de Giorgi 2014; Kauffman 2020; Zheng 2021) nonetheless maintain that the promotion of children's engagement against foreign and domestic enemies in the 1930s–1940s opened the way for a full-scale militarisation of childhood in the Mao era. My study elaborates on this thesis by examining war narratives in PRC middle-school history textbooks and discussions about 'war education' in general media publications and pedagogical journals of the 1950s–1970s.

My analysis reveals the existence of conflicting ideas of childhood and military aggression throughout the period in question. In the 1950s, PRC education journals conveyed the notion that children should be taught about the politics of war if they are to be trained for their role as future revolutionary fighters (see e.g. Figure 4.3a). Yet, educators did not necessarily cast youngsters in the role of 'small soldiers'. During the Korean War (1951–1953), for instance, children's publications sought to teach students to 'hate the US imperialists' and 'beat American arrogance'. However, some educators argued that exposing children of all ages to information about American 'military atrocities' could weaken children's characters and willingness to fight, thereby damaging their sense of national pride. Others promoted a view of childhood couched in developmental psychology, according to which children are more vulnerable emotionally and therefore must not become involved in – or exposed to – information about war brutality. Accordingly, the middle-school history textbook used in Chinese schools in the 1950s described war as the business of adults. It portrayed youth as victims of political conflict rather than as active fighters, and avoided graphic depictions of military violence (Naftali 2021: 259–263).

These features can be explained by the fact that in the early years of the PRC, the field of children's education was still led and populated by Republican-era intellectuals, who may have adopted the socialist notion of children as political agents, but held to imported liberal and psychologised notions of childhood innocence or indigenous, Confucian perceptions of children as 'incomplete' human beings. That said, a conflicted view of children and violence was evident in subsequent decades as well, even as Chinese society became more militarised (Naftali 2021: 263).

The early 1960s witnessed a shift in the way PRC thinkers regarded war education, a transformation that can be traced to broader developments in both the global and domestic arenas. As China became involved in a border war in India and was preparing for a potential conflict with US forces in Vietnam in the south and the Soviet Union in the north, Mao Zedong was also

Figure 4.3a: Zhang Lin 张琳 (1956). 'Tomorrow I will be a defender of the territorial sky of the motherland.' Source: China Visual Arts Project, University of Westminster.

concerned that policies issued by the CCP after the debacle of the Great Leap Forward (1958–1961) exhibited signs of 'Soviet revisionism'. To counter this trend, Mao launched a 'socialist education program' (1963), which employed military models to reintroduce 'collectivism, patriotism and socialism' into Chinese society and schools. The middle-school history textbook of this period included lengthier, more detailed discussions of military violence, while highlighting historical incidents in which youth were said to take part in the fight against domestic and external enemies. Nonetheless, the early 1960s book consigned youth auxiliary roles such as fetching food and water for adult combatants (Naftali 2021: 263–265).

The launch of the Cultural Revolution in 1966 brought adolescents to the forefront of domestic political struggle in a very real sense. Textbooks produced during this period correspondingly highlighted the leading role of youth in military fighting. For instance, a 1973 book describes a scene during the first Opium War (1839–1842), in which British soldiers allegedly 'escaped in shame' and 'knelt on the ground begging for mercy' from Chinese adult and 'youth (*shaonian* 少年)' militia forces. Notably, depictions of the same scene in the 1950s textbook did not mention youth at all, while the 1960s version produced prior to the CR assigned youth a much less active role in the fighting (Naftali 2021: 266).

Even as the 'small soldier' trope was rigorously promoted in Cultural Revolution textbooks, it would be wrong to extrapolate that educators across the

country necessarily embraced this view. Indeed, reprimands circulating in PRC media publications up to the mid-1970s warned against the 'stubborn tendency' of certain educators to 'over-protect' students of all ages from horrific war stories due to the 'false notion of children's innocence'. These admonitions indicate that a notion of childhood as a time of vulnerability lingered among some educators, even as Chinese teenagers participated in extreme acts of aggression against their teachers and other authority figures in the initial years of the Cultural Revolution.

These findings suggest that 'the idea of children and youth as "small soldiers" was never an unstated, assumed truth in Maoist-era education' (Naftali 2021: 268). Instead, it constituted a locus of continual debate between disparate views of childhood, pedagogy, and violence. My research further illustrates that during the Cold War era, idealised and often conflicting notions of childhood maintained by educators in socialist countries such as China were not in fact very different from those found on the other side of the political divide.

Notes

1. The term *children* refers here to persons aged 6–18 years old (designated in modern Chinese as *ertong* 儿童), while 'youth' refers to those at the middle school stage (ages 12–18), often designated in modern Chinese as *shaonian* 少年.
2. This piece is adapted from Naftali, Orna. 2021. Celebrating violence? Children, youth, and war education in Maoist China (1949–76). *Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth* 14 (2): 254–273.

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4.4 Social Media Discourse on Stay-at-Home Fathers in China: Full-Time Father, Part-Time Worker

Fei Huang

'When you hear the term stay-at-home fathers (SAHFs), what is the first image/thought that pops into your head?' – this is one of the questions I asked in a survey that I did with all my friends on WeChat last year. Answers varied from 'good father' and 'nurturing man in an apron' to 'go out and get a job!'

In the following, I analyse a common narrative about SAHFs on social media who intertwine paid work with their lives as full-time fathers, which brings a new perspective on how this emergent gendered identity is represented in today's digital China. Texts for analysis were articles on WeChat subscription accounts (*weixin dingyuehao* 微信订阅号), which I selected based on their quantifiable widespread appeal and reception (as confirmed through ratings and circulation/readership figures) and particular significance for the construction of masculinity and fatherhood (e.g. texts associating the role of SAHFs with masculinity and fatherhood, featuring experiences and insights from actual SAHFs and/or were referred by different articles in other contexts). The aim of my analysis is not to examine whether these WeChat articles accurately represent the realities of everyday SAHF life. Rather, I focus on the structures of knowledge that are represented by the statements of the articles, as they form a discourse in their correlation with each other and broader ideologies.

The term digital nomad (*shuzi youmin* 数字游民) is introduced in two recent articles about SAHFs (Hu 2019; Zhang et. al. 2019) and refers to people who work remotely and online. They argue that some SAHFs have already realised this 'nomadic' lifestyle, which opens up the possibility of altering

Figure 4.4: Stay-at-home father Xiao Chen with his son sitting in front of a desk (credit to Chen's WeChat subscription account – @埃文爸爸).

gender dynamics in and outside the home – the increase of job opportunities that embrace mobility and flexibility has made it possible for men to be more involved in the family without cutting off their connection to the labour market. As the author from one of the above-mentioned articles (Hu 2019) states:

> The SAHF La Rou has become a start-up entrepreneur whose career focuses on family education; (another SAHF) Qi Xiansheng started his blogging career on relationships and family on Weibo...The contrast [between the traditional conception of SAHFs and these fathers' image] helps readers to better understand this social group and leaves them some room to reflect on the social prejudices and stereotypes against this particular group of men – Do SAHFs who assume the dual identity as primary caregiver and part-time worker belong to a special social group? [After interviewing with SAHFs], my understanding and perception on SAHFs have completely changed – our society believes that men have to work outside the home in order to support the family, but in fact, full-time fathers also have their own career.

The question highlighted in the narrative above – 'Do SAHFs who assume the dual identity as a primary caregiver and a part-time worker belong to a special social group?' indicates that the lives that these SAHFs lead have challenged the assumed boundaries between work and family life for men, which are specified in two particular aspects in this article, i.e. their priorities and their choice of work.

Firstly, while working from home is arguably another form of maintaining a connection with the public sphere to preserve the sense of masculinity for SAHFs (Hanlon 2012: 208), a shift in their identities and a greater focus on the family seem to be emphasised in the social media discourse, i.e. work comes after childcare. The term 'full-time father' (*quanzhi baba* 全职爸爸) is used throughout the above-mentioned article (Hu 2019) to denote these men's primary identity. While acknowledging the fact that raising children needs money, the author has made it clear that the purpose of this article is to understand the role of SAHFs and condemn the stereotypical conception that 'men have to earn money'.

The SAHF/blogger Qi's experience mentioned in the article above (Hu 2019) is also narrated in the second article (Zhang et. al. 2019) entitled 'From a workaholic to a full-time father: family is my other workplace' (*cong gongzuo kuang dao quanzhi baba: jiating shi wode lingyige zhichang* 从工作狂到全职爸爸：家庭是我的另一个职场). In the authors' words, during the interval between cooking and cleaning the house, Qi wrote millions of words of stories and published four books about food and romantic relationships. The term 'interval' (*jianxi* 间隙) suggests the secondary status of Qi's job as a writer. This article also shows another SAHF's (Xiong Jun) daily timetable, which revolves entirely around his son, and the only time for Xiong to take a break and do his own work is when his son takes a nap and/or after his son falls asleep at around

11pm. This timetable is to substantiate the point that being a SAHF is a full-day job without breaks. Similarly, the other two articles (Wu 2020; Tu 2020) compare the typical time schedules from 7am to midnight between a working father and a full-time father, to demonstrate that the time for the father himself is normally after 10pm every day without a day off. Such narratives suggest that the priority of SAHFs' lives is still to take care of the family, and their paid work is organised according to the rhythms of their everyday life as a full-time father.

Secondly, by giving two particular examples of SAHFs, the statement presented above signifies the fusion of childcare/married life and professional/work identity, in that some men tend to take inspiration from their experiences in caregiving and married life as a SAHF. This textual representation of the seamless integration of both intimate life and paid work by SAHFs resonates with Katariina Mäkinen's (2020) study on how stay-at-home mom blogging has become a form of freelance work within the digital economy in Finland. Similar to Qi's transition from a full-time advertiser to a SAHF/content producer on Weibo and WeChat, Yu Ba (Foki 2020) quit his full-time job when his son turned two and has been vlogging about/with his son on social media. He has now successfully become an influencer in childcare and parenting with 764,000 followers on Weibo. It appears that the internet, and social media in particular, has become an important medium of professionalisation and monetisation of family life for SAHFs, which enables them to combine intimate family life with the professional life in a way that challenges the assumed boundaries between paid work and family life. As the SAHF La Rou (Zhang et. al. 2019) states, 'the increase of creative job opportunities that embrace mobility and flexibility offers a new area for full-time fathers/mothers to balance family and individual careers.' These men all expressed long-term commitment to their dual identity, with being a SAHF as their primary role.

The textual representation of the dual identity of SAHFs redefines the assumed boundaries between work and life. By highlighting how busy SAHFs are with the work of the home and their part-time career, this discourse on SAHFs goes against the perception of the home as a place of passivity, laziness, and consumption (i.e. financially dependent upon their partners) (see Hays 1996; Johnstone and Swanson 2003; Merla 2008). The digital world therefore constructs new possibilities of gender performance and challenges people's perceptions and behaviours in the real world. The dual identity of SAHFs portrayed in the analysed articles is one aspect of how the image of SAHFs is circulated on social media, which allows more people to better understand this emergent gendered identity in ways that suggest a gradual shift in traditional gender roles and values.

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CHAPTER 5

Film and TV

5.1 Visualising Homelessness in Sinophone Hong Kong: On Jun Li's *Drifting* (2021)

Alvin K. Wong

Hong Kong cinema has often been equated with speed, mobility, and globalisation. Hong Kong film scholar Esther Yau's classic description of Hong Kong movies as 'small speedboats breaking the waves alongside a daunting fleet of Hollywood *Titanics*' comes to mind (Yau 2001: 2). Ackbar Abbas similarly emphasises the cultural politics of disappearance and the feeling of déjà disparu, namely, what is new and unique about the cultural space of Hong Kong is always at the brink of disappearance due to the speed of globalisation and the 'love at last sight' mentality that characterised the 1997 handover (Abbas 1997). Fast forward to the year of 2021 and halfway into the fifty-year promise of economic prosperity and political stability stipulated under the One Country, Two Systems doctrine, are speed and cultural disappearance still the most salient markers of Sinophone Hong Kong cinema? I follow Shu-mei Shih's definition of the Sinophone as 'a network of places of cultural production outside China and on the margins of China and Chineseness' (Shih 2007: 4), with the disclaimer that Hong Kong is a Special Administrative Region that has been part of the PRC since 1 July 1997 but whose Sinophone cultures might express alternative forms of cultural identities not always in sync with the dominant logics of nationalism, global capitalism, and Sinocentrism.

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A recent film by the award-winning director Jun Li showcases the protean force of Sinophone visuality through cinematic representations of homelessness and economic precarity in a post-2019 Hong Kong that is still wrestling with the aftermath of social upheavals, political uncertainty, and the global pandemic. Li's 2021 film *Drifting* (*Zhuoshui piaoliu* 濁水漂流) recently won the award for Best Adapted Screenplay at the 58th Golden Horse Awards in Taiwan. The film centres on the story of the protagonist Ho Kei-fai, played by veteran actor Francis Ng. In the film, Ho is often referred to as Brother Fai as he is a well-known homeless man who lives on Tung Chau Street in Sham Shui Po, one of the most densely populated working-class neighbourhoods on the Kowloon side of Hong Kong. Just when Brother Fai is released from prison, his belongings, including a much-treasured photograph of his dead son, are suddenly confiscated by the police and cleaners from the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD). His fellow rough sleepers Master (one of the most respected Vietnamese refugee homeless men in the area), Chan Mui (a former female club dancer and sex worker), Dai Shing, and others decide to file a lawsuit with the help of the social worker Miss Ho (Cecilia Choi). When the government and FEHD agree to settle the case with an individual payment of HK$2000 to each plaintiff, Brother Fai refuses to accept the payment and demands a formal apology from the government. Throughout the course of the film, Brother Fai also befriends a young man named Muk. Muk seems to have a speech disorder and mental health issues, both of which the film suggests are linked to the years he spent separated from his mother. Fai forms a genuine bond with Muk and treats the young boy almost like his own son. By the end of the film, Fai's temporary home is set on fire during a particularly cold and dry winter.

While some initial film criticism and journalistic commentaries praise Jun Li's film for its simplicity and cinematic realism in portraying poverty, gentrification, and homelessness in a matter-of-fact manner, I prefer to take a slightly different approach by pointing to the ways that the filmmaker visualises homelessness through a cinematic appraisal of the dehumanising effects of neoliberal capitalism and gentrification. The film debunks the myth of individualism and the dominant Hong Kong economic ideology of hard work and self-sufficiency (otherwise known as the Lion Rock spirit) by showing how gentrification and 'urban redevelopment' in Sham Shui Po also lead to the further marginalisation of homeless people, beggars, drug addicts, and sex workers, all of whom are considered a surplus population destined for necropolitical expulsion. The visualisation of gentrification emerges early in the film narrative. In the establishing shot, the camera pans from the cityscape of Kowloon through a kaleidoscopic scanning of the newly built high-rise residential buildings. Immediately following this shot, the camera adjusts to a low-angle shot that positions the protagonist Brother Fai and the older Vietnamese man Master at the centre of the frame. Master offers to 'treat' Fai with a needle drug injection after Fai has just been released from the prison. The next scene shows the police and FEHD

officers ordering Fai and the homeless gang to stand aside for regular street cleaning. As the officers indiscriminately clear all of Fai's belongings (including his family photo and Hong Kong identification card), Fai can only put up a fight by verbally cursing the officers. While this scene depicts how the police officers and government workers clear the belongings and home of homeless people in Hong Kong without prior notice, it also symbolically alludes to the very dehumanisation of the personhood of homeless folks like Brother Fai, Master, Chan Mui, and Dai Shing. In fact, the very acts of Fai verbally assaulting the officers and rescuing his only photograph of his son from them both serve as a reminder that he is not simply a piece of rubbish that can be easily discarded.

The film critiques the violence of neoliberalism and gentrification not by re-conferring liberal humanism on Brother Fai and his friends. Alternatively, Jun Li shows the possibility for horizontal solidarity and intimacy among homeless subjects and those who experience mental health issues who are otherwise made invisible by 'normal' Hong Kong citizens and government. This horizontal intimacy is most evident in the father–son like relationship between Brother Fai and Muk, the street kid with a speech disorder. Muk first offers to carry the bed frame with Brother Fai when he sees him dragging the heavy item across the street. The Fai–Muk kinship bond also offers a sarcastic critique of real-estate hegemony and capitalism in contemporary Hong Kong. Specifically, as Brother Fai suffers from chronic foot pain, Miss Ho convinces him to stay hospitalised. One night, Fai escapes the hospital with the help of Muk, and the young boy even secretly infiltrates a construction site, operates the crane, and elevates Fai all the way to see an ariel view of Shum Shui Po at night. From there, Fai pisses onto the ground. When the police officers find out that someone is pissing from above, Muk helps Fai escape by running around and evading the police's chase. This scene visualises what Michel de Certeau calls the power of the weak through tactical intervention by the powerless, who must 'seize on the wing the possibilities that offer themselves at any given moment' (de Certeau 1984: 37). If real-estate hegemony is rooted in and powered by a capitalist system that is characterised by verticality and elevation, Brother Fai's momentary elevated vision positions him as a perverse urban parasite that suspends the regime of neoliberal dehumanisation of homeless subjects.

The closing credits of the film state that the screenplay is based on an actual legal dispute between the homeless community in Sham Shui Po and the government in 2012. Tragically, two homeless men died before the government issued any formal apology. The opening sequence also quotes from the feminist philosopher and queer theorist Judith Butler's writing: 'Such bodies both perform the conditions of life in public—sleeping and living there, taking care of the environment and each other—and exemplify relations of equality that are precisely those that are lacking in the economic and political domain' (Butler and Athanasiou 2013: 102). In its manifold visualisations of homelessness and the brutal processes of neoliberal dehumanisation in Hong Kong, Li's *Drifting* offers a trenchant cinematic diagnosis of dispossession and Sinophone resistance.

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5.2 Shaping Narratives of Anti-Corruption Through Popular Culture: An Analysis of the *Storm* Film Series

Alvin Hoi-Chun Hung

Corruption within government bureaucracy has been a long-standing problem in China. Unsurprisingly, it is also perceived by the ruling CCP to be an immense threat to the stability of its regime. Around 2012, after Chinese leader Xi Jinping rose to power, he pinpointed the balefulness of corrupt 'tigers' and pledged to uproot corruption. Popular culture became more important than ever as a tool to make the call on anti-corruption more appealing, shape public perception of corruption, and strengthen ideological control to enhance legitimacy of the regime.

It was under this particular background that the *Storm* film series (*Fantan fengbao* 反貪風暴) was born: a new form of commercialised recreation that strictly adheres to the anti-corruption discourse of the party-state, while overcoming the limitations of the typical 'main melody' anti-corruption popular culture which promotes government-sponsored messages but suffers from a lack of entertainment value.

The film series currently comprises five films, *Z Storm* (2014), *S Storm* (2016), *L Storm* (2018), *P Storm* (2019), and *G Storm* (2021). While produced by filmmakers from Hong Kong, the films are primarily directed at the Chinese market, and have been largely adapted to the preferences and realities of Chinese audiences.

Classic Hong Kong crime films often question the distinctions between good and evil. But the *Storm* films, having moved away from Hong Kong's crime film tradition, cast justice-oriented law enforcement officers as protagonists and feature straightforward detective-style stories. By depicting how law enforcement officers, in the name of the law, crush corruptors' evil plots, the *Storm* films instead represent a perfect fit with China's 'main melody' ideological trend, in

which cinematic images are used to transform people's legal consciousness and educate them about the dangers of corruption.

The protagonist of the films is William Luk (portrayed by Louis Koo), an investigator of the Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC) of Hong Kong. Each film has very similar plot lines. William leads his team to investigate different forms of corruption, ranging from charity fraud to football bribery, money laundering, and prison corruption. After overcoming tremendous hurdles, William and his team, sometimes with the cooperation of Chinese anti-corruption authorities, succeed in destroying the corruptors' plans and bringing them to justice. Before the ending credits, the films show the offenders convicted and the sentences received by corruptors to inform audiences of the serious consequences of the crime.

In the films, the image of anti-corruption law enforcement officers, in particular William, is portrayed in an idealised manner. They are seen as smart, brilliant, brave, motivated by passion for safeguarding justice, and prepared to sacrifice their lives in their fight against corruption. At times, their ethos is infused with the Chinese government's anti-corruption discourse. For example, when the ICAC Director of Investigation answers a question raised by William, he quotes the phrase 'lock power in a cage,' which is a popularised figure of speech first used by Xi Jinping in 2013 (China Daily 2013). Throughout the films, there is an emphasis on the indispensable role of law enforcement officers in anti-corruption endeavours, as they are shown to be highly professional and competent protectors of justice and the rule of law.

Amidst the positive portrayal of law enforcement officers, though, the films never question the conceptions of law and justice. Quite the contrary: the films promote an ideology based on a complete respect for legal authority and an attempt to instil a belief that the law is always fair and just, such that with the strenuous effort of law enforcement officers, the law can function as an effectve and trustworthy mechanism to promote justice. The films feature minor characters who proactively report corruption to the legal authorities. Even in the face of immense threat from corruptors, these informants still wholeheartedly trust the law and hold firm the belief that it is their moral responsibility to comply with the law and cooperate with law enforcement officers.

Ideological persuasion becomes more apparent in the later films of the series, when China's Anti-corruption and Anti-bribery Bureau officers appear as minor characters. Depicted as determined individuals driven by a strong sense of justice who vow to protect the rule of law and eradicate corruption, they are often shown working in an office decorated with CCP flags, which serves to emphasise the leading role of the Party in the ongoing anti-corruption campaign.

In one scene, the Anti-corruption Bureau officer confronts a corrupt government official, and the corruptor challenges him, 'On what basis can a petty level officer like you order a ministerial level leader like me around? Do you even dare to launch investigation against me?' The officer, unintimidated by this threat, shows the arrest warrant and swiftly brings the corruptor back to

the Bureau for investigation. Chinese viewers are thus encouraged to believe in not only anti-corruption officers' determination to arrest corruptors, but also the law's ability in curbing corruption. It appears from this scene that no one, not even senior government officials, is above the law, and all corruptors will eventually be caught and rightfully sanctioned by the law.

As the Chinese government launches an ideological battle against corruption, the ways in which corruption as a phenomenon are constructed, law and justice are portrayed, and law enforcement officers are glorified in the *Storm* films can be conceived as part of the campaign to educate the Chinese public about the importance of the law and its enforcement officers in the fight against corruption and the fostering of social justice. This film series is a prime example of how Hong Kong cinema, better known for its commercial nature, has accommodated to the needs of China and has become a tactical tool to make Chinese audiences empathetically engage with the anti-corruption campaign.

Given China's sociopolitical environment, it is likely that Hong Kong-produced films, with their tremendous popularity in China, will continue to assume their subtle, implicit, yet important role of promoting and legitimising political campaigns in China.

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5.3 The Cinematic Cult of Mao[1]

Jie Li

In what ways did cinema contribute to Mao's personality cult? In their professional magazine *Film Projection* (*Dianying fangying* 電影放映), mobile projectionists often mention Mao's appearance in newsreels as the greatest attraction for grassroots audiences. As a 1953 profile of a movie team from Guizhou put it:

> When the masses learned that a film had Chairman Mao's image, they were so excited they began dancing to celebrate the joyous event. A seventy-something-year-old man of Dong ethnicity ran with a torch to shout out the news to nearby villages: 'Chairman Mao is coming! Everyone go look!' The glad tidings of 'Chairman Mao is coming' soon spread so that thousands of people hurried over … A blind old man who heard the news asked his son to carry him through the mountains. He said: 'I cannot see Chairman Mao, but I want to hear his voice.'

> When Chairman Mao appeared in *The Great Unity of Chinese Ethnicities*, the site was filled with the sound of applause and shouting of 'Long live!' The masses lit firecrackers to welcome Chairman Mao, such that smoke blurred their vision. Women shed tears of joy. When Chairman Mao's image passed, the masses anxiously shouted: 'Comrade! Show slowly! We haven't gotten a clear look yet!' So our comrade had to rewind the reel and replay the film to please the audience. When the audience saw how their representatives shook hands with Mao and received with welcome everywhere [in Beijing], they understood: their disunity with the Han before Liberation resulted entirely from the discord of Chiang Kai-shek's bandits. They felt that Chairman Mao illuminated them like the sun.

This is one of many patronising reports celebrating the cinematic enlightenment of backward and benighted audiences – highlighting the women, the elderly and the disabled – and the cinematic governance of a formerly ungovernable, fragmented and hostile populace, now rendered benign as singing and dancing ethnic minorities under Mao's radiance. We might treat such reports less as reliable accounts of audience reaction than as literary performances by projectionists to testify to cinema's ritual efficacy. Such texts also served as model scripts for other projectionists to ventriloquise the rural masses as Communist converts through leader worship. The conceit of 'Mao as the sun' permeated cultural production from the 1940s to the 1970s and finds a synthesis in the song 'East is Red' illustrated with posters and choreographies that feature the people as sunflowers. Besides symbolism, Mao's cinematic image literally illuminated the dark night of the countryside off the power grid. This compels us to consider the mediation of the Mao cult and the cult value of mass media.

Studies of Mao's personality cult, such as Daniel Leese's *Mao Cult: Rhetoric and Ritual in China's Cultural Revolution*, have focused on the CCP's symbolic production, but little has been said of its dissemination and amplification through audiovisual media. Cinema not only mass-reproduced Mao's image and voice, but also congregated the masses for rituals of worship. Responding to projectionist reports, the Film Bureau issued directives to make additional copies of newsreels that included shots of Mao as early as 1956. Whereas cultural theorist Walter Benjamin famously polarised an artwork's cult value and exhibition value, proposing that technological reproducibility led to the withering of the aura, cinema enhanced Mao's sacred aura and multiplied the altar of his personality cult: every screening of his moving image enabled a divine political figure to come down from his heavenly court onto the earth to meet with the people. In 1958, according to *Film Projection* magazine, the newsreel documentary *Our Leaders Work with Us* showed Mao digging at the Ming Tombs Reservoir and was met with an enthusiastic reception: 'Chairman Mao took time out of his busy schedule to participate in labour - we must make

more iron!' Or 'Even Chairman Mao is labouring - the idlers among us ought to be ashamed!' As a quasi-labour model, Mao's cinematic image aligned him with the peasants, workers, and soldiers, while the occasion of film screenings connected the masses with the leader, peripheries with the centre.

Even when Mao did not appear on film, villagers sent out gong-and-drum processions to welcome 'Chairman Mao's movie team' or 'honoured guests dispatched by Chairman Mao'. Besides staging a vicarious encounter with the great leader, cinema became the culmination of technological wonders that inspired sublime feelings of awe for Mao and the Communist Party. Treating cinema as the oracle and fulfilment of socialist modernity, projectionist reports often quoted elderly villagers: 'Chairman Mao keeps his word: he said the countryside will have electrical light, telephones, and loudspeakers.' A 1964 report considered the very arrival of a movie team in the countryside a form of political influence, since 'the rural masses naturally associate cinema with the benevolence of the Party and Chairman Mao', regardless of what films they showed.

The cinematic cult of Mao reached its climax with newsreel documentaries of Mao's 1966 meetings with millions of Red Guards on Tiananmen Square, films that came to be dubbed 'red treasure films' (*hongbaopian* 紅寶片). Projectionists I interviewed in Zhejiang and Hubei recall having to screen these newsreels in every village on their circuit. Reinventing ritual processions for local cult deities, many village chiefs personally carried the film print with red ribbons and a Mao portrait from its last projection site. While landlords, rich peasants, counterrevolutionaries, bad elements, and Rightists were banned from these screenings, according to a film history from Guangxi province, the revolutionary masses brought their 'loyal, boundless, proletariat feelings'. Indeed, the nationwide screenings recreated the mass rallies myriad times, and local organisations of reception parades in honour of Mao's cinematic image add a new dimension to our understanding of film *reception*.

Retrospective accounts suggest highly varied reception of these Tiananmen rally films. Former Red Guards I interviewed in Shanghai recalled attending school-organised screenings of those films and clapping every time Mao appeared. Some were inspired by the first rally film to travel to Beijing to participate in a later rally. As workers in a Shanghai factory, my grandparents received free cinema tickets but had no time to go, so they gave a ticket to my great-grandmother, an illiterate peasant woman who happened to be visiting Shanghai. After seeing the documentary, she commented on Mao's nonchalant greeting of the young people's enthusiasm, which my mother found 'counter-revolutionary'. Villager interviewees enjoyed those newsreels as vicarious travel to the capital and often puzzled over who was who on the Tiananmen rostrum. In rural Hubei, a female villager best remembered 'Chairman Mao's pretty wife', Jiang Qing. In Ningxia, a villager recalled always seeing Lin Biao shoulder to shoulder next to Mao:

> He had on a bright green uniform, bright red insignia, and a big smile. When Mao clapped Lin would also clap, and we audiences clapped too. A villager once said Lin Biao was a 'smiling tiger' who looked like a traitor. Someone reported his comments, which got him executed as a counterrevolutionary. After Lin Biao really turned out to be a traitor, the villager was rehabilitated and his family received 10,000 yuan in compensation.

These stories of reception reveal audiences as cinematic guerrillas, but in different senses: while many young people were inspired to mobility as revolutionary pilgrims to meet Mao in person, others were less enchanted and harboured critical, even subversive thoughts. If the latter failed to keep these thoughts to themselves and got denounced, state-sponsored terror awaited them. While Lin Biao supported the Mao cult yet turned against the Chairman a few years later, the audiences learned from his costumes and expressions to play their parts as a devout congregation before Mao's cinematic altar, regardless of the truth of their feelings. After all, the failure to perform a correct response had grave and violent consequences.

Note

[1.] This chapter is an extract from the author's forthcoming book, *Cinematic Guerrillas: Maoist Propaganda as Spirit Mediumship*, due to publish in January 2023. Reprinted with permission of Columbia University Press.

CHAPTER 6

Red Culture

6.1 Recipes for Reform: Smashing the Gang of Four in the Dining Carriage Under Chairman Hua Guofeng

Jon Howlett

Most historians of the PRC are avid collectors of curios: items that capture the spirit of certain historical moments in modern China's ever-changing political climate. In this blog, I use a recipe book for train staff published in 1978 by the passenger department of the Guangzhou Railway Bureau, titled *Menus and Resources for Western Cuisine*, as an entryway to explore the history of the short-lived Hua Guofeng era (1976–1978) on its own terms.

Politics pervaded every public and private space in late 1970s China. Between 1966 and 1976, the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution had plunged the country into tumult. Militant Red Guards had competed to show their dedication to Chairman Mao Zedong through the violent persecution of 'class enemies', resulting in widespread death and destruction. For hundreds of millions of people, everyday life was defined by political rituals mandated by the state-sanctioned Mao cult (Leese 2011).

Mao died in September 1976, and the Cultural Revolution was concluded soon afterwards by his successor, Hua Guofeng. The elevation of the 'wise leader' Chairman Hua, as he was called in state propaganda, surprised contemporaries. The characteristically mercurial Mao had 'chosen not to chose' between the leaders of the left and right factions that had been locked in bitter

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Figure 6.1a: *Menus and Resources for Western Cuisine (Part One)* (note: the book has a different title on the outer cover).

Figure 6.1b: Jiang Nanchun 江南春 1976. 'Chairman Mao trusted Chairman Hua completely; the people and army warmly endorse him too.' Source: China Visual Arts Project, University of Westminster.

struggle over the previous decade. On taking power, Hua quickly ordered the arrest of the leftist 'Gang of Four', led by Mao's wife, Jiang Qing. However, his rule was short-lived, and in December 1978 he was outmanoeuvred by Deng Xiaoping's reformist faction. Deng became the paramount leader, while Hua was marginalised, retaining some official titles but little influence.

The period of Hua's rule, from October 1976 to December 1978, has received little concerted attention from historians. In most historical surveys, this period is portrayed as a brief interregnum, warranting a paragraph or two at best as authors trace the origins of China's four decades-long process of 'reform and opening up'. The CCP's 1981 'Resolution on certain questions in the history of

Figure 6.1c: Liu Nansheng 1978刘南生. 'Wholehearted support of the wise leader Chairman Hua.' Source: China Visual Arts Project, University of Westminster.

our party' praised his contribution to the purge of the 'counterrevolutionary Jiang Qing clique'. However, it was savagely critical of Hua's 'two-whatever's' policy (to uphold whatever policy decisions Chairman Mao made, and whatever instructions he gave). In the most recently promulgated resolution on party history (2021), Hua's name is omitted entirely, rendering him an historical irrelevance.

Yet people living through the Hua era will have had little sense of what was to come. For many, the future looked as uncertain as the previous decade had felt. How can we, as historians, begin to approach the Hua era on its own terms? Exploring the material culture of this short-lived historical moment may provide some answers. In the 'new' history of the PRC that has emerged over the last decade, historians have placed great emphasis on the importance of

Figure 6.1d: Ha Qiongwen 哈琼文 1978. 'Call to battle, glorious role model.' Source: China Visual Arts Project, University of Westminster.

everyday objects, as a corrective to approaches fixated on elite politics (Brown and Johnson 2015). In the hands of 'Sinological garbologists', throwaway objects can allow us to understand how people navigated the everyday as the political climate changed around them.

In this context, the 330-page *Menus and Resources* reflects two political projects from the Hua era that were aborted not long after its publication. The first is visible in the very words used to print the collection: in December 1977, the PRC embarked on a radical programme of Chinese character simplification to promote literacy. The scheme proved hugely unpopular and was stalled in 1978 before being formally abandoned in 1986. Some characters in *Menus and Resources* follow this second round of character simplification (the first took place in the 1950s). For example, the word egg (*dan*) is written as 旦 and not 蛋, and Gang (*bang*) from 'Gang of Four' is written as 邦 rather than 帮. However, the new scheme was only partially implemented in this book, with most characters remaining unchanged.

The second abandoned project was Hua's programme of economic reforms. From 1977, Hua's government began to promote the 'Four Modernisations' (of agriculture, industry, defence, and science and technology), drawing on an idea first espoused by Zhou Enlai in the early 1960s. Importantly, however, where

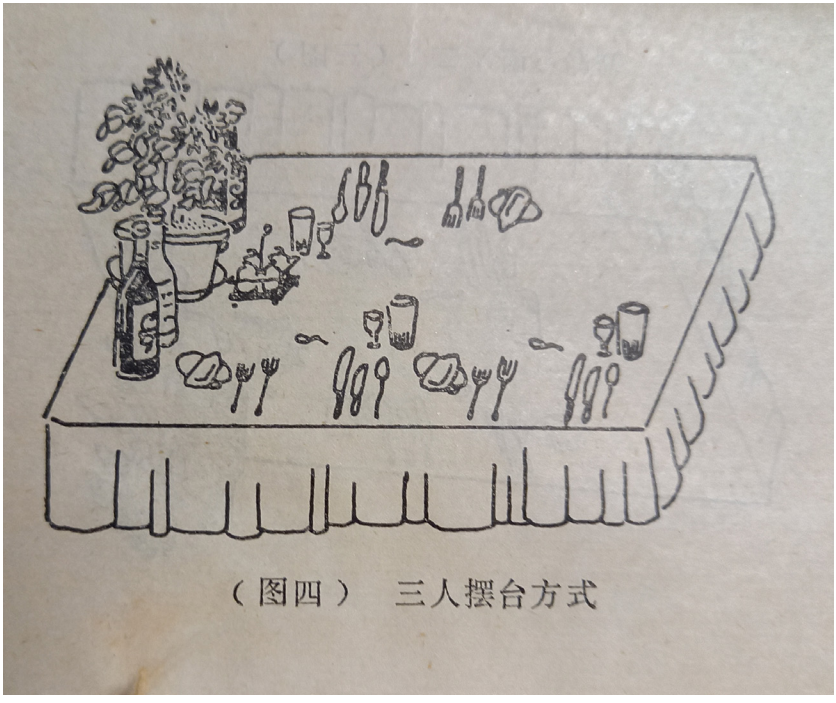
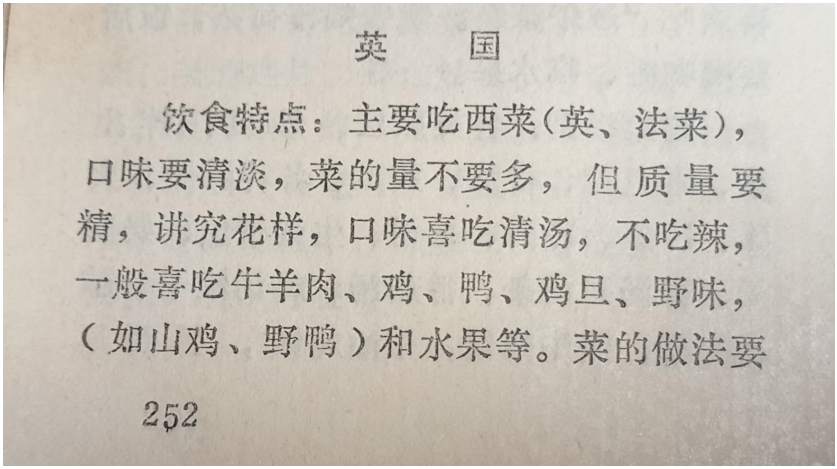


Figure 6.1e: Table arrangement for three people.


英　国

饮食特点：主要吃西菜（英、法菜），口味要清淡，菜的量不要多，但质量要精，讲究花样，口味喜吃清汤，不吃辣，一般喜吃牛羊肉、鸡、鸭、鸡旦、野味，（如山鸡、野鸭）和水果等。菜的做法要

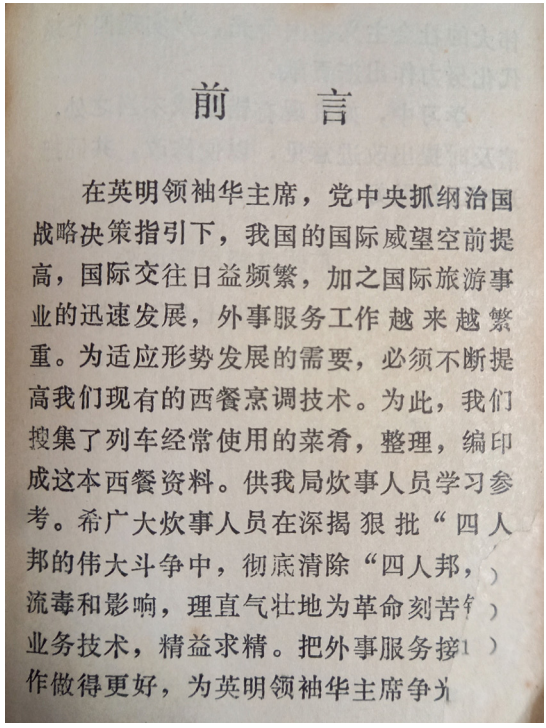
252

Figure 6.1f: Section on hosting British guests.

Hua had envisioned the 'Four Modernisations' as a state-led project using central planning, Deng and his successors unleashed the power of the market to transform the economy under the same slogan (Teiwes and Sun 2011). Nevertheless, the guide was meticulously compiled, and its publication represented a significant undertaking. The failure of Hua's reform project and language reform were not foreseen when the book was produced.

The book itself is divided into two main parts, the first of which contains recipes and cooking techniques for a wide range of Western and Chinese dishes. The second half details the culinary preferences and eating habits of foreigners of sixty different nationalities from every inhabited continent. The section on hosting Britons, to give one example, recommends serving well-presented and high-quality food, while avoiding strong flavours. It notes that British guests expected to be woken with a cup of tea in bed and that some would ask for afternoon tea (genteel eating habits more suggestive of English tastes in the 1930s than the 1970s). The guide also contains instructions for waiting staff on the manners foreigners expected, as well as illustrations for table layouts.

The care that went into the guide's production demonstrates the importance attached to providing proper hosting, typical of the careful management of foreigners in the PRC (Brady 2003). The foreword to the collection makes it clear that the dining carriage was expected to be a political space. Despite the Cultural Revolution having ended two years previously, politics continued to influence every aspect of life in China in the late 1970s, even when it came to preparing and serving food to foreign train passengers. As China embarked on the 'Four Modernisations', the number of foreign visitors was expected to increase. Accordingly, onboard catering staff were enjoined to perfect their cooking and hospitality to win glory for the socialist motherland under the wise leader Chairman Hua, and victory in the struggle against the poisonous ideology of the 'Gang of Four'.



前　言

在英明领袖华主席，党中央抓纲治国战略决策指引下，我国的国际威望空前提高，国际交往日益频繁，加之国际旅游事业的迅速发展，外事服务工作越来越繁重。为适应形势发展的需要，必须不断提高我们现有的西餐烹调技术。为此，我们搜集了列车经常使用的菜肴，整理，编印成这本西餐资料。供我局炊事人员学习参考。希广大炊事人员在深揭狠批“四人邦的伟大斗争中，彻底清除“四人邦，流毒和影响，理直气壮地为革命刻苦业务技术，精益求精。把外事服务接作做得更好，为英明领袖华主席争

Figure 6.1g: Foreword.

The carefully-produced *Menus and Resources* speaks to the importance the Chinese state under Hua placed on post-Cultural Revolution 'opening up' in the name of modernisation. Perfecting the hosting of foreigners was important in late 1970s China. Hua's 'Four Modernisations' project was abandoned but, as *Menus and Resources* shows, the Hua era was experienced by those who lived through it as the start of something new and not just an interregnum.

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6.2 The Art of the Propagandist: Visual Approaches to Understanding Revolutionary China

Steven F. Jackson

Happy. Angry. Inspired. Grateful. The emotions expressed in Chinese propaganda posters between 1949 and 1990 were not subtle or complex, nor for all of the embrace of 'socialist realism' in communist art were they realistic. These posters, with their vivid reds, yellows, oranges, blues, and greens were not Chinese people as they *were*; they were the Chinese people as they *ought to be*, at least according to the Communist Party. The fascination is that this proscriptive line in posters shifted frequently over the first four decades of the PRC, and these artefacts can give us insight into this period for teaching, learning, and research.

Founded in 1977 by writer and journalist John Gittings when he worked in the Chinese section of the Polytechnic of Central London (PCL), the China Visual Arts Project (CVAP) at the University of Westminster has digitised and made available an impressive collection of over 800 of these posters on the university archive site. The site is searchable and categorised based on Gittings' original 17 thematic categories. The collection is an invaluable tool for teaching about modern Chinese history and politics, as well as about the political role of visual arts in societies.

In this article, I describe three core ideas that emerge across the collection and reflect on their pedagogical value in the classroom.

1. Transforming society: revolutionary governments seek to change the societies they govern, to make a break from the past and to create new, ideal citizens. Social relations, such as gender and age are challenged. A good example of this can be seen in the quiet confidence of the face of the woman dressing a stone in Figure 6.2a.

2. Transforming nature: another aspect of communist societies (and indeed many societies prior to the 1970s) was the relationship of people to nature. In contrast to the near-universal concerns for the environment in the 21st century, Chinese posters showed a frequent theme of transforming nature for humanity's benefit. The second title of the 'Women hold up half the sky' post is 'Surely the face of nature can be transformed.' The next poster – 'The bank of the Yangzi river' (Figure 6.2b) – is particularly interesting because it uses

Figure 6.2a: Wang Dawei 王大为. 1975. 'Women can hold up half the sky; surely the face of nature can be transformed,' by Wang Dawei Source: China Visual Arts Project, University of Westminster.

a traditional *shanshui* 山水 ink wash painting technique for a familiar theme – the Yangtze River – but the banks of the river are now crowded with petrochemical facilities, an old-fashioned medium for a modern message: the river and its banks are being used for industry.

3. Recalling the Revolution: Fifteen years after the 1949 revolution, Chairman Mao Zedong realised that a new generation was growing up that had no memory of pre-revolutionary China or the conditions that gave rise to the Communist Party. The poster 'Don't forget class struggle, forever make revolutionary people' (Figure 6.2c) was part of a party effort to remind the new generation of that legacy. The central figure, a peasant man speaking earnestly to the fresh-faced youth uses posters to show what had happened. Thus, the image is about revolution, but also depicts posters and their use.

Chairman Mao, however, wanted more than posters to create a new revolutionary generation; he wanted the youth of China to take action against what he regarded as the parts of China's leadership who were 'revising' communism

Figure 6.2b: Song, Wenzhi 宋文治. 1973. 'The bank of the Yangzi river.' Source: China Visual Arts Project, University of Westminster.

Figure 6.2c: Chen Mou 陈谋 and Shu Dong 董舒. 1964. 'Don't forget class struggle, forever make revolutionary people.' Source: China Visual Arts Project, University of Westminster.

Figure 6.2d: National Fine Art Red Revolutionary Rebels Liaison Station 全国美术界红色革命造反联络站供稿. 1967. 'Revolutionary proletarian right to rebel troops unite!' Source: China Visual Arts Project, University of Westminster.

into something else, and thus he launched the Cultural Revolution. About one quarter of the CVAP collection covers this period (1966–1976), and these are quite distinct. Unlike posters from the previous political campaigns in which smiling workers, grinning peasants, and stalwart soldiers are constants, the Cultural Revolution faces show anger and defiance, bravery and suspicion. Figure 6.2d. shows an example of the period, where we see workers, peasants, and soldiers, and the central figure of a Red Guard, one of the youth Mao recruited to 'make revolution'.

Pedagogy: Posters are natural discussion and essay prompts, and I have used several as quiz prompts for years. In class, I usually employ the simple opening technique of showing (via PowerPoint) a poster, and asking students to look at it for about two minutes, and then they make comments using 'I like…' 'I noticed…', and 'I wonder…' as the prompts. A more detailed questionnaire is also used for the two-day version of the in-class discussion assignment.

Naturally, a little context for these posters is necessary for students who were born decades after the tumultuous periods of Chinese history from 1949 to 1990. After the Communist Revolution in 1949 there were multiple political campaigns such as the Great Leap Forward (1958–1961), and the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), and a dozen or more shorter and more specific campaigns. It helps that many of the posters at the China Visual Arts Project website

Figure 6.2e: Author unknown. 1975. 'Long live the unity of every nationality in this country!' Source: China Visual Arts Project, University of Westminster.

have dates to help place the pictures in the context of specific campaigns or events. The posters' text is also translated so that the phrase is clear (though not always the meaning).

Targeting an often semi-literate audience, the symbols used in the posters were usually quite simple: wrenches and gears or blue overalls indicate workers; uniforms show soldiers, sheafs and hoes show peasants, (what I dub the 'holy trinity' of Maoist iconography). Peasants in these posters are often shown wearing turbans, a common head covering among Han Chinese which some may mistake for ethnic minorities. Workers are often shown with iron and steel workers' furnace observation glasses. A fourth figure begins to be seen in posters after 1976: a scientist or 'intellectual' who is always shown wearing glasses. Age was usually depicted by heavier facial lines and beard shadows for men, hair in a bun for women.

Posters also are an opportunity for critical thinking, and nowhere is this more needed than the common posters involving China's 56 'official' ethnic minorities, such as the 1975 poster 'Long live the unity of every nationality in this country!' (Figure 6.2e). The poster is noteworthy in that it is a reproduction of a photograph, which is rare among Chinese posters of the period, though quite common for Soviet posters. Enthusiastic and grateful minorities are always shown in their distinctive national costumes, and a Tibetan woman wearing a *pangden* (brightly-coloured apron) is invariably included. Mongols can be identified by wearing the *deel*, a caftan garment, and Koreans are usually

women in *hanboks*. Other minorities such as the Miao and Yi are depicted with their distinct dress. The typical portrayal is of a large group of minorities, with Han Chinese posed in the middle, all linking arms, grinning broadly and grateful to be part of the PRC. Given the news out of Xinjiang of late about the treatment of Uighurs, students quickly recognise that the propaganda and the policies do not match.

6.3 At First Sight – Book Covers of the Mao Era

Marc Matten

For many decades, the visual arts have been a topic in research on modern Chinese history. Propaganda posters, Mao badges, and even material objects have received widespread attention among historians, thereby highlighting that an understanding of Mao-era China includes more than deciphering texts and comprehending their abstract rhetoric of exploitation, class struggle, and revolution. Propaganda posters, in particular, have been an object of desire, a desire that is sometimes shaped by a certain sense of orientalism, an identification with alternative models of society among activists during the Cold War, and sometimes by a morbid fascination with other relics from the Cultural Revolution. Tourists in China acquire reprints as souvenirs, collectors produce colourful catalogues, exhibitions are organised inside and outside of China, and iconic parts of posters are reproduced for merchandise articles, ranging from T-shirts to cups, from tote bags to fancy accessories.

Thanks to the long-term efforts of institutions such as the International Institute of Social History (Amsterdam) and the University of Westminster's China Visual Arts Project Archive, thousands of posters have also been made available for academic research in historical science and visual arts, allowing in-depth research on the history of propaganda in 20th-century China.

Propaganda posters were a central medium for political communication and could be seen virtually everywhere (to be sure, they were more present in cities than in the countryside). Following the guidelines for literature and art laid down in Mao Zedong's well-known *Talks at the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art* (*Zai Yan'an wenyi zuotanhui shang de jianghua* 在延安文艺座谈会上的讲话) dating from 1942, literature and art had to serve the masses of the people and reflect the 'correct' class standpoint. Art and literature were instrumental in the dissemination of the 'right' political consciousness, which also explains the unbroken continuity of propaganda until today.

Propaganda posters were, I argue, only one of many visual media that were at the disposal of the Communist Party-state. Next to newspapers, comics, films, and magazines that to various degrees relied on visual elements in disseminating political ideas, books played an important role. They were available in all sizes and paper qualities, printed in traditional or simplified characters,

covering everything from belletristic literature and school textbooks to handbooks and manuals in science and technology. Promoting reading as access to knowledge, reading in state-owned bookstores, in private spaces, and in libraries became a common phenomenon after 1949, particularly among the urban population.

Books were, however, more than text. Publisher and readers paid particular attention to book covers whose graphic design and aesthetics had started to change in the 1940s; this was when their visual language recombined the folk-art traditions that had been established during the Yan'an years with the graphic style from the Soviet Union and other countries of the Eastern bloc that were entering China by the rapidly growing number of translations.

The 1951 booklet *Invasion by Hollywood* (*Haolaiwu de qinlüe* 好莱坞的侵略) – a collection of articles denouncing movies and American influence on movies – is a compilation of translated newspaper articles by David Piatt, an American communist film critic, and texts by Chinese authors pointing to what they described as the brutal and savage, as well as anti-social and anti-human, character of Hollywood movies. The motive and design of the book cover imitates earlier ones from the Republican era.

Figure 6.3a: *Invasion by Hollywood* (1951).

Figure 6.3b: *Discussing the Invasion Pact of the United States and Chiang Kai-shek* (1955).

The 1955 book *Discussing the Invasion Pact of the United States and Chiang Kai-shek* (*Lun Mei-Jiang qinlüe tiaoyue* 论美蒋侵略条约) is a short, yet dense, booklet of 48 pages written by Qin Ziqing 秦子青. Across six chapters, it describes how Chiang Kai-shek and John Foster Dulles concluded the Sino-American Mutual Defence Treaty (considered by the author as illegal), and how the Chinese people reject it due to their unshaken will to liberate Taiwan. The cover shows a caricature of a skeleton whose insignias show that it is Chiang who declares an attack on the mainland. The style of the caricature is a continuation from the satirical journal *World Knowledge* (*Shije zhishi* 世界知识) that the same company had been publishing in the Republican era.

The book *The Red Former Capital – Ruijin* (*Hongse gudu – Ruijin* 红色故都-瑞金, 1958) by Wang Wenyuan 王文渊 describes the establishment of the first Soviet on Chinese soil in Ruijin. The narrative is supplemented with photos and maps. The cover itself reproduces the iconic stele commemorating the martyrs of the Red Army (*Hongjun lishi jinianta* 红军烈士纪念塔), choosing red as the primary colour, thereby conforming to the colourful style of socialist realism.

The publication entitled *Doing Everything to Strengthen the Dictatorship of the Proletariat* (*Yiqie weile gonggu wuchan jieji zhuanzheng* – 切为了巩固无产阶级专政) – printed at the end of the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976) – praises two traffic policemen who had made great sacrifices in their work, even

Figure 6.3c: *The Red Former Capital – Ruijin* (1958).

at their own risk of injury, to serve the people and apprehend the criminal class enemy. Though monocoloured and drawn in a simple fashion, it underlines the assertiveness of the policemen on their speedy motorbike.

The book covers presented above stem from one of the largest book collections of the Mao era in Germany, a donation of the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences (SASS) to the Friedrich-Alexander University of Erlangen-Nuremberg (FAU). In the early 2000s, the Academy had to sort out its duplicates, amounting to close to 100,000 monographs and roughly 10,000 bounded volumes of periodicals, all published from the late 1940s to the 1980s.

The openly accessible SASS collection features an assortment of publications ranging from translated Marxist classics to medical textbooks, from philosophical and literary works to agriculture handbooks and propaganda pamphlets, from popular youth magazines to academic journals. It also includes numerous 'internal publications' (*neibu* 内部) across all book categories. The largest categories are science and technology (19,000 volumes), economics, industry, agriculture, and commerce (15,000 volumes), history and historical science (11,000 volumes), as well as literature and arts (14,000 volumes).

The collection houses a large number of books on engineering (with blueprints of machines), geology, medicine, astronomy, veterinary medicine, etc.

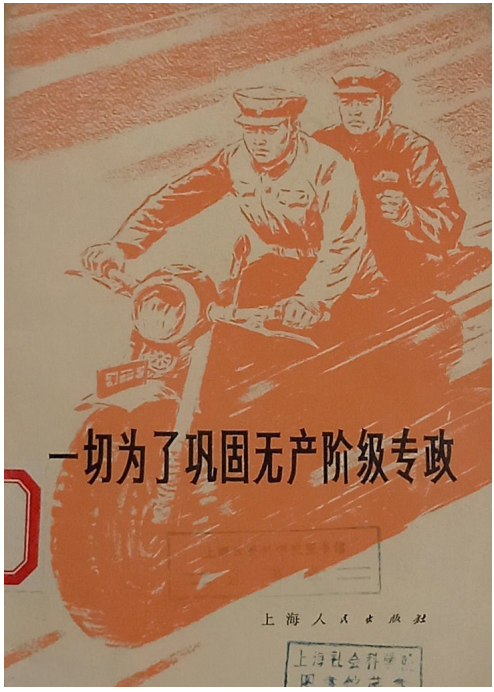

Figure 6.3d: *Doing Everything to Strengthen the Dictatorship of the Proletariat* (1975).

Researchers of history may trace the anti-Japanese sentiment in current China back to the publications on the Anti-Japanese War (1937–1945) in the 1950s and the 1960s. Internal publications highlight the 'anti-Chinese expressions' of the Soviet Communist Party and of Eastern European countries (e.g. Czechoslovakia), as well as detailed studies on criminal forensics and overviews on the status of nuclear physics research in the United States and Europe in the 1950–1960s. For researchers in the field of cultural studies, the collection offers material in Chinese and foreign literature, theatre, film, and music. The material on the perennial campaign of 'Learning from Lei Feng' display an impressive variety as oral performance (music/lyrics, traditional opera scripts, bamboo clapper talks), textual narrative (his diary, poems on Lei Feng, children's stories, movie scripts) as well as picture albums. The abundance of scripts of drama and opera in the 1950s and 1960s can be used for investigating the modernising/propagandising process of these genres, as well as their role in promoting ideas of patriotism, class struggle, revolutionary spirit, and socialist construction in the first decades of the PRC, which offer new insights on cultural life, especially during the 1960s and 1970s.

Complete sets of journals such as *World Knowledge* 世界知识, *Knowledge is Power* 知识就是力量, *People's Liberation Army Pictorial* 解放军画报, *Chinese*

Agricultural Science 中国农业科学, *Soviet Agricultural Science* 苏联农业科学, or *Artifacts of the Revolution* 革命文物, to name just a few, offer information on a whole array of topics.

The collection is accessible to researchers and PhD candidates. Due to its size, a catalogue is not available (yet), but a first impression of what is available can be gained by having a look at the bookshelves. Inquiries can be sent to Marc Matten, marc.matten[at]fau.de.

6.4 From Propaganda Posters to Covid Memes: Repackaging Chinese Posters in the Digital Age

Ruichen Zhang

Visual culture in the PRC features a rich collection of propaganda posters. With their unique visual style, language formation, and political messages, these posters are valuable for studying arts, social mobilisation, political persuasion, etc. across different periods in modern Chinese history. However, these posters are not just about the past. Indeed, they have also been variously revived in contemporary China in the form of memes across social media.

There are many examples of propaganda posters used as internet memes across a wide range of contexts. Just look at this poster below (Figure 6.4a). According to chineseposters.net, it originally comes from the Patriotic Health Campaign in 1952. The caption says 'To do a good job in epidemic prevention and hygiene work is concrete patriotic behaviour in the battle to smash American imperialist germ warfare' (*zuo hao fangyi weisheng gong zuo, jiushi fensui mei diguo zhuyi xijun zhan de juti aiguo xingdong* 作好防疫卫生工作，就是粉碎美帝国主义细菌战的具体爱国行动). I came across this image on WeChat from one of my friends' 'moments' (*pengyou quan* 朋友圈). A Chinese postgraduate student studying abroad, he shared this image to complain about his roommates not paying enough attention to Covid and to express the importance of him staying alert and taking all necessary procedures to protect himself from Covid.

In recent years, repackaging propaganda posters in this way has become quite common on Chinese social media (see Zhang 2020). It is essentially a mockery of this 'red aesthetic' which emphasises a unity of political ideology and everyday experiences (Donald 2014), and more broadly, of the hypernormalised and formalistic rhetoric of the state. The gap often found between official rhetoric for political persuasion and multifarious everyday experiences can generate a particular type of 'incongruity humour', i.e. humour comprising two sharply contrasted elements to create effects of disappointment and tension relief (Monro 1951). It is largely because of this incongruity that netizens have found remaking propaganda posters with contemporary captions to be particularly amusing.

Figure 6.4a: Zhang Wenxin 张文新. 1952. 'To do a good job in epidemic prevention and hygiene work is concrete patriotic behaviour in the battle to smash American imperialist germ warfare!' Reproduced with kind permission of www.chineseposters.net (Private Collection).

For example, at the early stage of the coronavirus outbreak when many of the elderly in China refused to wear a face mask (see for example, Eckersley 2020), young netizens decided to use propaganda posters to persuade them. On 25 January 2020, Weibo user @你丫才美工 (@ni ya cai meigong) shared 18 photoshopped propaganda posters to help netizens persuade their elder family members to wear a face mask. Among them, as the image at Figure 6.4b states, 'Face mask or ventilator, you may need to choose one' (*kouzhao haishi huxi ji, nin lao kanzhe er xuan yi* 口罩还是呼吸机，您老看着二选一). Figure 6.4c states, 'Save a penny for a face mask, you will spend a fortune lying in hospital' (*sheng xiaoqian bu dai kouzhao, hua daqian wochuang zhi bing* 省小钱不戴口罩，花大钱卧床治病). While these memes were initially meant to persuade the elderly by way of using posters that some thought might be both familiar and eye-catching, they were largely welcomed and in fact primarily consumed by young netizens with laughter. It is hard to know to what extent elderly people found the repurposed posters to be in any way persuasive or if they did actually see them by chance, but we do know for certain that netizens found them extremely funny and that they quickly went viral on Weibo.

Figure 6.4b: 'Face mask or ventilator, you may need to choose one.' Source: Weibo.

Figure 6.4c: 'Save a penny for a face mask, you will spend a fortune lying in hospital.' Source: Weibo.

Propaganda posters repackaged as memes are also popular because they often imply a value contrast between collectivism and individualism. The posters above, for instance, attempt to persuade the elderly to wear a mask for their own good rather than for the country. By contrast, the 1952 epidemic poster above called for individual actions on disease prevention not because it was good for their own health, but because they were serving the country in doing so. A similar theme can be seen again at Figure 6.4d, where a soldier figure

Figure 6.4d: 'I'm a socialist successor, I can't be bothered with romance.' Source: Weibo.

commonly seen in propaganda posters appears above the caption 'I'm a socialist successor, I can't be bothered with romance' (*wo nai shehui zhuyi jieban ren, qi neng tan ernü qing chang* 我乃社会主义接班人，岂能谈儿女情长). While such expressions are now often used as a form of self-derogatory humour about being single, with the poster and socialist terminology used for further comic effect, it nevertheless points to a value contrast between prioritising 'socialist construction' and personal happiness.

It is, however, important to note that the subversion of authoritarian rhetoric and aesthetic of persuasion by means of repackaging propaganda posters does not necessarily imply subversion of the values behind the rhetoric. While in some cases as in the memes above there is indeed a mockery of collectivism, in other cases repackaged memes are in fact promoting the very same values. For example, Figure 6.4e, captioned an image of a soldier with 'Imperialism fled away with its tail between legs' (*diguo zhuyi jia zhe weiba taopao le* 帝国主义夹着尾巴逃跑了). Imperialist (which usually means Western) countries are apparently the target of ridicule, which is consistent with the official rhetoric. It can be used for nationalist comments on news like the Sino-US trade war, or more generally as humorous complaints about foreign employers at work. Another poster (Figure 6.4f) captions an image of a woman being praised and applauded in a crowd with 'Those who choose socialism are blessed with good luck' (*gao shehui zhuyi de ren yunqi dou bu hui tai cha* 搞社会主义的人运气都不会太差). Commonly used for self-encouragement among young people struggling with studies or work, this meme may also imply some degree of approval of, and identification with, socialism.

In most cases repackaged propaganda posters are not trying to promote any official political values at all. They are just a means of everyday self-expression

Figure 6.4e: 'Imperialism fled away with its tail between legs.' Source: Weibo.

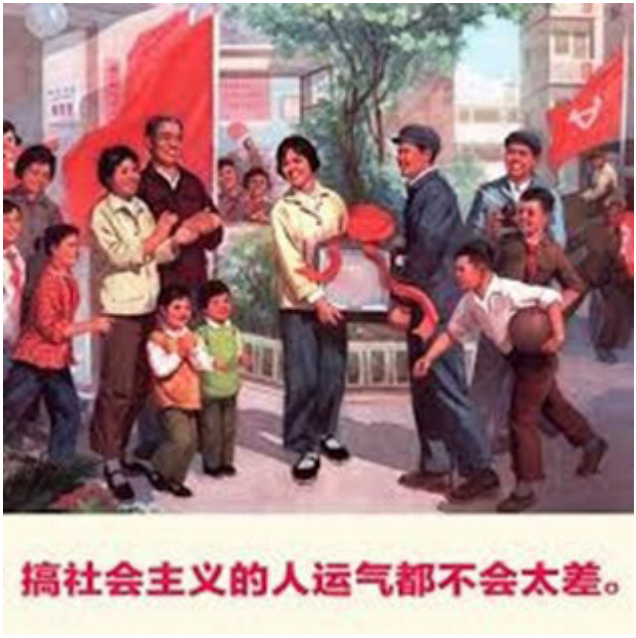

Figure 6.4f: 'Those who choose socialism are blessed with good luck.' Source: Weibo.

on social media platforms. Another poster (Figure 6.4g), for instance, jokes 'Gain weight in holidays, lose weight at work' (*jiaqi li zhang de rou, yong jiaban shou huiqu* 假期里长的肉,用加班瘦回去), while another (Figure 6.4h) declares 'C'mon! Let's go argue with the production manager' (*zou, he chanpin jingli sibi qu* 走!和产品经理撕逼去). Here, these memes have little to do with the values of China's political system, whether ironic, supportive or subversive. Propaganda posters here are simply used as meme templates for personalised connotations.

Figure 6.4g: 'Gain weight in holidays, lose weight at work.' Source: Weibo.

Figure 6.4h: 'C'mon! Let's go argue with the production manager.' Source: Weibo.

The fact that these 'historical artefacts' continue to have a social impact decades after they were first produced is not just about an interest in their 'retro' style, nostalgia for an imaginary past or even about subverting the values promoted within, but, as we have seen, it is also closely related to broader terms and aesthetics of public discourse on the Chinese internet. Whether netizens

agree with, disapprove of or feel indifferent about the values behind official discourse, the repurposing of these posters must be understood as part of the everyday visual practices of netizens across Chinese social media and therefore must be carefully contextualised for nuanced analysis. From the creativity of these memes with their diverse meanings and uses, we can see how Chinese netizens are playing an active role in constructing public discourse in the age of participatory media.

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CHAPTER 7

Calls to Action

7.1 Racisms as Plural: It's Not a Competition

Shzr Ee Tan

During the early days of Covid-19 in February 2020, I watched latent Sinophobia unleash itself upon the veneer of genteel British society. At a railway station in the Southeast, one of my Hong Kong students was followed, spat at, called names, and threatened with 'I'll report you as a perv' the minute he began recording the incident on camera. In the North of England, a colleague from China was shouted at to 'go home to your virus'.

Ha! I thought – I knew it: buoyed by nationwide xenophobia sanctioned by Brexit, (some) people in the UK were finally displaying their true colours, telling (and violently showing) Yellow persons open and blatant prejudice. News articles were written about 'incidents' (BBC 2021). Marches and performance interventions were held (Choi 2020). Academic and activist panel discussions – at which I spoke alongside thinkers on the British Chinese diaspora and on China studies – were convened (University of Westminster News 2020). Awareness of long-standing wrongs was raised overnight, even as many East Asians and Southeast Asians in the UK found the (anger-fuelled? anxiety-hastened?) courage to speak out, publicly. *Finally*, I sighed with frustrated relief – we were being heard.

And then, in June, #BlackLivesMatter happened. The fact that the latest tragic killing of a person in the US this time around (and one killing in

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a history of many) had ignited so much response within and beyond Black communities around the world was no coincidence in terms of timing. Far from a 'society-levelling' mechanism, the pandemic had clearly exacerbated longstanding inequalities and oppressions. People were angry; and why shouldn't they be? Those who were already poor, unemployed or marginalised suffered the unfolding health-turned-economic and political crises around the world much harder and more unjustly ... which also meant that for many East Asians like myself with at least some kind of economic privilege, it was far more important to hide our pain for now. It was crucial that we took a back seat for the moment and allowed the voices of our Black friends and colleagues to be fully and loudly heard. Even more important was that East Asians take responsibility in acknowledging that not a few in their community were themselves guilty of racisms against Black people(s) (daikon 2018).

On 16 March, however, the shooting of six East Asian women in Atlanta, US, triggered fresh waves of responses around Sinophobia. Indeed, even the concept of Sinophobia was being contested as a valid form of racism itself. Observing a Chinese diasporic friend's Facebook timeline detailing her own experience of hate crime against East Asians, I watched a (white) woman post a string of tone-deaf interrogations in the aftermath of the shootings: 'Have u been pulled over? Jailed? Denied a job? Denied housing? Denied loans? Denied access to education?'

To be sure, as the unsympathetic commentator infers, there are different kinds of racisms – all decidedly existing in the plural. Undoubtedly, it is important to acknowledge the differentiated natures of such (often, systemic) oppressions across timelines, geographies and generational divides. In white dominant societies, where those with bias may cross over to the other side of a road upon seeing a Black man approach, not too long ago the interaction was frequently the reverse when involving East Asians. Relegated to the ignored and invisible in their model minority 'doormat' status, Asians were, instead, expected to get out of the way. I speak from personal experience, pre-Covid: in dyeing my otherwise black and classically straight 'Asian' hair purple three years ago, I inadvertently bought myself an extra 50cms of proxemic bubble on British public transport. Now, paradoxically, in the height of a lockdown on London's streets, I enjoy as much radial space as I want, even as stereotypes of East Asians have moved on from the nerdy and emotionally embarrassed swot to that of a different, 'new Yellow Peril' (Royal Holloway University of London 2019). Today, as global power shifts place a technologically burgeoning China in a prime position with envious economic clout, new racist stereotypes of the Chinese as entitled offspring of rich single-child families have emerged.

How does one take apart these unhelpful caricatures, or even begin to understand them within different spectra of racist acts committed against other Japanese, Korean and Southeast Asians/Pacific Islanders lumped together in xenophobic conflation? And what of the many East Asians who themselves struggle with the anxiety of 'model minority' impositions, and refrain from

reporting incidents of racial abuse to the police because they 'don't want to cause trouble'? Plus – there's Chinese, and there's *Chinese*. At the height of Covid-19, one or two conversations within Asian communities themselves teetered into dangerous divide-and-conquer territory while political tensions around Covid-19 blame arose between different people from Taiwan, Hong Kong, and the PRC, amidst swept-aside concerns about racisms (particularly, Islamophobia) *within* China itself. Watching from the sidelines as the holder of a Singapore passport, I experienced soul-searching aches over how I may or may not have treated Malay and Tamil friends in Chinese-hegemonic Singapore (Zainal and Jumblatt Abdullah 2021). And … what about my Black friends in the UK itself, whose journeys of trauma and pain have long pre-existed and continue to exist alongside the pains of South/East/Southeast Asian/Indigenous/Latinx communities?

There is a danger, however, of whataboutisms. And this is where they are frequently deployed as strategies for undermining and denying pain, hurt and larger structural oppressions. Often, these equivalents of *ad hominens* function as a strategic distraction from the larger problem of white supremacy – for it is so much easier to put minorities against each other, no? To quote one of the bad-ass Black women who countered the white inquisitor of my above-mentioned East Asian friend on social media: 'We aren't your bargaining chips.' Too often, white people are entirely comfortable interrogating Black, indigenous and people of colour (BIPOC) about their experiences, forcing unfair identity politics into play while not considering their own privilege and power.

The same argument goes for those in the UK who claim that the race- and gender-fetishised Atlanta killings were 'purely US-centric' affairs spinning off Trump's 'Chinese virus', bearing no relation to race relations with East Asians/Pacific Islanders in the UK. But I can tell you from at least two decades of personal experience, long predating Covid-19, that racism against East Asians in the UK is out here and very much alive, if different in varieties from racisms against Black peoples. Over the past 20 years of my UK life, I have been told again and again that 'my English is very good' by colleagues and students at professional events. I have been accused of plagiarism by people who did not believe I could write. My women friends and I have been asked for free massage, cleaning and 'homecooked meals' alongside sex on Tinder UK. Eighteen months ago, a white man at my local spa tried to tip me, thinking I was his masseuse. (She had spent an hour oiling his body, and he had not bothered looking at her face – or perhaps … we just all looked alike, eh, never mind that I was not wearing a uniform.)

Is all this 'Asian hurt' less than Black peoples' 'hurt'? Yes – of course. But only Black and South/East Asian communities have the right to ask for such comparisons. And believe me – some of us have been doing just that. In the unfolding of this damned pandemic, one of the many lessons I have learned is that inter-ethnic solidarity has never been stronger in pockets across the UK. At the height of open anti-Asian racisms in early 2020, many East Asians reached out

to Black friends/colleagues to express how they finally had a glimpse of what life had been like for their counterparts of colour. Following the news of the Atlanta shootings, some of the first people to check in on me following news of the Atlanta shootings were my Black, Brown, Latinx, LGBTQ+ and EU friends – every one of them a member of a minority community.

And maybe – the notion of care and finding varieties of 'self' in the 'other' is where a hopeful path ahead lies. As recovery from the pandemic kicks into place slowly across the UK, I am watching people who have been hurt in one way or another on account of structural issues in society pick themselves up again, and in doing so learning how to pick others around themselves up too.

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7.2 The Heavy Burden on London Chinatown's Streets

Freya Aitken-Turff

London's Chinatown is preparing for the change in public restrictions on 12 April 2021. Across England, we will be able to eat outside. This holds the potential to breathe some life into the area after over a year of devastating uncertainty and commercial pressure. The possible return of visitors also comes with concerns of increasing racism and violence towards people and businesses of East and South East Asian (ESEA) heritage. Questions of safety do not simply focus

on the face masks and hand sanitisers of Covid-19 but on the physical safety of visitors, suppliers and employees. Last week I handed out personal security alarms to China Exchange volunteers carrying out street-side research in our neighbourhood. I asked them to walk in pairs. I do not want to add to their existing fears, but I also do not want to jeopardise their public safety. This is the 'new normal' in our daily Chinatown lives.

Our neighbourhood was used as the backdrop for early reports on a viral outbreak in Wuhan. Unable to travel to China, national media outlets descended for outdoor broadcasts shot with a backdrop in this distinctly 'Chinese' setting some 7,000 miles away from the emerging pandemic. Footfall fell dramatically for two months before the official start of UK lockdown in late March 2020, while no discernible difference was felt in the neighbouring areas of Covent Garden, Leicester Square or wider Soho. And then the first lockdown began (Barrie 2020). The barrage of anti-Chinese sentiment whipped up through the incendiary and insensitive comments of political leaders did nothing to improve the situation.

The Chinatown area – around a dozen streets of London's West End marked out with bilingual street signs, red lampposts, gates of welcome and stone lions – shapes and is shaped by the UK's East and Southeast Asian communities. Like many Chinatowns around the world, its origins lie in Chinese entrepreneurs who wished to create a feeling of safety by working together in an otherwise hostile environment. Its evolution to a formal branded urban space connects the influences of national and local ideas on multiculturalism, the businesses, their investors and owners, the local authority, the prospect of a larger tourist industry and the area's landlords. This does not mean that the identity and meaning created within Chinatown is uniform or uniformly positive – for many, it evokes complicated feelings about otherness and exotification (either by ESEA people themselves or by non-ESEA led organisations that profit from the area). For others, it is a place of belonging or contested belonging – somewhere to feel comfortable, at home and included. Many assume the area has a large residential population. It does not – not only due to the eye-watering costs of living in London's Zone 1 but also because the Georgian buildings were not all designed as places for people to live. The area is often used as shorthand for UK–China relations – just this week I saw an event about UK–China property investment advertised with an image of the imposing and majestic gate of welcome on Wardour Street. It is used to reflect all layers of Chineseness, all generations of ESEA diaspora experience reflected through the catch-all term 'The Chinese Community'. And it is a marketers dream for all things 'authentic'. It is also a place for food. And a 'must see' tourist destination. We expect a lot from these dozen streets, don't you think?

Pre-pandemic, Chinatown was already undergoing rapid change. This inspired my 2017 Winston Churchill Memorial Trust Fellowship research into global Chinatowns. An area that previously had been the way station for

Figure 7.2: China Exchange volunteer leading a tour on Gerrard Street. Photograph taken by China Exchange.

working-class immigrants and immigrant entrepreneurs now has different economic priorities. Chain restaurants and fast-food outlets have now moved into the area; long-running family businesses have closed as the children of those families have trained in other professions and no longer choose to run restaurants or small shops. The area is known for buffet-style Chinese restaurants and specialist supermarkets. Beneath this exterior lies an entrepreneurial community, grassroots advisory services and a community centre. The area's retail mix is now firmly anchored in food businesses, and fast food represents a substantial proportion of what is available. There remain bastions of the area's former identity as a focal point for other elements of culture rather than only food culture – notably Guanghwa Bookshop offering Chinese literature and cultural products since 1971 and Pang's Printing Company, the UK's first Chinese printing shop – but without someone highlighting these elements, they are not easy to find by oneself.

Community services, largely hidden from the image of the area created by its marketing account (funded and operated by the majority landlord in the neighbourhood), are under pressure. Demand for services has increased, anti-Asian hate incidents, crimes and racism have created more urgent need that the sector has met with admirable creativity and speed, but adds practical and financial pressures to already under-resourced services. There remain people who need these services for simple day-to-day activities (e.g. paying bills, translating a letter from a GP, understanding vaccine information) and that is before we talk about any of the other roles that community organisations serve.

The area's history is poorly documented and poorly understood. While developing the area's community-led walking tours, China Exchange gathered hundreds of pages of evidence of the people, businesses and social context of

this part of London from the 1500s to around 1960. If you walk through Chinatown, you will notice more than 11 heritage plaques in the area (a dozen streets, remember). These show some of the fascinating stories and people who shaped this urban space. You will also perhaps notice that not one of these plaques mentions ESEA history or a Chinese person's name. This inspired the work of China Exchange to document how Chinatown became Chinatown. Our Making of Chinatown oral history project and exhibition made a tiny but significant contribution in building understanding. The homogenised Chineseness of Chinatown is capitalised in every way. The ever-changing Chineseness associated with the people who work in or use the area is harder to derive economic value from but largely because it is difficult to pinpoint something fluid. The area's ESEA history is not yet visible enough to be acknowledged, celebrated or appreciated by the area's vast number of tourists and visitors. Standard visitor data is not available to our small charity at a rate that we can afford; however, our own experiment (counting people passing our doorway at 15-minute intervals between 11am and 8pm for six weeks) showed that an average of 450 people pass by every 15 minutes between these times. That is a lot of visitors! We want those people to have the opportunity to recognise the history of the area. We are crowdfunding to secure the first permanent public display of ESEA heritage in London's Chinatown. Why? Because we expect more from these London streets.

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7.3 My Own Sentimentality: Notes on Female Individualisation from Contemporary Urban China

Jing Y.

Recently I was invited to offer an online writing class to volunteers from an NGO, which dedicates the majority of its resources to bringing educational opportunities to migrant workers' children living in the Guangzhou metropolitan area. Out of the 37 who registered, there was only one man, and except for three young social workers, most of the women in the class were full-time mothers. After a couple of classes, a small group of women emerged showing a similar mindset. Well-intended and polite, they emphasised qualities such as listening, empathy, and solidarity. After a few private video calls and even

some personal dinners, I found they shared a certain social background: all were well-educated and enjoy a certain degree of material wellbeing in Guangzhou – the ideal candidates, according to the NGO.

But some of their other shared qualities puzzled me: they had very little interest in everyday news, whether inside or outside of China. They also had very little awareness of how the massive social and political changes that have taken place across China over the past several decades have impacted different social groups unevenly. Seeing this, I decided to bring news stories and case studies into the discussion. The result was always the same: a gracious reminder that 'one should not judge other people' and 'there is no wrong or right'. Little did I know at the time that these unified tones were the outcome of various 'emotion management' and 'female wisdom' training they had taken elsewhere prior to my class.

Fine, if they insisted on taking a 'no judgement' approach to others and the world around them, then let us talk about the inner self. As it turns out, the inner self is a world that is not only full of judgement but also of prejudice, and sometimes discrimination. And why? This is a question that had taken me some time and effort to understand. The first factor, the most direct and obvious one, lies in the kind of knowledge they turn to for the inner self, and that is pseudo-psychology. It is type of teaching has little to do with psychology as a discipline. What they promote is a very simple motto: hold tightly to your own sentimentality, value it and accept it, as a symbol of self. So they do, using it as the source of mental strength for their 'conclusions' about the world.

What kind of dish might we expect from the people who follow the recipe of 'no judgement for the outside' and 'be yourself for the inside'? Something harmless, I suppose. After all, as something of a typical middle-class preoccupation, millions of users all over the world have trusted their well-being in self-improvement manuals of this kind. But this characterisation does not look quite so 'neutral' when we consider context. Let me bring in two conversations I had to make my point. The first one was in 2017 with Mandy, a potential candidate for my 'Writing • Mothers' (WM) project, on the subject of motherhood.

Mandy: I am talking about our motherland: the place where someone is born. More than anything, I think one needs to love your motherland firstly, and unconditionally.

Me: I have no objection to people who choose to love their hometowns, or their birthplace. But what do you mean by 'one needs to love your motherland firstly, and unconditionally'? What kind of logic is that?

Mandy: I don't need logic (to prove it). The Buddha once said every life is here for a reason ... when you are born into a place, for sure you have to love it.

Then she continued to summarise my reasons for inviting people to write about their mothers, saying: 'Your motivation for doing that is to understand

mothers better, getting closer to them, and that is no doubt an act out of love, also unconditional.'

The second conversation was between me and Ma, an English school teacher from a small city. She posted on her WeChat Moments a government-made vlog which focuses on how selflessly a dispatched medical team had worked doing Covid-19 tests after a small breakout in her area, and added the following comment:

> Ah, I'm old, I can't watch this, it is too heartfelt. My eyes are wet and the only thing I can say is, thank you for your sacrifice to guard the safety of many families in town, do take care of yourself.

In the comment section I wrote to her: Shouldn't it be the government's basic responsibility to make sure medical employees are fairly treated (instead of sacrificing themselves)?

> Ma: If we look at the world in terms of 'should', we human beings will become cold and emotionless machines.
> Me: Are there further questions to ask besides 'being moved'? Why do you think they had to work in this manner?
> Ma: They must work like this because of the pandemic.
> Me: So, you are suggesting wherever there is a pandemic, there will be a medical team obliged to work like this?
> Ma: Why so serious, that's just talk. Can the problem be solved, even if I ask? I am just a very tiny and ordinary speck of dust. Don't accuse me, if you think you're so great, then why don't you go talk to the health department about all this. A village teacher like me could not bother less.

From self-improvement, to psychology, to Buddhism, to 'we human beings', the tools these three women used to rationalise the world may be different, but the function of the tools is the same: to own one's sentiment. Then, because they gave up their ability in reasoning, observing, and verifying in dealing with the outside world (the no-judgement attitude), the result is mistaking propaganda content as their own sentiment, their own personal life choice. Here, Mandy and Ma are respectively the worse and the worst outcome, according to levels of nationalism: one submits her own mother to the motherland with the help of Buddhism, the other has become a devoted actor in the party's 'gratitude culture' in the guise of humanitarian love. This is the context within which I situate the women from my class.

How representative are my three samples? Scholar Yan Yunxiang (2003) has used the term 'uncivil individual' to capture a similar phenomenon in a less gender-specific way. Today, what I can see in my surroundings is that Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* has joined the list, becoming new reading material for urban women. This list will probably go on growing, but little

will change until women that believe in this type of individualisation come to realise that there is not a pure, private and natural sentiment to start with or to return to, just like there is no stable, healthy material prosperity without an active civil society. If you do not act critically against this doubly bound reality, a state-dominated emotion management programme based on Social Darwinist principles, you basically remain running in one place, a no-place you mistakenly call 'my own sentimentality'.

The Gendering of Volunteering

A response to Jing Y.'s article by Derek Hird

What does it mean when individuals express their concern for the sacrifices of others, offer care and feel empowered through volunteering, yet don't reflect on the sociopolitical factors that contribute to suffering and marginalisation? To understand this phenomenon in China is to recognise that the Chinese state utilises volunteering as 'a 'technology of power', a means to nurture self-reliant and socially responsible individuals' (Fleischer 2011: 300). Selfless devotion for the good of society in China is often associated with the soldier Lei Feng, the subject of a 1963 Mao-era campaign. In recent years, the Chinese government has encouraged, rather than coerced, more measured participation in mass voluntary activities such as the 2008 Olympic Games.

The Chinese state deploys volunteering discourses and practices to further ideological control, social stability, Party building and Party legitimacy, while suppressing civil society (Hu 2020). The registration of voluntary organisations is encouraged but channelled towards government initiatives – including poverty alleviation, community and environmental programmes, large-scale public events, social control, and 'development' of the Western regions – rather than advocacy for the marginalised and oppressed. As Jing Y. indicates, volunteers often subscribe to values that include unconditional love for the Chinese motherland and belief in the moral superiority of their activities and goals. The 21st-century Chinese state has 'succeeded in arranging things in such ways that moulded, guided, and directed its citizens/volunteers to internalize the values and act towards its objectives' (Chong 2011: 34–5).

We cannot ignore the gendering of volunteering, as Jing Y.'s encounters in Guangzhou and on WeChat demonstrate. Training in 'emotion management' and 'female wisdom' occurs in political and commercial contexts where women as wives, mothers and sisters have long been associated with emotional labour such as care-giving, nurturing, and child-raising (Evans 2008). A feminine ethics of care in the service of state objectives, legitimised as self-improvement and psychological self-care, enacts the 'positive energy' (*zheng nengliang* 正能量) beloved of government policy. Yet it also reinforces entrenched gendered divisions of labour and complicates attempts to expose state patriarchy. As Jing Y.

shows, state and market discursive practices atomise and feminise women volunteers, who remain believers in their own autonomy, yet are fashioned to provide uncritical sentiment and care.

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Editors and Contributors

Editors

Séagh Kehoe is a Lecturer in Chinese Studies and founder and editor of the Contemporary Chinese Centre Blog at the University of Westminster, UK. Their current research interests include Chinese state media discourses of ethnicity, gender and sexuality, celebrity and the military. They have published in *Media, Culture and Society, The China Quarterly, positons: asia critique*, and *Asian Ethnicity*.

Gerda Wielander is Professor of Chinese Studies and Director of the Contemporary China Centre at the University of Westminster, UK. Her main research interests lie in the link between the personal and spiritual to wider social and political developments in modern and contemporary China. She is author of *Christian Values in Communist China* as well as book chapters and articles in leading peer-review journals. Her most recent work includes *Chinese Discourses on Happiness* (edited with Derek Hird). She is also Editor of the *British Journal of Chinese Studies*.

Contributors

Freya Aitken-Turff has been the CEO of China Exchange since 2015. The Chinatown-based UK registered charity focuses on creating opportunities for

people to learn more about China, Chinese culture and London's Chinatown. Alongside work dedicated to exploring contemporary China and Chinese culture, Freya was awarded a Fellowship by the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust in 2017 to research the future prospects of global Chinatowns and she is the co-author of *Chinatown Stories* published by Unbound.

Emily Baum is Associate Professor of Modern Chinese History at the University of California, Irvine, USA. Her first book, *The Invention of Madness: State, Society, and the Insane in Modern China* was published by University of Chicago Press in 2018. She is currently writing a history of acupuncture in late 20th-century China and the United States.

Samuel Berlin (he/him) is a Postdoctoral Research Fellow in the School of Geography, Earth and Environmental Sciences at the University of Plymouth, UK. He is part of the Atmospheres of (Counter)Terrorism in European Cities project (@AtmoCT) studying the affective experiences of terrorism, counter-terrorism and securitisation. He recently completed a PhD in Human Geography at the University of Bristol, where he studied the developmental politics of class through an ethnography of a Chinese market street. Sam also maintains a research interest in the politics and ethics of gender, sexuality and the body.

Liz P.Y. Chee is a Research Fellow in the STS Cluster of the Asia Research Institute (ARI) and a Fellow of Tembusu College, both at the National University of Singapore (NUS). She was the first graduate of the University of Edinburgh-NUS Joint PhD Programme, and completed her dissertation under the supervision of Professor Francesca Bray. She has an undergraduate degree in Japanese Studies and an MA in East Asian History, and briefly worked for the Singapore bureau of the Asahi Shimbun newspaper before returning to academe. She completed most of the research for this book at the Guangzhou University of Chinese Medicine.

Sophie Xiaofei Guo is a PhD candidate at The Courtauld Institute of Art, UK. Her thesis examines how biomedicine has transformed image-making in Sinophone cultures from the late 1980s to the present day. Her publications include 'Doubting sex: Examining the biomedical gaze in Lu Yang's UterusMan' (2019), 'Gender in Chinese contemporary art' (2018), and '"We will infiltrate your bloodline": Biohacking gender, trans aesthetics and the making of queer kinship in the work of Jes Fan' (forthcoming book chapter).

Derek Hird is Senior Lecturer in Chinese at Lancaster University, UK. He has written mainly on Chinese masculinities.

Jon Howlett is a Senior Lecturer in History at the University of York, UK. He has published on a range of topics including the political and social history of the

PRC, Sino-British relations, the history of Shanghai, propaganda production, and decolonisation. He is a co-director of the York Asia Research Network.

Fei Huang is a Chinese-English interpreter/translator and PhD candidate in Chinese and Cultural Studies at the University of Westminster, UK. Her research interests include masculinities, gender studies, and family life in contemporary China. Her current research explores stay-at-home fathers in contemporary China.

Alvin Hoi-Chun Hung is a Doctoral Researcher at the Centre for Socio-Legal Studies of the University of Oxford, UK. His research interests pertain to the study of humanities around the subject of law, and the study of law and its relationship with society, in the Asian context and with a comparative approach. His doctoral research project uses 'legal culture' as theoretical lens to examine management-labour relations in a Chinese-managed cross-cultural work environment. This blogpost was adapted from his latest article, '"Stones from another mountain": an analysis of the cinematic significance of Hong Kong's Storm films in China's anticorruption campaign', published in *Law and Humanities*. His articles have been published in the *Journal of Law and Society*, and the *Journal of Comparative Law*.

Jessica Imbach is a Postdoctoral Researcher and Lecturer in Chinese Studies at the University of Zurich, Switzerland. Her research explores contemporary Chinese media culture as well as the intersections of technology, futurology and environment in contemporary Chinese literature. She is co-editor of the forthcoming volume *Sinophone Utopia: Exploring Futures Beyond the China Dream* (Cambria Press) and is currently editing a book on digital literature and culture in the Sinocybersphere, which is under contract with Amsterdam University Press.

Justyna Jaguscik is Senior Lecturer in Chinese Language, Culture and Society at the University of Bern, Switzerland. She received her PhD in Chinese Studies from the University of Zurich, Switzerland, in 2016. Jaguscik has published several papers on feminist poetry, workers' culture and gender issues in English, Polish and German. Her current research explores grassroots cultural activism in the PRC and focuses on independent theatre productions.

Shaw-wu Jung is a Taiwan-based anthropologist at Academia Sinica who focuses on law, politics, and the politics of culture. He previously engaged with the intimate spaces of village and local ideas in Taiwan before expanding to the political economy of transnational contexts. To prepare for comparative study, since 2010 he has conducted fieldwork in Hong Kong where a series of related political and legal issues in light of civil society, citizen empowerment, and local culture were explored.

Steven F. Jackson is Professor of Political Science at Indiana University of Pennsylvania, USA. He writes primarily on Chinese foreign relations. He began his interest in Chinese revolutionary posters in 1980 as a student and acquired more while teaching English in China 1981–1983.

Jakob Klein is Senior Lecturer in Social Anthropology, SOAS University of London, UK. He convenes an MA programme in the Anthropology of Food and chairs the SOAS Food Studies Centre. Klein is the co-editor (with James L. Watson) of *The Handbook of Food and Anthropology* (Bloomsbury, 2019) and (with James Staples) of 'Consumer and consumed: Humans and animals in industrialising food systems' (Special Issue of *Ethnos*, 2017). His research interests include Chinese regional and diasporic cuisines, food heritagisation, and meat eating and vegetarianism.

Carl Kubler is a PhD candidate in Modern Chinese History at the University of Chicago, USA. His research interests include the history of childhood in 20th-century China and the transnational dimensions of Qing socioeconomic history, with particular emphasis on the years immediately before and after the first Opium War.

Jie Li is John L. Loeb Associate Professor of the Humanities at Harvard University, USA. She is the author of *Utopian Ruins: A Memorial Museum of the Mao Era* and *Shanghai Homes: Palimpsests of Private Life*. Her forthcoming book, *Cinematic Guerrillas: Maoist Propaganda as Spirit Mediumship*, explores film exhibition and reception in socialist China.

Adam Liebman is Assistant Professor of Anthropology at DePauw University, USA. He is currently working on a book monograph called *Recycling Uncontained* which explores waste circulations and containment struggles in and beyond Kunming. His published articles include 'Waste politics in Asia and global repercussion's' (2021) and 'Reconfiguring Chinese natures: Frugality and waste reutilization in Mao era urban China' (2019).

Marc Matten is Professor of Contemporary Chinese History at Friedrich-Alexander University of Erlangen-Nuremberg (FAU), Germany. He is working on the legacy of the Maoist past in contemporary Chinese society (https://redmemory.hypotheses.org/), as well as recent developments of global historiography at Chinese universities (https://www.writing-history-with-china.phil.fau.de/).

Orna Naftali is Senior Lecturer in the Department of Asian Studies and Director of the Louis Frieberg Center for East Asian Studies at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Israel. Her main research interests include the anthropology of childhood and youth, education, gender, nationalism, and militarisation in the PRC. She is the author of two books: *Children, Rights, and Modernity in China:*

Raising Self-Governing Citizens (Palgrave Macmillan 2014), and *Children in China* (Polity Press 2016).

Shzr Ee Tan is a Senior Lecturer and Ethnomusicologist (with a specialism in Sinophone and Southeast Asian worlds) at Royal Holloway, University of London, UK. She is interested in impact-based issues of music and decolonisation, aspirational cosmopolitanism, and anti-racist activism in music scenes around the world (including HE), with a view towards understanding marginality through the lenses of intersectionality. Her recent research project initiated with Mai Kawabata, 'CULTURAL imperialism and the 'new yellow peril' in Western art music, has gained considerable traction among East Asian music communities around the world and turned her towards more activist-informed scholarship and teaching.

Erin Thomason is an independent scholar, consultant, and applied researcher focusing her work at the intersection of life course development, poverty reduction, and sustainability. She earned her PhD in Anthropology from University of California, Los Angeles, USA, and still incorporates the lessons she learned from rural grandmothers into her everyday life. She has been published in *Gastronomica* and *Journal of Consumer Studies*. Her work is featured in the edited volume, *Families Upside Down* (Brill 2021).

Caroline Yiqian Wang is a final-year Masters candidate and Researcher in the School of Culture and Communication of the University of Melbourne, Australia. Her research interests fall between interdisciplinary fields of East Asian cultural, film, and media studies. Her latest projects include a short documentary about thriving Chinese food landscapes in Atlanta and an article on Hong Kong food and ethnic identities in *Food, Culture & Society*.

Alvin K. Wong is Assistant Professor in Comparative Literature at the University of Hong Kong. His research interests include Hong Kong culture, Chinese cultural studies, Sinophone studies and queer theory. Wong is writing a book titled *Queer Hong Kong as Method*. He has published in journals such as *Gender, Place & Culture*, *Culture, Theory, and Critique, Concentric*, *Cultural Dynamics*, *Continuum*, and *Interventions*, and in edited volumes such as *Transgender China*, *Queer Sinophone Cultures*, and *Fredric Jameson and Film Theory*. He also co-edited the volume *Keywords in Queer Sinophone Studies* (Routledge 2020).

Jing Xu is an Anthropologist at the University of Washington, USA, and a National Academy of Education/Spencer Postdoctoral Fellow. Her research examines child development, education, family and morality in contemporary China and martial law-era Taiwan as well as broader, cross-cultural comparative contexts. She is the author of *The Good Child: Moral Development in a Chinese Preschool* (Stanford University Press 2017).

Jing Y. is an artist and writer. She is the initiator of 'Writing • Mothers' (WM), an ongoing Chinese collaborative writing project since 2017.

Dino Ge Zhang is a media anthropologist and co-editor of the book *(Un) Locked: Memories of Wuhan* (Scale 2021).

Ruichen Zhang works on digital humour and its socio-implications in China and is, more generally, interested in power struggles and meaning making on the Chinese internet. She earned her PhD in Sociology at the University of Cambridge, UK. She is co-editing a forthcoming Special Issue of *AI & Society* on 'Iteration as Persuasion in the Digital World' with Dr Clare Foster, Centre for Research in the Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities, University of Cambridge, UK.

Cultural China is a unique annual publication for up-to-date, informed and accessible commentary about Chinese and Sinophone languages, cultural practices, politics and production, and their critical analysis. It builds on research and perspectives central to the Contemporary China Centre, based at the University of Westminster, and the Contemporary China Centre Blog.

The chapters in this *Review* speak to the challenging and eventful year that was 2021 as it unfolded across cultural China. Thematically, they range from health and medicine, environment, food, children and parenting, via film, red culture and calls to action. Many of the contributions in this edited collection focus on the People's Republic of China, 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 cultural China. It aims 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.

Séagh Kehoe is Lecturer in Chinese Studies at the University of Westminster, UK, and founder and editor of the Contemporary China Centre (CCC) Blog, available at https://blog.westminster.ac.uk/contemporarychina/.

Gerda Wielander is Professor of Chinese Studies and Director of the Contemporary China Centre at the University of Westminster, UK.

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