JOURNAL

VOLUME 7, ISSUE 1, JAN–JUN 2022

OUT OF TIME

Realms of Chinese Nostalgia

The *Made in China Journal* is a biannual publication on Chinese politics and society. This project has been produced with the financial assistance of the Australian Centre on China in the World (CIW), The Australian National University, and the Centre for East and South-East Asian Studies, Lund University. The views expressed are those of the individual authors and do not represent the views of CIW, Lund University, or the institutions to which the authors are affiliated.

ANU PRESS

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Made in China Journal is published by ANU Press
The Australian National University
Canberra ACT 2600, Australia
Email: anupress@anu.edu.au
This title is available online at press.anu.edu.au

ISSN 2652-6352 (print)
ISSN 2206-9119 (online)

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The *Made in China Journal* (MIC) is a publication focussing on labour, civil society, and human rights in China. It is founded on the belief that spreading awareness of the complexities and nuances underpinning socioeconomic change in contemporary Chinese society is important, especially considering how in today's globalised world Chinese labour issues have reverberations that go well beyond national borders. MIC rests on two pillars: the conviction that today, more than ever, it is necessary to bridge the gap between the scholarly community and the general public, and the related belief that open access publishing is necessary to ethically reappropriate academic research from commercial publishers who restrict the free circulation of ideas.

INFORMATION FOR CONTRIBUTORS:
Authors are invited to submit articles, notes, or book reviews, but are encouraged to discuss their ideas with the editors beforehand. All manuscripts are subject to a refereeing process. Manuscripts and editorial correspondence should be emailed to: editors@madeinchinajournal.com.

INFORMATION FOR READERS:
The *Made in China Journal* is published by ANU Press twice a year. It is freely available online with ANU Press (press.anu.edu.au) or at madeinchinajournal.com.

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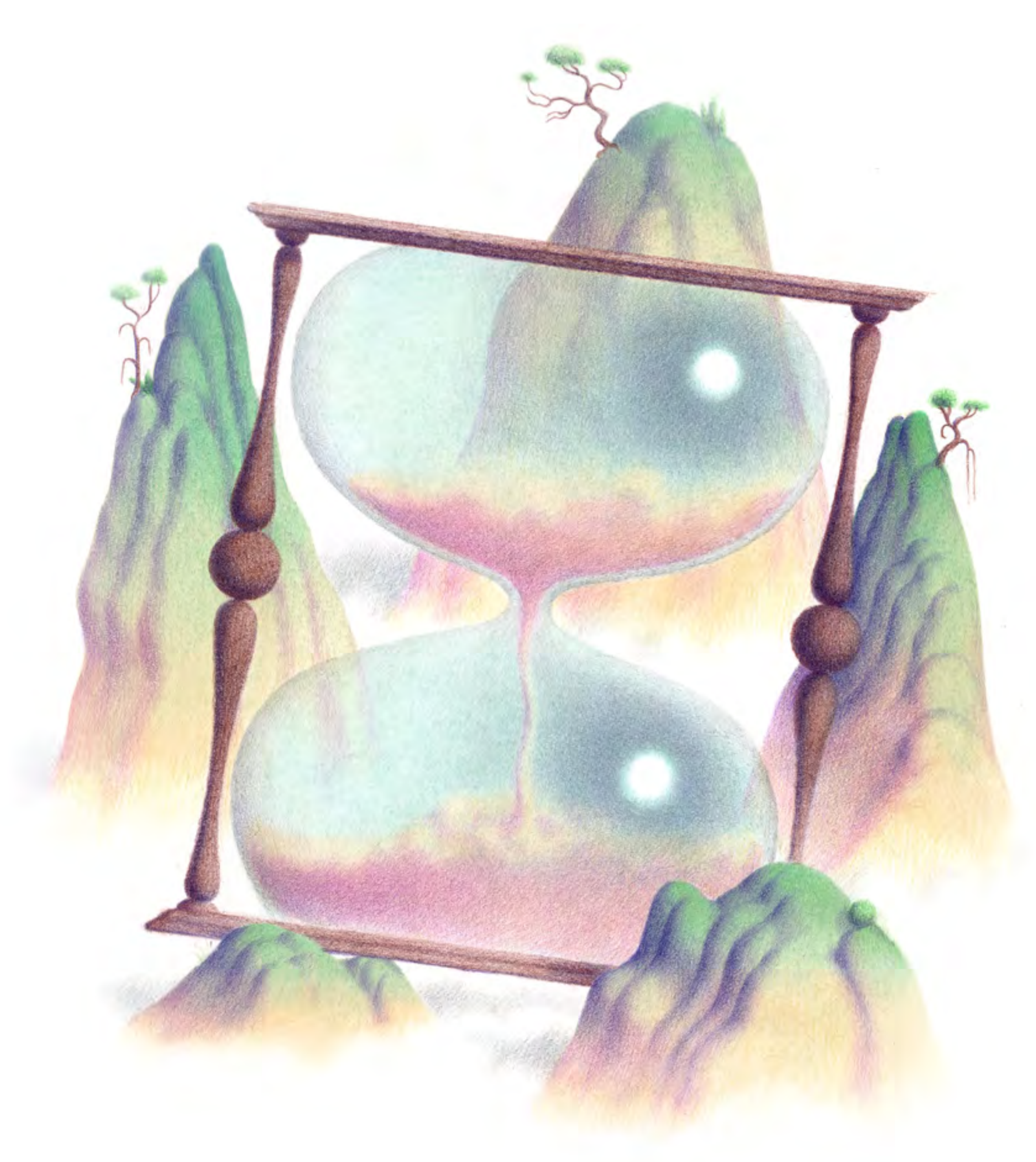

MADE IN CHINA
JOURNAL

VOLUME 7, ISSUE #1
JAN–JUN 2022

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

EDITORIAL P. 9

BRIEFS P. 13

OP-EDS P. 19

EVERYTHING IS DIFFERENT, BUT NOTHING HAS CHANGED: THE PAST DECADE FOR CHINA'S WORKERS P. 20
China Labour Bulletin

CHINA'S RATIFICATION OF THE ILO FORCED LABOUR CONVENTIONS: A HOLLOW GESTURE? P. 28
Nicola MACBEAN

CHINA COLUMNS P. 35

ETHICS IN SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH ON CHINA P. 36
Björn ALPERMANN

FOCUS P. 45

ON NOSTALGIA AND RETURNS P. 46
Jennifer HUBBERT

FROM GRASSROOTS NOSTALGIA TO OFFICIAL MEMORY: RED RELICS IN CONTEMPORARY CHINA P. 52
Emily WILLIAMS

MAGIC, RELIGION, AND THE NATURALISATION OF CHINESE COMMUNIST PARTY RULE P. 58
Frank N. PIEKE

NEWBORN SOCIALIST THINGS: A CONVERSATION WITH LAURENCE CODERRE P. 64
Laurence CODERRE, Matthew GALWAY and Christian SORACE

AMBIVALENT NOSTALGIA:
COMMEMORATING *ZHIQING* IN THE
JIANCHUAN MUSEUM COMPLEX P. 73
Lisheng ZHANG

'THE MINE WAS OUR HOME':
NARRATIVISING NOSTALGIA BETWEEN
SOCIALIST AND POST-SOCIALIST MINING
ZONES P. 82
Ruiyi ZHU

JOHNNIE GOT HIS GUN, WHILE LIANG
TOOK UP THE PLOUGH: NOSTALGIA IN THE
UNITED STATES AND CHINA, THEN AND
NOW P. 88
Stephen RODDY

MAINLANDERS' NOSTALGIC WRITING IN
TAIWAN: MEMORY, IDENTIFICATION, AND
POLITICS P. 94
Phyllis Yu-ting HUANG

PEASANT WORKER COMMUNIST SPY:
A CHINESE INTELLIGENCE AGENT LOOKS
BACK AT HIS TIME IN CAMBODIA P. 100
Matthew GALWAY

FORUM P. 113

COVID AMONG US: VIRAL MOBILITIES IN
SHENZHEN'S MORAL GEOGRAPHY P. 114
Mary Ann O'DONNELL

THE SHANGHAI LOCKDOWN AS A
CHRONOTOPE: THE BIOPOLITICS OF ZERO
COVID, AUTO-IMMUNISATION, AND THE
SECURITY DISCOURSE P. 134
L. G.

LOCKDOWN SOUND DIARIES: PODCASTING
AND AFFECTIVE LISTENING IN THE
SHANGHAI LOCKDOWN P. 151
Jing WANG

OUTSOURCING REPRESSION:
A CONVERSATION WITH LYNETTE ONG P. 162
Hong ZHANG

CONVERSATIONS P. 169

THE URBANISATION OF PEOPLE:
A CONVERSATION WITH
ELI FRIEDMAN P. 170
Ivan FRANCESCHINI and Eli FRIEDMAN

CONTRIBUTORS P. 178

BIBLIOGRAPHY P. 181

EDITORIAL

Out of Time

乡愁如亡国之君
寻找的是永远的迷失

Nostalgia is like a king with his kingdom lost
What it searches for is an eternal bewilderment.

—Bei Dao, 2008
(translation by Tao Naikan and Simon Patton)

Russian-American cultural theorist Svetlana Boym famously distinguished two types of nostalgia: a restorative one that 'manifests itself in total reconstructions of monuments of the past'; and a reflective one that 'lingers on ruins, the patina of time and history, in the dreams of another place and another time' (Boym 2001: 41). But nostalgia is not necessarily only backward-looking. Rather, it can represent a feeling of longing for a future yet to be lost or even realised. For the historian Roxanne Panchasi, nostalgia may originate in the ways in which people anticipate and plan their lives around an expected future. This anticipated future, Panchasi intimates (2009: 4), 'can tell us a great deal about the cultural preoccupations and political perspectives of the present doing the anticipating'. In these and other ways, nostalgia can actualise in cultural expression and performance within communities of nostalgia and as immersive environments that shine a light on past trauma to move closer to reconciliation. Contributors to this issue explore the workings of nostalgia in people's memories and spaces in China from a variety of perspectives to uncover how and why admirers of the Maoist and post-socialist eras express their longings for pasts real, imagined, and somewhere in between.

The special section of this issue includes nine articles. **Jennifer Hubbert** opens by tackling the question of what it means to be nostalgic amid a global pandemic and worsening repression in contemporary China. **Emily Williams** investigates the practice of collecting 'Red relics'—objects relating to the history of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP)—and argues that in recent years these objects have been increasingly coopted into the party's narrative about the rejuvenation of China under its leadership. **Frank N. Pieke** explains how the CCP has developed strategies to boost its legitimacy that draw on a dedication to the party that is specifically religious yet does not require belief in a doctrine. These strategies revolve around the Leninist concept of 'party spirit' and are here discussed in the context of party-cadre education and 'Red tourism'. **Laurence Coderre** engages with **Matthew Galway** and **Christian Sorace** in a conversation about her latest book, *Newborn Socialist Things: Materiality in Maoist China* (Duke University Press, 2021), and reflects on how the material culture of the Mao era set the stage for the post-reform commodification of society. **Lisheng Zhang** examines how official and unofficial museum commemorations of the *zhiqing* generation—the youths who were sent to live and work in China's rural areas between 1968 and 1980—have articulated a pervasive nostalgia marked by narratives of a '*zhiqing* spirit' that celebrate qualities of perseverance, patriotism, and self-sacrifice. He does so through the lens of the Museum of Zhiqing Lives in the Jianchuan Museum Complex, China's most high-profile private museum project and home to the largest collection of Maoist artefacts. **Ruiyi Zhu** recollects the stories she heard from Chinese workers she met during her fieldwork at a Chinese-owned fluorspar mine in Mongolia and reflects on why they claimed a past that was never fully their own. **Stephen Roddy** revisits the nostalgic pragmatism of the reformer and Confucian philosopher Liang Shuming (1893–1988), highlighting how his responses to the social and economic dislocations of the early Republican era are surprisingly relevant today. **Phyllis Yu-ting Huang** offers a reading of the nostalgic writing of civil war exiles in Taiwan, tracing the evolution of these texts from the 1950s to the 2010s and exploring the authors' narratives of China in relation to the concept of 'homeland'. Finally, **Matthew Galway** delves deep into the nostalgic reflections of Sino-Khmer journalist turned CCP intelligence agent Vita Chieu on his time working for the CCP and the Chinese Embassy in Phnom Penh.

The issue also includes a forum with four pieces about the handling of the Covid-19 pandemic in China. **Mary Ann O'Donnell** provides an ethnographic account of Shenzhen's response to the Omicron outbreak in February and March 2022, introducing how the country's 'grid management' system was implemented in the city. In so doing, she tracks viral mobilities online to understand how physical mobility emerged as a site for the evaluation of the commitment to 'Zero Covid', the quality of implementing protocols, and what were perceived as acceptable forms of policy enforcement. **L.G.** reads the Shanghai lockdown as a chronotope, exploring the biopolitical process of immunisation through an analysis of the Zero Covid policy in the context of the security discourse that has taken root in the People's Republic of China over the past decade. **Jing Wang** pays attention to the everyday soundscape of the Shanghai lockdown—what she calls 'lockdown sound diaries'. Analysing a sample of podcast episodes released in that period, she highlights women's voices and food as mediums to reconnect people, arguing that the lockdown sound diaries serve as defiant gestures recording ordinary voices and making fun out of bitterness in a time of uncertainty. Finally, **Lynette Ong** talks to **Hong Zhang** about her latest book, *Outsourcing Repression: Everyday State Power in Contemporary China* (Oxford University Press, 2022), explaining how her research can inform our understanding of the Zero Covid policy enforced in China.

In the China Columns section, **Björn Alpermann** reflects on professional, personal, and political ethics in social science research in China, arguing that we must recognise the complex trade-offs involved in this type of research rather than proposing simplistic solutions. In the Op-Eds section, **Nicola Macbean** considers the implications of China's recent ratification of the International Labour Organization's two forced labour conventions. The **China Labour Bulletin** looks back at how the dramatic economic, social, and technological changes that have taken place over the past decade have affected the landscape of workers' rights in China. We conclude the issue with a conversation in which **Ivan Franceschini** interviews **Eli Friedman** about his book *The Urbanization of People: The Politics of Development, Labor Markets, and Schooling in the Chinese City* (Columbia University Press, 2022) and, more broadly, about the prospects for Chinese migrant workers and their children.

The Editors

BRIEFS

Jan–Jun 2022

JAN–JUN 2022

Arrests Continue in Hong Kong

In the first half of 2022, national security continued to top the agenda of the Hong Kong Government. Local media outlet *Citizen News* shut in early January, mere days after the closure of *Stand News*, in fear of overstepping blurry red lines on national security. Citing similar concerns, Hong Kong's Foreign Correspondents' Club cancelled its annual Human Rights Press Awards, for the first time since 1996. Veteran journalist Allen Au, formerly of *Stand News*, was arrested in early April on charges of sedition. Later that month, radio host and opposition activist Tam Tak-chi was found guilty of the same charge and jailed for 40 months, marking the city's first sedition case since the British handover in 1997. In early May, Chan To-wai, a former standing committee member of the now-disbanded Hong Kong Alliance, which organised the city's annual Tiananmen vigil, was jailed for refusing to assist a national security investigation into the organisation. A court ruled that prosecutors could label members of the organisation as 'foreign agents' without having to reveal for whom they were accused of working. Standing committee members Chow Hang-tung, Tsui Hon-kwong, and Tang Ngok-kwan pleaded innocent and await trial in July, while Simon Leung Kam-wai finished his three-month jail sentence in April. Meanwhile, four trustees of the now-disbanded 612 Humanitarian Relief Fund, which helped pay the legal and medical fees of protesters who were arrested during the 2019 anti-government protests, were themselves arrested in May for allegedly 'colluding with foreign forces'. They include 90-year-old Cardinal Joseph Zen Ze-kiun, Cantopop star and activist Denise Ho, former lawmaker Margaret Ng, and academic Hui Po-keung. In May, the Hong Kong Election Committee selected John Lee, the former security secretary with three decades in law enforcement, to become the next Chief Executive, signalling an even greater focus on governance through national security. *AK*

(Sources: **Agence France-Presse 1**; **Agence France-Presse 2**; **BBC**; ***China Digital Times* 1**; ***China Digital Times* 2**; ***Hong Kong Free Press* 1**; ***Hong Kong Free Press* 2**; **Reuters 1**; **Reuters 2**; ***South China Morning Post***; ***SupChina***; ***The New York Times***)

Xinjiang Still in the Spotlight as Human Rights Defenders Remain in Detention

In the first half of 2022, the international community maintained pressure on China over its human rights abuses in Xinjiang. In January, France's parliament passed an almost-unanimous resolution condemning the 'genocide' in Xinjiang, joining the Netherlands, Czech Republic, United States, United Kingdom, Canada, Lithuania, and other governments in using the term 'genocide' to describe these human rights abuses. In February, the International Labour Organization expressed 'deep concern' over China's 'discriminatory' policies in Xinjiang and 'coercive measures' akin to forced labour. Researchers also revealed that the World Bank's private lending arm, the International Finance Corporation, has several significant investments in clients that actively participate in Beijing's campaign of repression against the Uyghurs. In May, UN Human Rights chief Michelle Bachelet conducted a long-awaited visit to Xinjiang that was widely criticised for reinforcing Chinese state propaganda and failing to adequately investigate human rights abuses. Meanwhile, the Chinese Government continued to round up human rights defenders, activists, and journalists. In January, lawyer Xie Yang was detained for inciting subver-

sion after publicly sympathising with a professor who questioned the death toll of the Nanjing Massacre. That month, Zhang Qing, wife of rights lawyer Guo Feixiong, died of cancer in the United States after a failed appeal to Beijing to let her detained husband visit her before her death. After being forcibly disappeared in September and placed under residential surveillance, #MeToo activist Huang Xueqin and labour activist Wang Jianbing were charged with inciting subversion in March. In April, the European Union revealed that An Dong, a Chinese national working for its diplomatic mission in Beijing, had been detained since September for 'picking quarrels'. In May, veteran journalist Luo Changping was given a seven-month jail sentence for defaming China's martyrs. On the bright side, Taiwanese activist Lee Ming-che, who was imprisoned for subversion in 2017, was finally released in April. *AK*

(Sources: **Agence France-Presse; Atlantic Council; *China Digital Times*; China Media Project; Chinese Human Rights Defenders; *Politico*; Reuters 1; Reuters 2; *South China Morning Post* 1; *South China Morning Post* 2; *SupChina* 1; *SupChina* 2; *The Wall Street Journal***)

US Department of Justice Closes Controversial China Initiative

In February, the US Department of Justice (DOJ) closed its China Initiative, a controversial Trump-era program from 2018 aimed at countering Chinese espionage in American businesses and universities. The program drew fierce criticism from activists, academics, and business leaders, who argued that it unfairly targeted professors of Chinese descent and scarred the research community. Matthew Olsen, head of the DOJ's National Security Division, claimed there was no evidence of racial prejudice in the DOJ's prosecutions, but a December 2021 analysis by *MIT Technology Review* found that almost 90 per cent of China Initiative defendants were of Chinese origin. Many critics also argued that the initiative helped fuel Sinophobia during a time of record anti-Asian violence in the United States. As a result, more than half a dozen top researchers of Chinese descent publicly stated their intention to move from their posts at American universities to China. Moreover, the DOJ failed to successfully prosecute numerous high-profile cases. While the DOJ has a conviction rate of 92 per cent for white-collar crimes, only one-quarter of those charged under the China Initiative were convicted and a significant number of cases were dropped, according to the MIT analysis. Even those who were found innocent, like MIT scientist Gang Chen, described having their reputations and lives ruined by years-long investigations and legal proceedings. The DOJ has replaced the China Initiative with a new program, called the 'Strategy for Countering Nation-State Threats', which focuses on a broader set of countries including Russia, Iran, North Korea, and China. However, many researchers are sceptical that the new initiative will be anything other than a change in name, as the DOJ has continued to investigate university professors of Chinese descent since the China Initiative's closure, and as academics find themselves under increasing scrutiny amid deteriorating Sino-American relations. *AK*

(Sources: **Associated Press; *China 21*; *China Digital Times*; *MIT Technology Review* 1; *MIT Technology Review* 2; *Nature*; *SupChina* 1; *SupChina* 2; The Brennan Center for Justice; *The New York Times*; *The New Yorker*; *The Wall Street Journal*; US Department of Justice; US–China Perception Monitor**)

Labour Issues in the Spotlight

In the first half of 2022, labour issues were once again in the spotlight in China, with health and safety at the forefront. In February, the deaths of a Bilibili content moderator and a young Bydance employee reignited debate about the '996' overwork culture in China. In March, 14 workers were killed in a coalmine collapse in Guizhou Province, bringing attention to the lingering safety problems in China's mining sector. Pandemic control measures in many Chinese cities put millions of

migrant workers' health, working conditions, and livelihoods at risk, especially food delivery drivers. Unemployment was another hotly debated topic in this period. In May, China's unemployment rate for workers aged 18 to 24 rose to 18.4 per cent—the highest rate since the country began tracking it in 2018. It was reported that several tech giants were resorting to mass layoffs: Didi Freight was reportedly laying off as much as 50 per cent of its workforce; Alibaba and Tencent were to cut more than 50,000 jobs; JD.com was trimming 10–15 per cent of its staff; and Meituan was set to lay off 20 per cent of workers in core business units—to mention just a few. In the face of such worrying numbers, the Chinese Government acted. In March, with a record 10.76 million university students set to graduate in the summer, the national authorities announced the creation of one million internship positions in the public sector for college graduates and unemployed youth. Also, Beijing pledged support for unemployed people, including allowances for migrant workers. Older workers and retirees were also at the centre of discussions. In March, several cities in China—including Shanghai, Tianjin, Shenzhen, Taizhou, Nanchang, and Jingzhou—set stricter age and hiring restrictions for migrant workers in construction, raising public concerns about the social protection of millions of older migrant workers in the country. The following month, China launched the country's first private pension scheme to tackle the strains of an ageing population. On the international front in April, China ratified two international treaties on forced labour amid criticism over the events unfolding in the Xinjiang region—a move that was met with widespread scepticism by human rights practitioners. *LL*

(Sources: ***Bloomberg*** **1**; ***Bloomberg*** **2**; ***Caixin***; ***China Daily***; ***China News Weekly***; ***China Labour Bulletin*** **1**; ***China Labour Bulletin*** **2**; ***Financial Times***; ***Forbes***; ***Protocol***; ***Rest of Word***; **Reuters 1**; **Reuters 2**; **Reuters 3**; **Reuters 4**; **Reuters 5**; **Reuters 6**; ***Sixth Tone*** **1**; ***Sixth Tone*** **2**; ***South China Morning Post*** **1**; ***South China Morning Post*** **2**; ***South China Morning Post*** **3**; ***South China Morning Post*** **4**; ***SupChina*** **1**; ***SupChina*** **2**; ***SupChina*** **3**; ***Technode*** **1**; ***Technode*** **2**; ***The Guardian***; ***The New York Times***; ***The Wall Street Journal***; ***The Economist***; ***Worker's Daily*** **1**; ***Worker's Daily*** **2**; ***Xinhua***)

Violence against Women Makes Waves

In late January, a video of a mother of eight chained by the neck in a doorless shack in Feng County, Jiangsu Province, sparked a huge public outcry in China. In February, while Chinese public opinion was outraged at the conflicting official statements, lack of action, and subsequent censorship in this case, state media celebrated Eileen Gu, the 18-year-old San Francisco–born skier who won two gold and a silver medal for China at the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics, as a symbol of a strong nation and women's empowerment. This provoked new, fierce debates about class and gender inequality in the country. In the same month, two women, known only by their online aliases, Quanmei and Wuyi, who had tried to visit the chained woman, were detained, and beaten by local police officers. After their release, Wuyi had her social media accounts blocked and was detained a second time in early March, igniting a #freeWuyi movement on Weibo. In March, another case of a woman being caged by her husband, in Shaanxi, spurred online discussions about human trafficking, domestic abuse, rural poverty, and the rights of women, which were promptly censored. In the same month, in response to these controversies, China's Ministry of Public Security launched a year-long campaign to stem the abduction and trafficking of women and children. All this occurred in the context of ongoing concerns over demographic decline. Government statistics released in March showed the number of marriage registrations hit a 36-year low in 2021, contributing to the country's rapidly declining fertility rate. In May, new figures from China's National Bureau of Statistics revealed the country's population is set to shrink for the first time since the Great Famine of 1959–61. In the same month, some Chinese youths used the 'We are the last generation' hashtag on Weibo to lash out at their disillusionment with life and the pressures they face to procreate and boost the

country's falling birthrate. In June, vicious attacks on women in Tangshan, Hebei Province, and Shanghai promoted outrage and reignited debate about predatory sexual behaviour and violence against women; yet China's officials and elites blamed gangsters rather than sexism and considered feminism a foreign plot. In more positive news, in June, a court in Jinan, Shandong Province, sentenced a former Alibaba manager to 18 months' jail for 'forcible indecency' in a landmark #MeToo case of the sexual assault of an employee during an alcohol-soaked business meal in the summer of 2021. *LL*

(Sources: ***Caixin Global***; ***China Digital Times*** **1**; ***China Digital Times*** **2**; ***China Digital Times*** **3**; ***China Digital Times*** **4**; ***HK01***; ***Insider***; **National Bureau of Statistics of China**; ***Quartz***; **Reuters**; ***Six Tone***; ***South China Morning Post***; ***SupChina*** **1**; ***SupChina*** **2**; ***The Conversation***; ***The Economist***; ***The Guardian***; ***The New York Times*** **1**; ***The New York Times*** **2**; ***The New York Times*** **3**; ***The New York Times*** **4**; ***The New York Times*** **5**; ***The Washington Post***; ***Vice***)

OP-EDS

"Balance", Dongbei.
PC: Gauthier Delecroix (CC),
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Everything Is Different, but Nothing Has Changed

The Past Decade for China's Workers

China Labour Bulletin

Over the past decade, dramatic economic, social, and technological changes have affected the landscape of workers' rights in the People's Republic of China (PRC). But what did these transformations entail for China's workers? In a recently released report entitled 'Reimagining Workers' Rights in China' (CLB 2022d), we took a worker-centred approach to answering this question through an examination of the discourse about and implementation of China's labour policies over the four decades since the beginning of the Reform and Opening Up program.

The impetus for the report was the tenth anniversary of our 'Strike Map', in which we have documented more than 14,000 collective actions since 2011 (CLB 2022a). We followed this in 2014 by creating a 'Workplace Accident Map' and, in 2020, a 'Workers-Calls-for-Help Map' (CLB 2022a). In addition to these data sources, our interviews with trade union officials about specific incidents included in the maps reveal systemic problems in policy implementation across regions and sectors (CLB 2022b). The stories of workers and their families we collect are often shocking, but the patterns are recurring.

Take, for example, the protracted legal dispute of the family of construction worker Zhang Jiangdong, who died in March 2013 at the age of 54 in a traffic accident on his way to work on a government project in a company-provided vehicle with colleagues (CLB 2014). At the time of writing this in 2022, the family is still fighting in the courts for compensation, which demonstrates that laws and regulations do little to protect workers, no matter how clear they are (CLB 2022d: 70–72).

'We were asked to forfeit our right to pursue any legal action or complain to the government authorities,' Zhang's daughter, Zhang Lihua, told us in 2014, after the family rejected a private settlement. 'The village party secretary threatened all our relatives … and told us he was just taking orders from the mayor.' But this was not simply a problem of local interests. The family wanted justice and pursued civil litigation to have the tragedy recognised as a work-related accident, but every level of the court system rejected their claim.

After the case went through civil litigation and mediation in 2014, the Supreme People's Court issued a document with a series of provisions on work-related injury insurance (Supreme People's Court 2014), which led to a reapplication of the Zhang family's case in 2017 and again in 2018, and a retrial at the Hubei High Court in 2021. But despite the existence of laws on accident insurance and judicial instructions to ensure that workers and their families are properly compensated, the Zhang family is no closer to receiving compensation, let alone accountability.

The Zhang family's situation is not an isolated case of official systems failing to implement policies designed to improve workers' access to fundamental rights. Every year, the State Council issues notices on topics such as occupational health and safety and wages in arrears in the construction sector (CLB 2019a: 24–29). The notices and decrees against wage arrears—typically released just before the Lunar New Year holiday—are disregarded as no-one at the local level is willing to enforce them against construction companies, frequently leaving migrant workers desperate for their pay. After every deadly accident, local governments issue top-down directives demanding in strong language that production is halted and inspections are conducted, only to have similar accidents happen in the same jurisdiction just months later.

And, despite President Xi Jinping's calls in 2015 for reform of China's official trade union (Crothall 2020), the All-China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU), the organisation has made some minor changes but remains largely focused on carrying out propaganda campaigns on behalf of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and spreading empty slogans to build up political loyalty for the government. In this context, workers are left behind.

One of the latest CCP slogans is 'common prosperity' (共同富裕), the official use of which soared in 2020 and 2021 (Bloomberg 2021). The term has its origins in 1953, long before China embarked on its

path of Reform and Opening Up in the 1970s and the concept of 'a few getting rich first' was introduced. The term then reappeared in a 1981 plan for wealth redistribution aimed at making way for the nation's economic development (Bandurski 2021). 'Common prosperity' was officially announced as the nation's top priority by President Xi at a meeting of the Central Committee for Financial and Economic Affairs in August 2021 (Xinhua 2021), but at the annual Two Sessions in early March 2022, the term was barely mentioned (Wu 2022).

This sudden emphasis and subsequent about-face revealed the fleeting and unsubstantial nature of these policy buzzwords. When common prosperity was promoted as a priority in the second half of 2021, the authorities pressured major sources of capital to pledge billions of yuan to invest in this grand dream (Lau 2021). Giant technology companies including Alibaba, Tencent, Pinduoduo, Bytedance, and Meituan complied, with Alibaba alone pledging 100 billion yuan (Goh 2021). But there was never any plan for how the funds would be used to create greater social equity, so the noise around this campaign simply served as a distraction, not only from the lack of labour policy implementation by the authorities, but also from the failure of these companies to address the real, everyday problems faced by their workers.

Instances of these problems abound. For example, an overworked Pinduoduo employee with the surname Zhang died in Ürümqi on her way home after working past midnight in December 2020. She was only 22 years old. Just two weeks later, a Pinduoduo engineer with the surname Tan jumped to his death shortly after requesting leave. He was a recent graduate and had started at the company's headquarters just six months previously. Both Zhang's and Tan's periods of employment coincided with the launch of a new Pinduoduo initiative designed to capitalise on the growing demand for online grocery delivery services in China (CLB 2021a). Pinduoduo reportedly pushed its employees to log 300 hours a month—in clear violation of China's Labour Law. Pinduoduo's response to the two deaths was to announce a psychological consultancy service for employees, rather than addressing their own culpability.

When a 43-year-old food delivery worker with the surname Han died from exhaustion from overwork in Beijing in December 2020, Ele.me claimed he was not its direct employee and initially offered his family just 2,000 yuan even though, before his death, Han had purchased work accident insurance through Ele.me's app. Following a backlash on social media, Ele.me agreed to pay Han's family the standard work-related death compensation of 600,000 yuan.

On that occasion, our organisation called the office of the Sunhe Township trade union in Beijing's Chaoyang District, where Han had picked up his last orders. The official who answered the phone said the union had not heard about Han's death and even doubted the veracity of the incident, despite it having made headlines at

One of the latest CCP slogans is 'common prosperity' (共同富裕), the official use of which soared in 2020 and 2021

that time. 'The more detailed the report, the more likely it is to be fake,' the official said, before going on to say that this case was not within the union's purview (CLB 2021d).

In response to the Sunhe union official, our organisation offered some concrete recommendations for the ACFTU to take up, including simply reaching out to delivery drivers in their districts to understand their concerns and pushing the relevant authorities to mandate employers to provide insurance for each driver. The union could also have taken it on itself to represent workers to negotiate with giant tech companies on a range of pressing needs. For instance, besides accident insurance, the ACFTU could have negotiated issues such as the dangerous traffic directions and delivery distances for orders generated by the apps' algorithms. It also could have advocated for the hiring of additional tech workers so employees no longer have to work excessively long and deadly hours. These recommendations are in line with official policy goals, such as those expressed in the July 2021 guidelines on the platform economy of China's Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security (MOHRSS 2021).

An Ele.me delivery driver waits at a pedestrian crossing in the Futian district of Shenzhen.
PC: SCMP / Roy Issa

When it comes to political campaigns and signalling party loyalty, major domestic companies have framed their seemingly generous contributions as 'donations'. This deflects from their own legal obligations to their workers. Were these tech giants to set a national example by complying with the existing labour laws and regulations and offering fairer compensation to their workers—from programmers and engineers to office cleaning staff and delivery drivers—this would be a much greater contribution to achieving the goal of 'common prosperity'. And if the government were to ensure that both enterprises and workers could negotiate on an equal footing over working conditions, remuneration, and workplace safety, there might be more hope of China's labour laws and policies being adequately enforced—this time, from the bottom up through union representation and collective bargaining.

Still, the ACFTU is busy focusing on other issues that look very much like another distraction from the more pressing matters that should fall under its purview. The campaign that purports to eliminate absolute poverty (精准扶贫) is one such instance. In our investigations of how local trade union officials have responded to labour incidents within their jurisdictions, we found union officials were often dispatched to rural areas to assist with poverty alleviation campaigns, including delivering cash to villagers and taking photos of themselves holding brooms as though cleaning villagers' courtyards (CLB 2020). What if, instead of travelling to the countryside, these union officials helped the workers near their offices facing wage arrears and other chronic problems at local companies and state-owned enterprises? It is possible the rural recipients of the gifts delivered with much fanfare by the trade union representatives are the family of those same workers who are waiting for long overdue paycheques in the city (CLB 2019b).

The subject of workplace safety also sees the same type of deflections. With the 2018 State Council reshuffling, China's State Administration of Work Safety was absorbed by the new Ministry of Emergency Management (State Council 2018), effectively treating workplace accidents as post hoc emergencies to react to rather than prevent. This shift is reflected in recent media cycles reporting workplace accidents, in which we see dramatic coverage of heroic rescue operations and praise for the authorities' efforts, rather than questions about why the accident occurred in the first place or what proactive steps are being taken to prevent the next 'emergency'. Local officials increasingly face consequences in the aftermath of investigations, but rather than create accountability aimed at improving workplace safety, the scapegoating is just the luck of the draw for local officials. All the while, millions of China's workers face a daily gamble with their lives and health. When it comes to real responsibility, the ACFTU is the only entity given the right to organise workers and oversee safety matters in the workplace; but to

Food delivery workers in Guangdong, for example, are employed by a tech giant headquartered in Beijing or Shanghai. They are 'managed' not by a human, but by an algorithm that feeds them orders, doles out penalties, and entices them with bonuses to work in bad weather, on public holidays, and for excessive hours.

date, union officials have never been held accountable for failing to conduct their duties under China's Work Safety Law (Art. 24), Trade Union Law (Arts 24–25), and the ACFTU's own charter (Art. 28).

Risking life and health is not a fair exchange for any sum of money. Within five days in early 2022, two coalmine accidents killed 22 people in Guizhou Province (CLB 2022f). Our organisation called the county, municipal, provincial, and national government bureaus responsible for occupational health and safety, asking officials in each whether the investigations of the accidents would include the official trade union. All responded that it would not, despite the union's responsibility to represent workers in monitoring health and safety at the worksite. Government departments are not the only ones who are confused about what the law requires. Our organisation held the same conversation at all levels of the ACFTU about what the union could do in terms of accident prevention. One union official told us that laws are 'only principles' and enforcement depends on the local government.

In recent decades, as China strove to become the world's manufacturer, the country's workers have endured unsatisfactory conditions, from the low pay of sanitation workers, unpaid wages of construction workers, and lack of social security for retiring factory workers, to the occupational illness of pneumoconiosis prevalent among coalminers, and so on. Even though workers have repeatedly raised their voices over these issues, none of these problems has been solved. Instead, broad economic changes have phased out some of China's most dangerous industries and contributed to the downturn in manufacturing (Crothall 2018). More major transformations followed the US–China trade war, which led many manufacturers to move elsewhere in Asia, while the Covid-19 outbreak in early 2020 and ongoing pandemic response have created new challenges for workers.

Because of these shifts in the labour landscape, many workers have been laid off from stable employment, which provided dedicated spaces in which they worked and often even lived side-by-side in factory dormitories. They have flooded into the service sector and more flexible forms of employment that do not lend themselves as well to the possibility of strikes and organised protest. These are quickly becoming some of the most dangerous jobs, and today workers have an even more pressing need for sectoral representation to combat the ways in which capital is taking advantage of regulatory gaps.

Food delivery workers in Guangdong, for example, are employed by a tech giant headquartered in Beijing or Shanghai. They are 'managed' not by a human, but by an algorithm that feeds them orders, doles out penalties, and entices them with bonuses to work in bad weather, on public holidays, and for excessive hours. The structure of this 'workplace' does not lend itself to meeting other

drivers, understanding the nuances of the algorithm, or bargaining for better protections such as accident insurance. Still, despite the changes to the nature of work and the workplace, food delivery drivers across China have found ways to connect, organise, and fight back against their conditions (CLB 2021c).

It is not just blue-collar and migrant workers who are vulnerable to consistently poor working conditions. Overwork in China's tech industry is internationally notorious. China's start-ups are staffed by young, college-educated workers who have little bargaining power and struggle to find the camaraderie within their small workplaces that is necessary to begin asking for change (CLB 2022c). University students and graduates feel overwhelmingly pessimistic about their future job prospects. Meanwhile, state policies are pushing young people to start families, and larger ones at that. Maternity leave has been increased, but paternity leave has not, with both bills footed by enterprises, likely giving rise to increased gender discrimination in employment (CLB 2021b).

At the Two Sessions in early March, it was apparent that delegates, including those from the ACFTU, understood the depth and breadth of the issues facing China's workers today, and they could imagine some effective solutions to these problems (CLB 2022e). However, what is always missing from these policy discussions are the voices of workers themselves. There is no shortage of worker voices, as our mapping projects show. The ACFTU, which proffered 42 separate policy recommendations at the meetings, is mandated to represent China's workers but has situated itself far from the reality workers face.

In the Afterword of our report, our Executive Director, Han Dongfang, writes about the political will needed to solve the fundamental problems facing workers:

> No matter whether you call it 'common prosperity' or the 'China Dream', ensuring that workers and working families are treated fairly has to be the most fundamental aim for any government. In order to accomplish this goal, political and ideological arguments must be temporarily put aside, and the focus should be on how to create a better future for all. (CLB 2022d: 132)

It is confounding that the same problems have continued for years, despite high-level policies and regulations that, on paper, offer promising solutions. The problem lies not only with mechanisms to enforce labour rights and protections, but also with a system that ignores workers' voices. It does not take a lot of creativity to

reimagine the landscape for workers' rights in China: worker participation at the enterprise level and a truly representative union to fairly monitor the enforcement of labour laws before and after violations arise. This is the only way to ensure that policy responses sent from on high land in the hands of workers as tools to protect their own rights and lives. Will the ACFTU continue to stand in the way? ■

"Dirty Hand", PC: Dale Mastin-Purcell (CC).

China's Ratification of the ILO Forced Labour Conventions: A Hollow Gesture?

Nicola MACBEAN

There was a lukewarm welcome from the international community to China's announcement in April 2022 that it would ratify the International Labour Organization's two forced labour conventions: the Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (No. 29) and the Abolition of Forced Labour Convention, 1957 (No. 105). Director-General of the International Labour Organization (ILO) Guy Ryder's statement that the move 'demonstrates China's strong support for ILO values' (ILO 2022b) was met with raised eyebrows by human rights experts. Against a background of numerous reports of forced labour in Xinjiang and an imminent visit to the region by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights—which took place at the end of May, bringing new controversies with her failure to criticise China publicly—it was difficult to be other than sceptical about the news from Beijing. Setting aside the cynical timing of the announcement, will ratification of these two fundamental labour conventions change anything on the ground?

To consider the potential impact of ratification, we need to understand the nature of forced labour in China today and what we know of the Chinese Government's sincerity in undertaking international commitments on human rights.

The Forced Labour Convention (ILO 1930) defines forced labour as work that is performed involuntarily and under threat of punishment. It can be imposed by state authorities, by private enterprises, or by individuals.

The ILO established an office in Beijing in 1985 as the country began the transition to a market economy. Twenty years ago, the organisation embarked on a program of technical assistance to the Chinese Government, addressing the use of forced labour in the practice of reeducation through labour (劳动教养 *laodong jiaoyang* or 劳教 *laojiao* for short) (ILO 2005). *Laojiao*, a form of administrative detention, was created in 1955 as part of a campaign to suppress counterrevolutionaries. Imposed by the police, *laojiao* was targeted at the 'politically unreliable' and minor offenders. A State Council decision in 1979 fixed the period of detention at three years with a possible one-year extension. Human rights organisations have long seen the policy as a significant obstacle to China undertaking international commitments on human rights. The ILO was one of several international organisations trying to apply constructive pressure on China to end the use of lengthy extrajudicial detention. *Laojiao* was officially abolished in December 2013, but, as the situation in Xinjiang demonstrates, the practice was too useful to the authorities to be abandoned and it has, to all intents and purposes, been reintroduced in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR).

The Forced Labour Convention (ILO 1930) defines forced labour as work that is performed involuntarily and under threat of punishment. It can be imposed by state authorities, by private enterprises, or by individuals. Exceptions from the scope of the convention include compulsory military service as well as normal civic obligations and minor communal services, compulsory labour as a result of a conviction in a court of law, and cases of emergency. Each of these exceptions is, however, subject to the observance of certain conditions that define their limits.

Forced labour in China takes several forms and a full discussion, including of forced sexual exploitation, is beyond the scope of this article. Broadly, there are two dimensions to the problem in the People's Republic of China (PRC): the exploitation of vulnerable workers in the private sector and state-imposed forced labour as part of penal policies. Yet, with officials complicit in abusive employment practices at local enterprises and the private sector benefiting commercially from state-imposed forced labour, the two types are interrelated.

Surplus agricultural labour following the de-collectivisation of land in the 1980s fed the growth of township and village enterprises (TVEs). As TVE expansion outpaced the state's capacity to regulate the workplace, numerous reports of abusive practices came to light. For instance, firework factories in China were typically small and locally owned. A string of reports in 2003 of fatal accidents at unregulated sites revealed that many village schools were forcing children to work to pay for their tuition (China Labour Bulletin 2003).

A few years later, the Chinese public was shocked by reports that children, teenagers, and people with mental disabilities were among captives forced to work in appalling conditions in brick kilns in rural

Shanxi (Watts 2007; Franceschini 2022). Distraught parents and local investigative media revealed the extent of exploitation and ill-treatment, including the collusion of local officials.

China's Labour Contract Law was introduced in 2008 to help ensure fairer employment practices and reduce labour unrest (Gallagher 2022). The new law contributed to a decline in the level of informalisation among the urban labour force, yet the young, the old, migrant workers, and the less educated were the ones who predominated among those without labour contracts (Gallagher et al. 2015).

The rapid expansion of vocational education in China created new opportunities to bypass labour laws as factories took advantage of requirements that students complete an internship to graduate. Thousands of school and university students participated in unskilled factory work that provided few discernible training benefits (Cai 2018). A 2014 China National Textile and Apparel Council report, co-authored with the ILO, described how unacceptable working conditions from unregulated internships in the textile and apparel sector risked causing 'scandals at home and abroad, including accusations of forced labour' (ILO and CNTAC 2014).

Scandal has, at times, been a driver of the reform agenda in China (Fu 2009). As stories of abuse circulated online, growing public concern pushed the authorities to act. This dynamic depended on a degree of media freedom that has disappeared under President Xi Jinping. Today, public discussion of a controversial topic can usually be closed down in days while reform-minded scholars and lawyers are wary of speaking out, fearful of the consequences. Rather than address the complex social and legal challenges these stories usually raise, the authorities are now more likely to lock up the messenger (Macbean 2016). Ten years on from the brick kilns scandal, Franceschini reflected that the 'display of solidarity' that had enabled parents and the media to save hundreds of children from slavery was now improbable as critical media voices were tamed and those speaking out for the 'weak and disenfranchised' were arrested in Xi's China (Franceschini 2022: 585).

> The rapid establishment of the so-called vocational education and training centres in XUAR took place in the shadow of *laojiao*. The internment camps replicate not only the extralegal characteristics of *laojiao*, but also the requirement to undertake productive labour

Although market-led reforms began to transform the relationship between the state and workers, the Chinese Constitution continues to proclaim both the 'right and the obligation to work' (Constitution of the PRC, Art. 42). China bucks the global trend that sees the decline of the 'systematic state practice of compelling free citizens to work, for either economic or political purposes' (ILO 2005). Labour is viewed as a national resource (Bian 1994) and Chinese Communist Party (CCP) policymakers regard employment not only as the source of people's livelihoods, but also as 'the top strategy' for ensuring social stability (Di n.d.).

Reports from the Uyghur region illustrate how far CCP notions of employment as a tool of social control can intertwine with inadequate protections, leading to devastating consequences. The rapid establishment of the so-called vocational education and training

> The obligation to work has always been integral to the ‘reeducation’ of offenders and political enemies. Deploying different names, schemes share the characteristics of coerced labour and oppressive indoctrination, mislabelled as ‘education’.

centres in XUAR took place in the shadow of *laojiao*. The internment camps replicate not only the extralegal characteristics of *laojiao*, but also the requirement to undertake productive labour (The Rights Practice 2022).

The Chinese Government has justified its repression of Uyghurs in terms of both counterterrorism and poverty alleviation. Xi’s goal to eradicate extreme poverty in China converged with the desire of the CCP leadership to assert greater control over Uyghur and other Turkic communities accused of being radicalised and fomenting unrest. With the threat of being sent to the camps hanging over families, households have been pressured to agree to state-sponsored labour transfers where workers are placed under close surveillance and supervision. Researchers have unearthed examples of Uyghur forced labour in picking cotton (Zenz 2020; Murphy et al. 2022), as well as in the textile and solar industries (see Lehr and Bechrakis 2019; Murphy and Elymä 2021).

With the repressive apparatus of the state always present, it is a thin line between voluntary and involuntary labour. In *Laundering Cotton*, a report on Xinjiang cotton in international supply chains, the authors refer to a 2014 provision that resistance to government assistance programs in Xinjiang was included on a list of ‘religious extremist activities’ (Murphy et al. 2022). In southern Xinjiang, factories have been built near villages to bring women into the wage economy. An official observed approvingly how women ‘no longer wear headscarves. Instead, they wear work clothes, hats and square kerchiefs’ (The Rights Practice 2020).

The obligation to work has always been integral to the ‘reeducation’ of offenders and political enemies. Deploying different names, schemes share the characteristics of coerced labour and oppressive indoctrination, mislabelled as ‘education’. Across China, state-imposed forced labour also occurs in pre-trial detention centres, the *kanshousuo* (看守所). Despite regulations that state participation in labour is voluntary, former detainees have described to The Rights Practice mind-numbing work assembling Christmas decorations. While several internment camps in the XUAR have now become securitised factories, others have changed their names from ‘training centres’ to *kanshousuo* (Goldkorn and Byler 2021).

In 2017, the XUAR saw a staggering 730 per cent increase in the number of Uyghurs sent to prison over the previous year. Our report, *(Ab)use of Law*, concluded that, given the likely political purpose of convictions and in the absence of fair trial rights, the large-scale imprisonment of Uyghurs was inherently arbitrary (The Rights Practice 2022). Although compulsory labour by prisoners following conviction in a court of law is excluded from the general prohibition against forced labour (ILO Convention No. 29, Art. 2[c]), this does not apply where the deprivation of liberty is arbitrary.

The Abolition of Forced Labour Convention No. 105 is primarily concerned with forced labour imposed by state authorities. As a first step, China will need to revise several laws to ensure there is a clear prohibition against forced labour in all places where persons are deprived of their liberty without trial. The 2017 draft *Kanshousuo* Law—still not passed—states that pre-trial detainees cannot be compelled to engage in productive labour (Art. 83), but in the absence of independent mechanisms to inspect places of detention it will be impossible to monitor compliance. Attempts by reformers to remove Ministry of Public Security authority over *kanshousuo* were rebuffed in the drafting process. Individual detainees are reluctant to complain, fearing—with justification—that raising the issue of forced labour will be viewed unfavourably pending a decision on their case.

State-imposed forced labour operates in close association with both state-owned and private sector enterprises across China, while complex supply chains can connect prisons to household names in the West (Kuo 2019). Outrage at reports of forced labour among Turkic minorities detained in Xinjiang led the United States to introduce the *Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act*, while the European Union and other countries are drafting legislation to strengthen due diligence throughout global value chains.

Supply chains in China's extensive apparel industry have been described as a 'black box' with opaque networks of subcontractors difficult to investigate (Wu 2021). In-person auditing of factories in Xinjiang has long been difficult and is now impossible (Lehr and Bechrakis 2019). Some Western companies have concluded that the only socially responsible action is to try to remove their supply chains not just from Xinjiang, but from China altogether. Yet, cotton yarn from Xinjiang now appears to be part of garments finished elsewhere in Asia as businesses conceal the source of raw materials (Murphy et al. 2022).

How far economic incentives are driving the continued use of forced labour in Xinjiang, or indeed, labour in the prison system across China is hard to assess. Reports suggest that prison labour can be a useful source of income (Vincent 2011). As wages in China rise, sources of cheap labour are particularly attractive.

State-imposed forced labour operates in close association with both state-owned and private sector enterprises across China, while complex supply chains can connect prisons to household names in the West

China's commitment to ratify the two forced labour conventions will bring increased international scrutiny. Ratifying countries undertake to apply the conventions and report on their application at regular intervals. The ILO supervises the application of standards through a committee of experts and a tripartite committee that considers submissions by member states and observations by workers' organisations and employers' organisations. In February 2022, ILO experts called on the PRC Government to review, repeal, and revise laws and practices of employment discrimination against racial and religious minorities in Xinjiang (ILO 2022a: 514).

Domestic accountability, however, is the missing piece in the implementation of ILO standards. The All-China Federation of Trade Unions does not provide an independent voice for workers and is not responsive to worker complaints. China has ignored the advice of UN experts to amend the Trade Union Law to allow workers to form independent trade unions (OHCHR 2014) and has yet to ratify two fundamental ILO conventions on freedom of association and protection of the right to organise (No. 87) and the right to organise and collective bargaining (No. 98); nor has it indicated its intention to ratify Protocol of 2014 to the 1930 Convention (No. 29), which encourages states to adopt stronger preventative measures. Labour groups in China lost international funding and support after the introduction of the Overseas NGO Law and the departure of many support organisations (Howell 2022; Froissart and Franceschini 2022). While some continue to offer limited services to workers, the extent of political repression in China today has largely silenced these grassroots groups.

China's move to ratify the forced labour conventions helps the ILO progress towards the goal of universal ratification of the fundamental conventions. It also contributes to the realisation of the United Nations' Agenda 2030 and Sustainable Development Goal 8, Target 7, which is to take immediate and effective measures to eradicate forced labour and end modern slavery and human trafficking. At the end of her controversial visit to China, including Xinjiang, in May 2022, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, welcomed the announcement on forced labour and encouraged China to engage constructively with the ILO (OHCHR 2022).

There is, however, a risk that progress towards these diplomatic objectives will come at the cost of further weakening of the UN system and the authority of international law if China fails to approach implementation in good faith. China has already ratified six core human rights instruments, but in June 2020, an unprecedented 50 UN experts felt compelled to raise concerns at the deteriorating situation and called on China to protect fundamental freedoms at home (OHCHR 2020).

The ILO has had an office in China for several decades and has, throughout that time, been providing expert advice to the government on international labour laws and inspection regimes. It would seem to be political will rather than technical competencies that is the real obstacle to progress. Although the problem of forced labour in China is bigger than its use in the XUAR, without a U-turn in its policy towards Xinjiang, China cannot make meaningful progress towards ending forced labour. The state is too complicit in its use. ■

CHINA COLUMNS

Installation by Zhou Xiaohu (周啸虎), America Loves Me, 2012. PC: Long March Space.

Ethics in Social Science Research on China

Björn ALPERMANN

Although research ethics remains an underdiscussed topic in the field of Chinese studies, it is becoming increasingly important due to evolving research practice standards and growing international distrust of the Chinese Party-State. This essay draws from the relevant literature and the author's own experiences to offer a reflection on professional, personal, and political ethics in social science research in China. It argues that we must recognise the complex trade-offs involved rather than proposing simple solutions. Social research in authoritarian settings such as contemporary China requires delicately weighing different options, none of which will be ideal, if we do not want to forgo any chance of firsthand data-gathering inside the system.

Research ethics is an underdiscussed topic in Chinese studies that has only recently attracted more attention due to increasing geopolitical tensions and the concomitant anxieties about China's shifting global role. In this essay, I aim to reflect on often-overlooked aspects of research ethics in the study of contemporary China and consider the implications for the field going forward. My comments proceed in three steps, discussing professional, personal, and political ethics. This is a simple heuristic distinction and does not define clearly separated fields as, in practice, these dimensions overlap and interact in complex ways. Thus, my main argument is that, as with many other questions of empirical research, when considering research ethics, we are

presented with trade-offs and must make difficult choices, often representing outcomes that are far from ideal.

Professional Ethics

While different disciplines have their own understandings and standards for ensuring research ethics, approaches have become institutionalised over time. Standards were first developed for biomedical research, leading to frequent complaints among social scientists about the 'bioethical imperialism' that had invaded their academic disciplines (Emmerich 2016; Zhang 2017: 149). The objection is that the standards of ethical conduct developed for biomedical research may not be appropriate for the social sciences—in fact, they may even be counterproductive (Sleeboom-Faulkner et al. 2017). Moreover, there is a geographical component to this advance of formalisation in research ethics as well. Like many academic trends, it started in the United States and expanded throughout the Anglophone world. In contrast, in continental Europe, it is not yet quite as entrenched (Sleeboom-Faulkner et al. 2017: 73 ff.). In addition, Chinese studies—as a form of interdisciplinary 'area studies'—seemingly continues to be less affected by this standardisation than many social science disciplines.

There is considerable controversy about proper research ethics practices. What is the problem? From the critics' point of view, the institutionalisation of research ethics in the form of an obligatory ethics review before any research project involving 'human subjects' introduces a 'regulatory straightjacket and ethical principles of standard research models' (Sleeboom-Faulkner et al. 2017: 73). Social scientists are forced to mimic biomedical researchers and their methodology (usually laboratory experiments). As an unintended consequence, social researchers may become cynical and see research ethics reviews as nothing more than futile exercises in checking the right boxes and using the correct jargon to gain approval and get on with their research. Building on Guillemin and Gillam (2004), Zhang (2017: 150) calls this 'procedural ethics' in contrast with 'ethics in practice'. Sleeboom-Faulkner et al. (2017: 73) report that UK anthropologists they questioned also saw the danger of 'a false sense of ethical security in the field' among early-career researchers. Because the project has been approved, the line of reasoning goes, the ethnographers may pay less attention to the ethical ramifications of their research while in the field than they might do without the mandated ethics review. Nevertheless, others argue that well-thought-out ethics procedures could be useful for social research in authoritarian contexts (Glasius et al. 2018: 18 ff.).

One particular bone of contention is the question of informed consent. Naturally, participation in a study should be based strictly on voluntary choice, data should be protected, personal information anonymised or pseudonymised, and so on. Yet, having participants sign a statement of informed consent is based on the work of laboratory researchers in the US and European contexts. Here, these mutual assurances are supposed to build trust and reliability between researchers and the researched. However, this does not work in the same way for vulnerable groups even in these societies (Sleeboom-Faulkner et al. 2017: 74) and may be problematic or even self-defeating in other contexts. Glasius et al. (2018: 100) observe that written forms for informed consent 'are not customary in authoritarian research' for good reasons. Cultural differences pose an additional barrier to written consent: the legalistic understanding of trust that undergirds the idea of informed consent (whether written or oral and tape-recorded) will be alien to many Chinese respondents (Zhang 2017: 149 ff.).

This aligns with my own experiences in the field. While it is important to explain the purpose of a study (in general terms) and how data are being safely handled before commencing an interview, having Chinese respondents sign a document of informed consent is impractical or even counterproductive. It might strike them as contradictory that you assure them of anonymity, but then ask them to sign a form with their real name (cf. Zhang 2017: 150). In one of the standard works on fieldwork in China (Heimer and Thøgersen 2006), the topic of informed consent is not discussed

once—so alien does the concept seem to be for both Chinese informants and China scholars. Beyond this, there are practical limitations, too. For instance, reporting on her fieldwork on resettlement in the Three Gorges Dam project, McDonald-Wilmsen (2009: 298) explains that she had to make do with verbal consent (not tape-recorded) since many of the survey respondents were unable to read or write.

This is not to say that the question of informed consent should be taken lightly in the context of Chinese studies, but I argue that we must discuss and develop our own standards for how to obtain it. As a master's student in 1997, I participated in a study aimed at identifying appropriate sites for organic cotton pilot studies in southern Hebei Province. Our team was looking not just at the environmental and economic conditions of the villages in question, but also at aspects of gender and local politics. The village leaders had an interest in having their locality selected as a pilot site and were taking my colleague and me to various households for interviews (as well as being interviewed themselves).

Two ethical questions with respect to informed consent emerged. First, how much of a voluntary choice did our informants really have if village cadres brought foreign researchers into their homes? Second, even though all concerned knew what the study was ostensibly conducted for, none of them could have known that I was going to use the data for my MA thesis, which was later turned into a book and an article (Alpermann 2001a, 2001b), on village self-administration. The reason is simple: I did not know this myself at the time. So, there was no way of getting their informed consent before, and arguably also not later, given the very limited channels of communication in rural China at the time. I do not think that reusing the data for different research outputs is a problem per se, as this is in line with recent requests to make all data available for secondary analysis by other scholars (which presents its own problems; see Glasius et al. 2018: 108 ff.). But since these later studies looked at birth-control implementation at the grassroots level, including the collection of very personal information in this policy area from our informants, this is not a trivial matter. My justification for using the data was that they were completely anonymous and even the placenames below the county level were protected. Therefore, no direct 'harm' was being done to the interviewees, while the 'benefit' of shedding light on a previously understudied aspect of rural governance could be achieved.

In further defence of this research practice, one could argue that even though I considered the data on birth control to be 'very private', this was certainly not the case for the local villagers and cadres. In fact, part of village self-administration in this field is to openly display such information on large blackboards in the main square to enhance 'transparency'. Readers can judge whether these justifications suffice. My point here is that formalised regulations on informed consent would not necessarily have helped in such a case because: 1) we cannot know whether participation is completely voluntary if a local official is present, and 2) getting approval from a research ethics committee and having a form signed by informants are next to meaningless when the data are later used in ways other than the original purposes. At least with respect to the first point, the experience prompted me to take a different approach during my PhD research and instead conduct interviews with private businesspeople exclusively, without the presence of any officials (Alpermann 2010: 196).

Regarding the second issue of prior approval, de Seta (2020: 89 ff.) touches on similar issues in a radically different case—namely, digital ethnography in China. The more connected world of the internet today is not a guarantee of easier solutions in terms of informed consent but instead presents new challenges: 'These discussions move research ethics away from the evaluation of risk and informed consent prescriptions of human subject research, towards more relational and situational ethics negotiated according to the digital media context at hand' (de Seta 2020: 90).

Returning to the special position of the Chinese studies field, there is another conundrum. Funding agencies usually emphasise that whenever a relevant portion of the research is conducted abroad, the laws and regulations of that country must be respected. This is one reason research ethics has become more salient over the past few years for

those conducting research in China. Since the People's Republic of China is an authoritarian state under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), it has never been fully open to social research. In the past, however, it was often possible to conduct even fairly large-scale surveys on political issues in collaboration with Chinese counterparts. These academic partners would usually be more knowledgeable than outsiders when it came to navigating the political minefield of academic research in the country. For instance, they would suggest an appropriate wording for questionnaire items or facilitate access to localities where the foreign researcher would be given greater leeway (Dickson 2010; Tsai 2010). With the hardening of politics under the current CCP leader, Xi Jinping, Chinese authorities have become much more restrictive in granting access and allowing data collection. One indication of this enhanced vigilance is a national campaign against foreign spies that began in 2016 (Chen 2016; Kuo 2018). Another is the tightening regulations on data protection and privacy over recent years. So, when organising a survey under these conditions, a foreign researcher must consider whether the Chinese partners are putting themselves in danger by misjudging the sensitivity of a study. We can no longer console ourselves that those domestic collaborators will be able to correctly sense the political problems and steer clear of them—particularly as 'red lines' are often 'fluid' in authoritarian settings (Glasius et al. 2018: 40 ff.).

Being misidentified as a 'spy' is neither a new danger nor reserved for those researchers gathering large-n quantitative data (see, for instance, Franceschini 2020). Wu (2021: 108 ff.) reports of a 'spy episode' during her ethnographic fieldwork in Guizhou Province in 2009. Studying educational policies among ethnic minorities—a potentially sensitive topic—she came under suspicion of gathering data to 'make China lose face' (丢脸). Given the accusation of 'smearing China' is heard even more often these days, chances are that studying almost anything that could potentially make China (more precisely, the Chinese Government) look bad could land you in a similar situation. Wu (2021: 109) had to navigate these difficulties, which gave rise to 'a range of emotions—guilt, embarrassment, frustration, fear, stress, disturbance'—while trying to cling on to her field site. In the end, she decided to leave for another locality and wait until things had calmed before returning to the first.

Nor does this issue arise only with politically touchy issues. When conducting interviews among private businesses in the cotton industry in a rural county in Shandong (Alpermann 2010), I was suspected of being a spy for the local tax bureau or for foreign cotton companies. This was bemusing at the time, but in the current political climate these accusations would have seemed more alarming, especially in the context of the arrest and long-term detention of two Canadian citizens, Michael Spavor and Michael Kovrig (BBC 2021).

Personal Ethics

While consent forms establish a paper trail to show that proper procedures have been followed, they do not guarantee the research is doing no 'harm' to the participants (Emmerich 2016: 18). Ideally, it should be beneficial to them, if only in the sense of making their voices heard within the academic community. A fundamental idea here is that of reciprocity. Participants in any study give up something of their own—at a minimum, their time and the personal information they reveal. What can they expect in return? What is ethical to give in return without compromising the quality of the data and the ethics of the researcher? Should such a counter-gift be made upfront and openly or should one wait until the right moment arises to pay back the respondents and informants? Zhang (2017: 151 ff.) argues for an 'ethics of care' that extends beyond the fieldwork phase. An example he gives for such a 'post-research ethics' is his helping former interlocutors with English translations of captions and texts for a tourist site about Jinmen. While these are, as he admits, only humble contributions to local development, they go some way to repaying the debts incurred during fieldwork. The case may look innocuous enough, but even here one can sense there could be ethical strings attached. Zhang lent his help to govern-

ment-sponsored touristification of the research locality—something with which one may not feel comfortable in all cases.

Reciprocity can become much more uncomfortable, of course. Discussing his fieldwork among underworld figures in Chengdu, Osburg (2013) beautifully exemplifies how a particular 'godfather' called Brother Fatty (胖哥) came to befriend him:

> Fatty, Chen, and their *xiongdi* subordinates were masters of a type of relationship-building referred to in the Sichuan dialect as *goudui*, which can be understood as a form of courtship for some instrumental purpose … Given their seductive onslaught of gestures of care and generosity toward me, maintaining distance in a way that did not threaten to undermine our relationship became a serious challenge. (Osburg 2013: 300)

He argues that anthropologists easily fall prey to 'ethnographic seduction' (Anthony Robben's term) because this gives them the feeling of exploring 'hidden worlds'. But, as Osburg writes: 'By being "won over" or "seduced" by our informants, we may risk legitimizing their claims to morality, virtue, or honor at the expense of more critical perspectives' (2013: 301).

My own experiences support Osburg's observations. While doing research in Hubei Province, I encountered a local official who sought through various ways to gain advantage of me (or so it felt, although I was clearly also looking to get what I wanted from him). First, he insisted on taking me out for lunch, which devolved into an afternoon of drinking and mahjong, neither of which I enjoyed. A few days later, he followed this up with a dinner with his family. His hope was that I might be of help in getting his child into a German university. I patiently explained that I was in no position to do so and could only offer general advice. Failing this, he next asked for euros since this currency was still hard to get in the Hubei countryside. One of his superiors was preparing to go to Europe and he wanted to make him a 'gift'. Again, being a PhD student on a scholarship, I could not see how I might help. After this, he first took home his wife and child, then offered me a ride to my hotel. Once in the car, he proposed continuing the night with a visit to a nearby brothel. This was the point when I decided I had had enough.

While I could extricate myself from this uncomfortable situation, I kept thinking about what it told me about conducting research in China. With hindsight, I believe this official wanted to enhance our social relations so he could invoke reciprocity to get what he wanted. He did so in ways that were shaped by the habitus of his group, for whom dining, drinking, visiting karaoke clubs and brothels, as well as handing out bribes, were all too common. Little did he know how repulsive all of this was to me, coming as I did from a very different social and cultural background.

As a male researcher, I never felt like the object of 'sexual conquest', as described by three female authors in a landmark paper (Schneider et al. 2021), even when I had to 'sing for my data', as they call it, in a karaoke parlour. But refusing to play along and accept an offered sexual service does potentially risk continued access to the field because the refusal may cause the host to lose face. Fortunately, this has never occurred to me because, in those rare instances, the hosts were not important gatekeepers for me. But, like what Schneider et al. describe, these experiences contributed to my decision to shift my research focus away from rural governance. Thus, they had concrete ramifications for my research.

There are other ways in which doing research that depends on Chinese (local) officials can be ethically challenging. For instance, it appears to be quite common that local governments want to be briefed by their foreign guests about their findings (Glasius et al. 2018: 61). Having been in their locality for some time, one cannot easily reject such a request since it is based on reciprocity. At the same time, it would be foolish to do so because discussing these issues with local officials could provide important pointers on how the local state views the issue at hand, what their policy goals are, and so on. But how to get through these briefings without revealing too much about one's informants can be tricky. This is even more so when, as is frequently the case, a local TV crew happens to be around as well. In such a scenario,

the foreign researcher is expected to play along and find words of praise for the host government. Again, this raises obvious ethical issues. One does not want the host to lose face, but on the other hand, one may be unwilling to profusely praise the government's performance—not least because this may open oneself up to criticism on political grounds (see below). So, one must strike a balance that feels comfortable.

In these matters of reciprocity, a researcher is well advised to be open and honest about what he or she can and cannot do. Leading someone on and pretending to be a greater potential help than is realistic are not ethical conduct, even if they lead to short-term gain. Conversely, as a fieldworker, one needs to develop a good sense of where real friendship starts. For example, one of my acquaintances during field research was a businessman manufacturing plastic flowers. Even though I was never able to open the German market in plastic flowers for him in the way he may have hoped when we first met, we are still friends. I take this as a sign that I was able to manage his expectations successfully.

Political Ethics

We all have our own political values and opinions, and these undoubtedly impact on our research; the only question is whether we acknowledge such an influence and reflect on it. This starts with the selection of topics we study, which are not predetermined, though they are certainly influenced, by the state of the field or academic trends. Even so, we have lots of room to choose varying angles of how to study a subject. For instance, scholars researching China's nongovernmental organisation sector may be inclined towards opening up spaces for social activism; those who are attracted to environmental topics will often hold ecology and natural protection dear; others are animated by specific personal concerns to engage in research on gender issues, LGBTQ+ rights, or similar topics. However, none of these topics can claim to occupy higher moral ground than other questions for social research. It is simply impossible to unambiguously assign an 'ethical value' to a study on LGBTQ+ rights and compare it to one on 'traditional family values' because there is no commonly accepted moral standard for doing so. Likewise, we cannot say that a study of China's civil society is morally superior to one of the private business sector.

What further complicates matters in the Chinese context is the fact that scholars might be subjected to suspicions of having 'sold out' to the Party-State. The economist Carsten Holz (2007) was among the first to ask the question: 'Have China scholars all been bought?' Even before his publication, China scholars reflected on what it meant to be conducting research 'in the footsteps of the Communist Party' (Hansen 2006) or being 'disciplined' as a fieldworker (Yeh 2006). But Holz framed his observations in more confrontational terms. In essence, he charged that due to a combination of factors—including opportunism and intimidation by the Party-State—international China scholars had established cosy relations with the regime up to the point where they engaged in self-censorship and presented a much too benign image of China's realities. Very similar points have been raised more recently (Fulda 2021; Fulda and Missal 2021). There is no question that China's Party-State has a deliberate policy of courting 'foreign friends'. As Brady (2000) has shown, the CCP has strategically used 'friends of China' for a long time. The real question is whether China scholars are naive enough to not reflect on their own role and, conversely, whether they can make strategic use of the affordances offered to gain insights into facets of China normally closed to them or engage in meaningful interactions that would otherwise be impossible. It is hazardous to generalise about this, since the dilemmas and predicaments are real, but researchers will deal with them in their own way. So, the outcomes will indubitably vary. Moreover, the argument that 'China scholars have been bought'—with money, honorary positions, and so on—and now report positively about China may suffer from reverse causality. It is just as likely that Chinese institutions seek out those scholars to grant them the

above-mentioned favours exactly because they hold opinions and do research that the party sees as favourable—and not the other way around.

Nevertheless, one should be mindful of the potential pitfalls of close relations with official Chinese counterparts. During my time at the Center for Chinese Studies at the University of California at Berkeley, I got to know a Chinese historian who also was a guest there. We got along well and when that person attained a professorship at a highly respected university in eastern China, I was invited to attend a conference there. The catch: it was at one of the newly created Institutes of Marxism (short: 马院, *mayuan*). These are part of President Xi's drive to reinforce ideological rigour in Chinese higher education. Therefore, I was wary about becoming too close, yet intrigued to learn more about how such an institute functions, what its role and position within the university is, and so on. The conference topic was 'consultative democracy' (协商民主)—a concept used by the CCP to deflect criticism of the lack of electoral accountability within the Chinese polity. Attending such a conference allowed me to gain insight into the latest thinking among leading Chinese scholars about the evolution of CCP rule. Of course, in such a setting, one cannot expect to meet political dissidents, but there was a fair degree of variety in views on which direction political evolution should take. Thus, I clearly benefited from the insights gained.

But what about the costs incurred? To begin with, I had to lend my 'white face' to the organisers' attempt to enhance their reputation. It soon became apparent that the primary reason for the presence of just four foreign participants was not the content of their presentations. Institutes of Marxism were still quite recent inventions and were responsible for classes such as 'Deng Xiaoping Theory', which students of all majors had to take. But *mayuan* did not have their own degree programs or were just getting started in creating them. Despite being lavishly funded, the institutes were, therefore, suffering from low academic prestige. The conference was one attempt to raise their scholarly profile and having international guests was a key component of this strategy.

Next, my 'old friend' asked me to supply their dean, whom I had met during the conference, and his entourage with a letter of invitation to visit Germany. The expected academic value of this exchange was low, I admit. Nevertheless, I complied out of a feeling of reciprocity. As anticipated, the trip involved not much more than vague ideas being swapped about future activities. At this stage, I felt it important to make clear that any cooperation between our own institute and the Chinese side would have to go beyond the *mayuan* for practical as well as political reasons. In the years that followed, a second delegation visited Germany very much along the same lines.

Then, I was invited back to give a 'high-level talk' at the Chinese university. This was a prestigious invitation—an honour that should go to scholars holding a Nobel Prize or the like, according to the documents I saw. There was a budget to cover my travel to China and the cost of my hotel there. I hesitated, since without doubt, there would be a catch. This was revealed in due course: the topic of my presentation was set to be China's Belt and Road Initiative and its 'community of common destiny'—both intimately connected to Xi's political agenda. In the end, I accepted because I saw it as a chance to give a talk to a large auditorium full of young Chinese and pass on some of my thoughts. Addressing more than 300 Chinese students in an elite university is an opportunity I do not get often (actually, only this once). Needless to say, this meant I had to find an indirect way to frame my criticism of Chinese foreign policy and keep my distance from the ideological mantra of the 'community of common destiny'. I believe I managed both, but others may not be convinced. So, even though I kept my academic integrity, I may have opened myself up to criticism by others who would argue that I had 'sold out' in some way.

The same risk was inherent in the next step in my relationship with the Institute of Marxism. My acquaintance approached me one day with a request to join an international advisory board for a centre on 'Xi Jinping Thought' they intended to establish. My workload would be low, it was promised, just a trip to China once a year to attend a board meeting. Again, I was torn between accepting and rejecting. And again, in the end, I

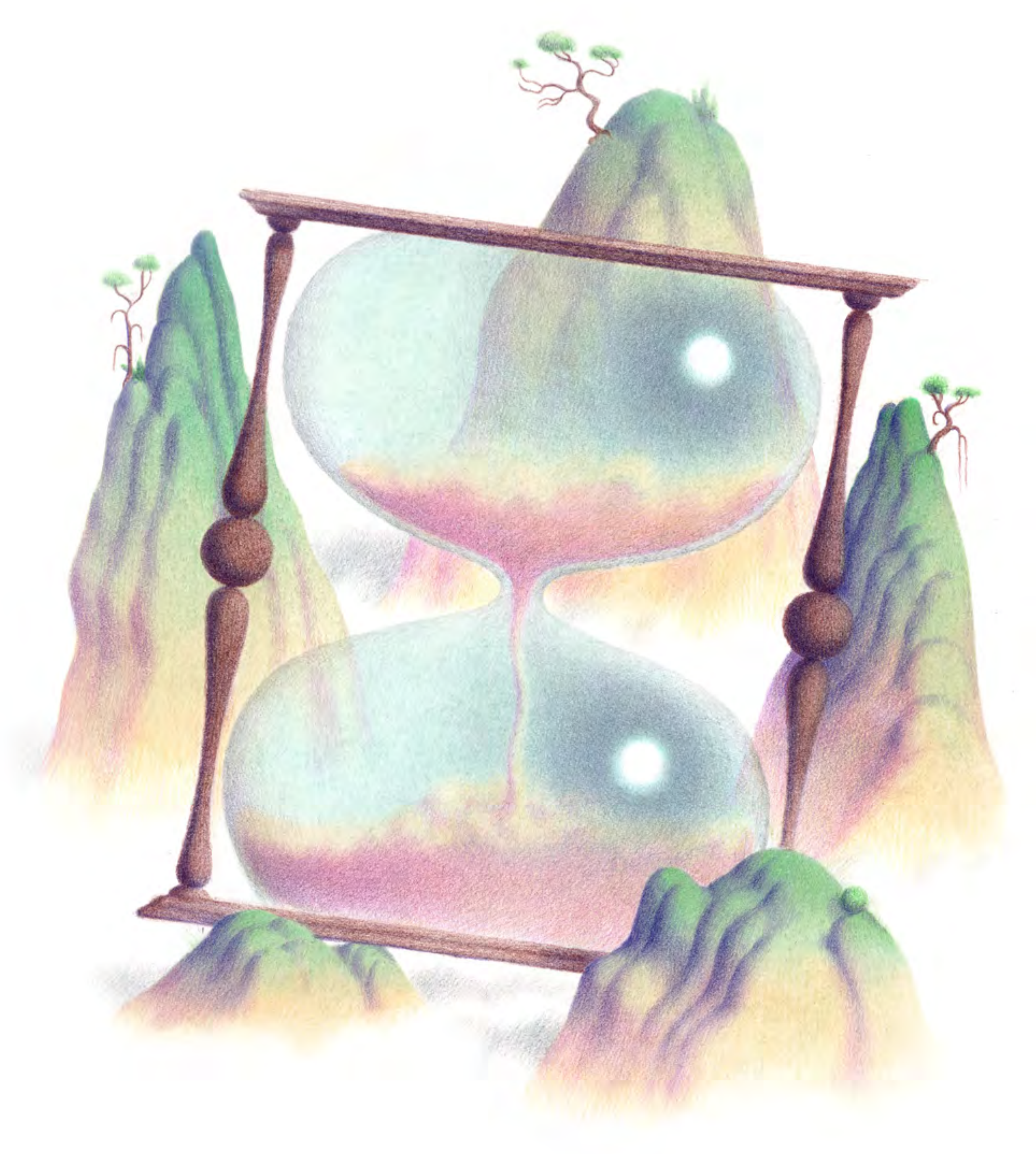
allowed my name to be put forward. The reason was simply my curiosity about what was going on in CCP ideology and the related academic field. Would a position on an advisory board not offer me a unique position from which to study these developments and see what was happening behind closed doors? In the end, the application was rejected so I never had the chance to answer this question. At any rate, being on such a board could have rendered me open to attack. Given the current political climate, this is not an entirely theoretical possibility, since China scholars are once again under scrutiny regarding their political orientations and are often not given the benefit of the doubt (Fulda 2021; Fulda and Missal 2021).

However, many who accuse Sinologists of 'lacking spine' do not consider the justification scholars may have for treading cautiously. A survey among China scholars conducted by Greitens and Truex (2019) regarding their 'repressive experiences' is enlightening in this regard. It demonstrates that outright acts of repression against researchers or their collaborators and interlocutors are rare but do happen. However, they also show that these usually have the opposite of the intended result: they make China scholars more critical of the Party-State and more willing to speak up about this. Furthermore, they find:

> [A] majority of respondents (68 per cent) identified self-censorship as a concern for the field, but provided several important correctives to accusations of careerism and cowardice. Respondents stressed the moral requirement to protect one's interlocutors and subjects. Many also articulated a distinction between the ethical imperative to avoid self-censorship in the core tasks of academic work versus what they perceived to be a more discretionary choice about adopting publicly critical stances, especially on topics outside an individual's research expertise. (Greitens and Truex 2019: 351)

Thus, the charge that China scholars collectively acted naively or opportunistically or were intimidated by the Party-State to adopt self-censorship is simplistic and does not come close to adequately grasping the delicate dilemmas with which we must deal. In fact, some China specialists would argue that their foremost duty as publicly financed professors is to provide the public with relevant research output on China, including its official policies, and that to do so, they need to maintain access to their field of study. Hence, they say, a degree of moderation in public statements and of mimicry while in China is necessary and even an ethical requirement to live up to their primary task.

Again, doing social research on China presents us with real dilemmas for which there is no simple solution. We need to appreciate this complexity if we are to make progress in our debate on research ethics. It seems also pertinent to broaden the debate and recognise that social scientists working in authoritarian contexts throughout the world grapple with similar issues (Glasius et al. 2018). ■



Artwork: Daniele Castellano.

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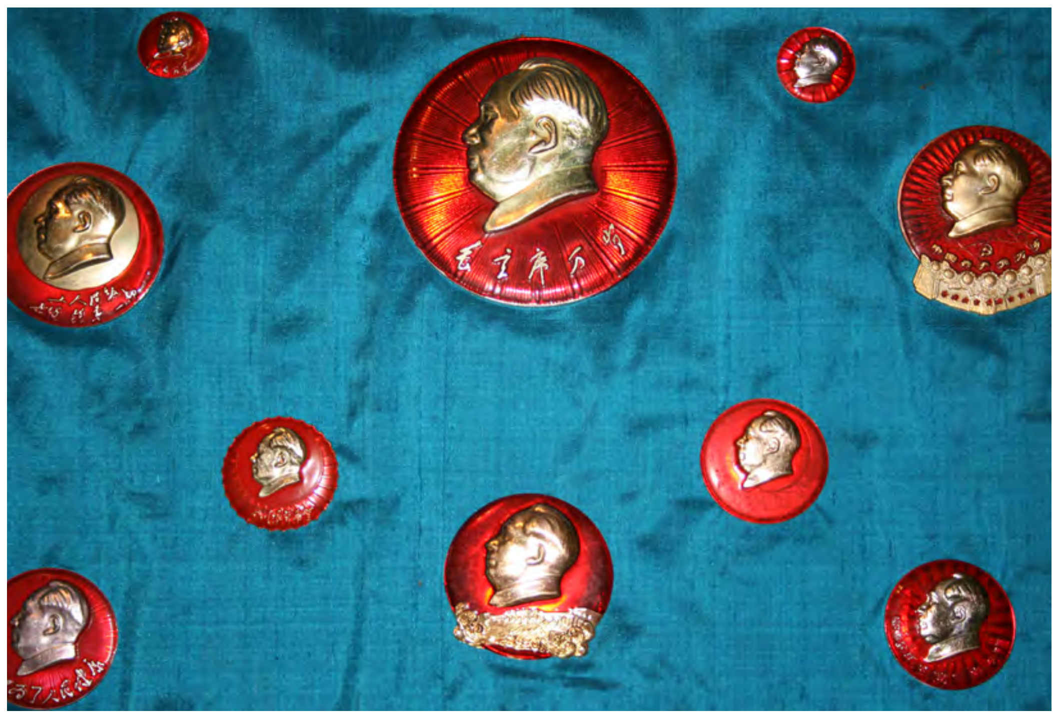


Chairman Mao Cultural Revolution Badges. PC: Gary Lee Todd (CC).

On Nostalgia and Returns

Jennifer HUBBERT

Amid a global pandemic and worsening repression in contemporary China, what does it mean to be nostalgic? This essay explores this question through two disparate but intimately connected lenses. First, it examines changing registers of nostalgia in China over the past several decades, analysing the role of the Party-State and how it is imagined in their production. Second, it examines what nostalgia might mean for scholars who study state–society relations and the production of nostalgia in China, when they confront the potential of not being able to return to China to conduct research, and the ethics of that research should they continue to engage.

When the invitation from the *Made in China Journal* to write an essay on nostalgia appeared in my inbox, I leaned back and allowed myself to engage in a bit of this emotion. While much of my academic work over the past several decades reflects an interest in the ways in which individuals and nation-states exhibit wistful affection for the past, it is one of my earliest fieldwork experiences that I remember most nostalgically and that cemented my interest in public nostalgia as a reflection of state–society relations in China and beyond.

Shortly before leaving for China in 1994 to conduct dissertation research (a study of four generations of Chinese intellectuals and their individual experiences and collective memories of the Maoist past), I was thumbing through *The Washington Post* and came across an article about a collector of Mao Zedong badges named Wang Anting, who had turned his small flat into a museum for the Great Helmsman. The journalist listed Wang's address as 23 Five Riches Street, Chengdu, a day-and-a-half train's journey from where I would soon be based, in Kunming. While the topic was slightly tangential to my research endeavours, I quickly translated the address and dashed off a note to Wang, asking whether I might visit his collection.

I heard nothing for months and assumed Mr Wang had not received this letter from a random stranger or had received it but, reasonably, had chosen to ignore it. So, imagine my surprise when, in early December, I opened an elaborate red and gold embossed invitation to a party in Mao Zedong's honour on 26 December, the 101st anniversary of his birth. The resulting research never figured in my dissertation but was later theorised through a discussion of the Mao badge as a fetish that interrogates the presumed theoretical divide between the postulated ahistorical, 'private' fetish and its 'public' commodity counterpart (Hubbert 2006). Yet, reflecting on that early fieldwork, nearly 30 years later, it was not the theoretical manoeuvrings that I found myself contemplating, but the visceral and social experiences of studying collecting—the visual saturation of red badges and banners juxtaposed with busts and paintings of Mao, Marx, and Lenin; the extemporaneous bursts of revolutionary opera music; a devotee who sported a Marx-like long grey beard insisting the government could 'chop off my head' for all he cared, but he would continue to resist contemporary capitalism through honouring Mao.

The nostalgia of Wang Anting and his party of elderly Mao enthusiasts was an embodied emotion—reflections on intimate experiences of loss and displacement from a time in which public rhetoric, if not always practice, lauded their working-class subjectivities as vanguards of revolution. Yet, their nostalgia reflected not only a personal sense of injury, but also a growing political sentiment that was manifest in a wave of public nostalgia for the Maoist past that reached a climax in the mid-1990s and reflected the perceived moral turpitude of the Deng Xiaoping era (Deng 1991). The nostalgia of the partygoers was thus both a form of spectacle—to amass sheer numbers of badges that were intended to speak, through their volume, to the greatness of Mao and the greatness of the collector honouring Mao—and a form of resistance to a Party-State that had rejected the communitarian, egalitarian impulses of an earlier ideology in favour of schemes of capitalist enrichment that marginalised these celebrators.

My own nostalgia, as I reflect on theirs, is also both personal and political. It, too, is individually embodied, perhaps idealising the nascent stages of a career that is nearer now to its end than its beginning. At the same time, it is a political response directly embedded within the context of a global pandemic and an increasingly bellicose and repressive Chinese Party-State that renders creative and public manifestations of resistance to power and forms of immersive fieldwork increasingly challenging in contemporary China. Nostalgia, Svetlana Boym (2001: xiii) writes, is a 'sentiment of loss and displacement', a longing for 'a home that no longer exists', but also a 'romance with one's own fantasy'. Here, I explore the forms of nostalgia produced by and in reaction to the Party-State, thinking through the question of how individuals and the Party-State produce romances with a fantasy past and how the Party-State is imagined in nostalgic forms of public culture through sentiments of loss and longing. I approach nostalgia and the Party-State over the long durée, exploring how these relationships illuminate the changing nature of public culture and how power—and threats to power—is embedded in the nostalgic visions of belonging and melancholy. However, as I dissect this changing relationship, I find myself returning not only to nostalgia as a theoretical object, but also to the politics of collecting these nostalgias through fieldwork, and increasingly asking: 'What is at stake in this interest? Is future fieldwork and its attendant knowledge a form of complicity with an increasingly repressive Party-State? Will I ever return?'

Nostalgias Close to Home: Mourning Loss and Celebrating Consumption in 1990s China

It comes as no surprise that nostalgia emerged as a central theme in my scholarship, given my early and sustained interest in collective memory. And yet how I came to experience and theorise it as a form of public culture and reflection of state–society relations has much to do with the critical nostalgias aired and debated in the 1980s. Living and working on a university campus in the late 1980s provided immediate access to the educated population that later became the subject of my dissertation research. As Zhang Xudong (1998: 3) notes, intellectuals at the time were 'semi-independent of state ideology and rhetorical officialdom' and, while the Party-State launched several relatively tepid campaigns against 'bourgeois liberalisation', these years in general were marked by the dynamic development and relative freedom of intellectual discourse. Within this context, I watched the television miniseries *River Elegy* (河殇) in public spaces with friends and colleagues and discussed how this anticommunist program that set tradition against modernisation and portrayed the West as an oasis of science and democracy was also ardently nationalist and revealed a deep-seated nostalgia for an imperialist past (Wang 1996: 122). My notes from the time include commentary from a colleague while we were watching *River Elegy*: 'Here in China we think the United States is perfect.' This sentiment reflects an extreme that was modified in other representational forms, yet it was articulated at a time when the viewing public felt relatively comfortable airing their critiques through analyses of the show, and nostalgia as a cultural practice dug deeply and publicly into recalcitrant histories.

When I initiated my study of collective memory in the mid-1990s, the possibilities for such nationwide, public nostalgia had undergone a metamorphosis. After June 1989, and its unleashing of extraordinary violence on its citizens in Tiananmen Square, the Chinese Party-State launched comprehensive patriotic education and national propaganda campaigns that rendered such critical forms of public culture more challenging. In the place of critical nationally televised shows like *River Elegy*, what emerged were more privatised forms of nostalgia, enabled through consumption. Deng Xiaoping had gone south, declared money-making worthy of more complete embrace, and citizen romances with the past were often deeply embedded in the capitalist project, with the Party-State both an enabler of nostalgia and an object of its derision. Badge collector Wang Anting and his partygoers articulated their nostalgia for this past through lamentations about disjuncture and distance from an idealised egalitarian ideology that critically framed the present in reaction to an erosion of earlier social hierarchies of value. The Party-State, in rejecting the proletarian-led and anti-capitalist premise of Mao's revolution, had driven them to the outside of official ideology. As such, Mao emerged as a nostalgic symbol of authenticity, worshipped in this capacity to contest public discourses of value and belonging. Although the promise of the Maoist revolution was a future-oriented one, these individuals' memories of it redirected that orientation to the past, fashioning paths around mourning and loss that laid implicit blame on the contemporary Party-State.

Nonetheless, as Kathleen Stewart (1988: 227) notes, nostalgia is a 'three-ring circus of simultaneous images in the arenas of life-style, spectacle, and loss'. While Wang Anting in his nostalgia—manifest through amassing Mao badges—grieved for China's neoliberalisation of socialist ideology, other Mao badge collectors embraced it, buying and selling badges for profit rather than to honour Mao. Their allegorical readings of Mao badges—Mao's profile perpetually turned to the left—moved collecting to the right through instrumentalist pursuit of capital accumulation in a marketplace enabled by the Party-State. Nostalgia—always already a cultural rehearsal—shifts with context, depending 'on where the speaker stands in the landscape of the present' (Stewart 1998: 227). And these collectors-for-profit thus rewrote

their acts of accumulation as paeans to a new ideology of belonging through entrepreneurialism that recoded this nostalgia in relation to the Party-State as one of empowerment rather than loss.

The diverse nostalgias of the Mao badge collectors in the 1990s paralleled another privatised public expression of nostalgia similarly manifest through consumption: Cultural Revolution–themed restaurants that memorialised both contemporary gluttony and historical deprivation (Hubbert 2005, 2007). The owners of these restaurants were members of a generation who directly suffered the wreckage of the Cultural Revolution. Like Wang's nostalgia, theirs was personally embodied and they envisioned their restaurants as mini-museums that refused to accommodate an amnesiac nation. And yet, like the for-profit badge collectors, they performed a similarly complicated dance around culpability and the Party-State, for their mini-museums simultaneously served as *guanxi* grounds for the production of class status, with walls of business cards providing professional updates on former sent-down youth. 'Nowadays,' one restaurant owner explained to me back in 1995, 'connections are really important … You need to have relationships with these people' (Hubbert 2005: 137). In contrast to the era these places were meant to memorialise, there was little threat of Cultural Revolution–type persecution inside these restrained spectacles of rusticity that ratified the Party-State's new forms of belonging.

In contrast, many of the Cultural Revolution restaurant diners with whom I spoke were young adults who did not directly experience the ravages of the recent past; their 'vicarious' nostalgia was for the Cultural Revolution youthhood of their parents' generation. While nostalgia is frequently implicated in reveries about one's youth, this generationally contiguous longing was a disembodied one, often founded on popular culture representations of the Cultural Revolution as a time of camaraderie and ideological fervour rather than tragedy and devastation. And yet, while they commoditised a troubled past from a privileged place in the present, their nostalgia—mirroring that of Wang and his cohort of elderly collectors—was equally sentimentalised as feelings of displacement.

The young diners I interviewed found themselves in a liminal space marked by the demise of a job-assignment system that guaranteed them post-college positions and an underdeveloped job market. Their ambivalence about their waning social capital in the face of a market that rewarded entrepreneurial over intellectual endeavours rendered the Cultural Revolution—in contrast—as a moment of time in which youth were empowered and had ideological purpose. Their reflections on the rickety values of both past and present and the concomitant fears of potential loss of social capital led to romanticised visions of a past they had never experienced, but one their parents, in their frequent unwillingness to explore the depravity of the era and the Party-State's role in its construction, left ripe for reinterpretation. Thus, through reclaiming the legitimacy of earlier values and forms of belonging in the face of dispossession (both real and imagined) in the present, these students avoided complicated assessments of state-sanctioned destruction at the same time as they consumed the fruits of its contemporary neoliberalisation.

For All the World to See: Performing Nostalgia on the Global Stage in the Second Millennium

In more recent years, we find the dominant forms of nostalgia are far more about state power than about individual loss and are no longer embodied in personal or contiguous generational experience. The closer one comes to the present, the further away is the object of nostalgia. And the public stages for this nostalgia are massive, with badge collections and restaurants ceding to the Beijing Olympics, the Shanghai Expo, and Confucius Institutes. These newer forms of nostalgia reflect a mandate set in the geopolitical future, constructing promises of a globally authoritative modernity through claiming ownership over a long-lost imperialist antiquity. This is a teleological nostalgia that undergirds the Party-State's quest for superpower

status; the Party-State has emerged as the dominant producer of public nostalgia as it increasingly forecloses other forms of memory and value. While these nostalgias are not uncontested (see Hubbert 2015, 2019a), they dominate public expressions.

The nostalgia of Cultural Revolution restaurants and Mao badge collectors both rendered the past more palatable—as a mechanism for buttressing previous state destruction and contemporary ideological change—and manifested as critiques of the Party-State. In contrast, the contemporary forms of nostalgia at these globally facing events and institutions are not about addressing social anomie but about winning the hearts and minds of local and global populations through glorifying a romanticised past that offered ostensibly alternative forms of modernity (Hubbert 2010, 2013, 2015, 2017). While the Party-State plays a central role in all these invocations of nostalgia as object and subject, the dominant contemporary form is one promoted by and in support of the Party-State rather than one that laments its distance from its idealised forms. So, for example, rather than dine on the rustic fare of the Cultural Revolution or collect Mao badges to fashion memories of an inconvenient and contentious past, Shanghai Expo exhibits lauded Daoist environmentalism as a model of contemporary sustainability and Olympic Games cultural displays drew on Confucian themes of harmony among diversity. These 'landscapes of power' (Zukin 1992) selectively constructed a public nostalgia that naturalised historical forms of culture as laudatory precursors to a better global modernity, and a specifically Chinese one at that. Confucius Institutes have taken this message around the globe through pedagogical materials that actualise the imperial past in a present political context and situate resistance to the Party-State's narrative as anti–Chinese culture and the Party-State as that culture's guarantor. Where the 1990s nostalgias of Wang's badge collectors and the younger college students emphasised disjuncture, the new Party-State–sponsored nostalgia offers continuity with an ancient past as a form of contemporary national communion and a global model for nation-building.

The Changing Stakes of Memory

During my years of research on the Olympics, Expo, and Confucius Institutes, the Party-State's willingness to proactively scrub representations of China free of warts has become increasingly fraught for those implicated in the Party-State's webs of predation. Chinese citizens and critical scholars, both local and global, who refuse to tell the 'correct' China Story, are increasingly being answered by the Party-State through silencing, visa refusals, and/or incarceration. Susan Stewart (1984: 23) has characterised nostalgia as a 'social disease' and I am concerned about what contagion means when memory and nostalgia reside as strange bedfellows in a context that renders research in China an uneasy ethical question.

In recent years, as I engage with scholars, politicians, and human rights activists, among others, and hear less often from my friends and contacts within China, I see these webs of predation expanding. I hear reports of precarious faculty at US universities censoring their in-class commentary on China for fear of Chinese students retaliating in teaching evaluations. I talk with scholars who return to China to engage in fieldwork and face prohibitions on travel to previous field sites, the removal of sponsorship, and interlocuters unwilling to engage. Others have been banned entirely. No new research visas are being granted and multiple-entry visas are no longer honoured. Internally, the forms of political repression and cultural compression grow apace. Uyghurs are disappeared or detained *en masse* in 'reeducation' camps (Byler et al. 2022), public representations of 'effeminate men' are banned (Timmins 2021), and foreign textbooks are expunged from classrooms (Cheung 2020). I increasingly find my scholarship at the vortex of impossibility as I publish and give talks on these state-sponsored forms of nostalgia. When I express scepticism about US media representations of Confucius Institutes as spy outposts and communist propaganda training grounds, I have been accused of being in the pockets of the Chinese Government. And yet, critiques seem to land me in a similarly awkward position. After

a talk that referenced debates about freedom of speech at Confucius Institutes, I was accused of being a racist by one online audience member and a 'sad, hate filled monotonic chirping American monkey' in the colourful words of another. One long-time Chinese friend declaims of the contemporary period: 'It hasn't been this bad since the Cultural Revolution' (no nostalgia for the era noted). And yet, I also cannot discount the possibility that my knowledge is constituted through absence. I am no longer there, and my nostalgia is embedded in earlier privileged access to lively forms of resistance and empowerment.

What are the changing stakes of memory—my own and that of my interlocuters? China is witnessing a massive expansion of the Party-State's nostalgic presence in the public sphere and a global expansion of what counts as that space, and a contraction of both authorship and possibility for resistance to state-mandated nostalgia. The forms of loss that can be publicly recognised have narrowed—a dominant romance for an ancient past mandated for all. How far back must one go to find an acceptable object of desire? Embodied pasts are dangerous in constructions of nostalgia. People remember. I wonder whether my growing sense of unease manifests in a form of nostalgia, for my memories remain intensely tied to the visceral and affective aspects of the research: soaking in the pride of a Beijing resident who waxes rhapsodic over China's hosting of the 2008 Olympics, amid a tsunami of global critique about the 'Genocide Olympics' of 2022; sweat dripping down my back as I waited in seemingly interminable lines to see the massive national pavilion at the Shanghai Expo; giggling with high school students in US Confucius Institutes over the anthropomorphised characters in their Chinese-language textbooks. Do such memories empower their objects or gloss over the decreased possibilities for a more politically powerful nostalgia? How am I navigating my scholarly conclusions in relation to state-sponsored constructions of the past?

Does my nostalgia, then, mirror an inverse progression of the nostalgia I have studied? In *Veiled Sentiments*, an ethnography about gender relations, poetry, and morality among the Bedouin, Lila Abu-Lughod (2016) makes evident how such sentiment plays a central role in the construction of knowledge. In a rewritten epilogue to the book, she pushes this discussion of sentiment in new directions, thinking nostalgically about her initial desire for belonging, as a 'shy twenty-six-year-old with strong feelings, deep insecurities, and a desperate urge to understand their world as I lived in it' (Abu-Lughod 2016: 264). Abu-Lughod notes how anthropological research involves 'caring in common' despite different positionalities and geopolitical realities, despite incommensurate worlds. This has manifest in one form in my work through the years in China, through insisting on the humanity of my interlocuters. For example, Confucius Institute teachers are often regarded by parents and program sceptics as inevitable sources of propaganda and/or objects of repression (Hubbert 2019b). Through interrogating the frameworks—in this case, the notion of freedom of speech—as culturally and politically constituted, we can see how different forms of speech (i.e. Chinese teachers' representations of China) are not necessarily the result of state repression, and thus construct a form of subjectivity often denied them by critics of China and Chinese global productions. Yet, despite the possibilities for sentiment, after decades of work among the Bedouin, Abu-Lughod, too, seems to be questioning the inherent conflicts of the process. 'It is not clear to me,' she writes, 'what good would come from more revelations, however insightful, meant for audiences that do not really include them' (2016: 298); or, in my case, for citizens' decreasing ability to express themselves publicly through their nostalgia and my own ability to reflect their memories in a manner that honours their experiences. ■

The author would like to thank Monica DeHart, Lisa Hoffman, Dawn Odell, and Jessie Starling for reading various drafts of this essay.

我是太仓市陆渡中心小学一（2）班的谢一鸣，我今天分享的"红色宝贝"是我爸爸荣获的军功章"三等功奖章"和"优秀士兵证章"。

我爸爸曾服役于中国人民解放军71834部队，在服役期间曾担任过班长一职，还参加过九江抗洪抢险。在军旅生涯中我爸爸认真、努力、刻苦训练，表现突出，被授予"三等功奖章"和"优秀士兵证章"。爸爸在一次实弹演习中左耳耳膜穿孔，导致左耳神经性耳聋，虽然给爸爸的听力造成一定的困扰，但爸爸从来没有后悔当过兵，他一直说："男子汉一定要有家国情怀，有国家才有我们的小家"。平时他还经常教育我和姐姐："现在要好好学习，热爱我们的祖国，用知识和科技来保卫我们的祖国"。从爸爸身上我学到了坚毅的品格及不服输的精神。特别是这次疫情让我更加清楚军人总是在国家最危难最需要的时候挺身而出，默默奉献自己。

我会以爸爸为榜样，努力学习，长大了做一个有用的人，为祖国贡献自己的一份力量。

我是太仓市陆渡中心小学二（3）中队的姚韵希，我要跟大家分享的"红色宝贝"是我爷爷珍藏多年，是他当年在部队时获得的奖章和荣誉证书，但遗憾的是，由于拆迁搬家过程中不慎遗失了部分证书，现在只留下了一小部分奖章了！

我爷爷出生于1941年的太仓浏河，他的童年经历了旧社会和新中国的成立，从小他就知道了旧社会的苦难以及共产党、新中国带来的幸福生活是来之不易的，所以他18岁的时候就报名参军，立志为保卫祖国而努力奋斗，在部队里他严格要求自己，练就了过硬的军事素质，每年都被评为"模范标兵"、"五好战士"，在军队大比武中还获得了"特等炮手"的称号，由于表现突出，爷爷在部队里光荣的加入了中国共产党！

爷爷超期服役，在部队一待就是5年，退伍回来后，他先后担任过大队民兵营长、大队书记和集体企业厂长等职务！爷爷现在已经八十高龄了，但他始终保持着一个革命军人的本色和优良传统！爷爷经常跟我说："如果没有共产党新中国，就没有我们现在的幸福生活，我们要时刻准备着为党和人民付出自己的一切！"

看着爷爷当年获得的奖章我肃然起敬，我的爷爷虽然很普通，但在我的心目中是伟大的，他是我的标杆，是我学习的榜样！我现在要好好学习，长大后要像爷爷一样，为祖国和人民作出自己应有的贡献，做一个对社会有用的人！

A sample of the contributions uploaded by students on the WeChat platform, combining the student's explanation of their family's Red Treasures and photos of the selected items.

From Grassroots Nostalgia to Official Memory

Red Relics in Contemporary China

Emily WILLIAMS

Collections of 'Red relics'—objects relating to the history of the Chinese Communist Party—were initially understood primarily as a form of grassroots nostalgia for the supposed purity and equality of the Mao era and a reaction against the changes of the reform era. This essay argues that in recent years, these objects—particularly those from the revolutionary, pre-1949 period—have been increasingly coopted into the Party's narrative about the rejuvenation of China under its leadership.

The year 2021 marked the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP)—an occasion that was celebrated with events throughout the People's Republic of China (PRC). These initiatives foregrounded the role of the CCP in China's rejuvenation and coincided with a campaign within the Party to encourage the study of Party history with the aim of promoting the 'correct line' of history, as made clear by the publication of the new 'Brief History of the Chinese Communist Party and the 'Resolution on Certain Questions in the History of Our Party' in late 2021. This focus on history has come in the larger context of President Xi

Jinping's leadership, which, according to Mike Gow (2021: 81), has emphasised the CCP's 'moral and ideological leadership' as key pillars of their ruling legitimacy.

This essay investigates the relationship between historical objects and the memories that are constructed around and through them and explores the ways in which outside forces can influence this link. In particular, I examine the changing role of 'Red relics' (红色文物) in this 'return to history' by looking at a media campaign in Suzhou, Jiangsu Province, that asked schoolchildren to find so-called 'Red treasures' (红色宝贝) in their homes and tell their 'Red stories' (红色故事). I begin by tracing earlier engagements with these objects in the form of collecting, a pursuit that first emerged in the early reform era and which reflected a form of nostalgia for the Mao Zedong years. In focusing on the changing role of these relics, I contrast this previous 'grassroots nostalgia' that used the past to criticise the present, with the contemporary 'state-constructed nostalgia' that conversely uses the past to legitimise the present. In so doing, I consider the ways in which memories are mediated through engagement with objects and the ways in which different social actors use objects as the embodiment of values in radically different ways.

From Grassroots Nostalgia to Official Memory

The term 'Red relic' refers to objects made between 1921 and 1978 that have some connection with the CCP, the People's Liberation Army (PLA), the PRC, or its top leaders (particularly Mao), either aesthetically or politically. It most frequently refers to objects like Chairman Mao badges and propaganda posters, and is often associated primarily with post-1949 objects, but as I discuss in this essay, in recent years, collectors in China have given pieces from the pre-1949 period increasing prominence, in part due to their impeccable revolutionary heritage and their association with a less politically sensitive period of CCP history. Collections began to be formed in the late 1980s, before becoming more prominent and mainstream in the 2000s, and over time, the field has changed considerably.

Most English-language academic literature on early 'Red collecting' has understood it as reflecting nostalgia for the Mao era (Bishop 1996; Dutton 1998; Hubbert 2006). There is often a tendency in the literature on nostalgia more broadly to see it as a malady, as delusional, and as reflecting a desire to return to an idealised past that never existed (Boym 2001). This perception governed early writing about post-communist nostalgia in the former Soviet Union (Todorova 2010), but now also applies to analyses of the nostalgia-powered political movements in Western countries in recent years. It is more helpful, however, to regard it not as mindless longing, and certainly not as an uncritical desire to return to the past, but, as Frances Pine (2002: 111) writes, as 'an invocation of the past … to contrast it with, and thereby criticize, the present'.

The comparative power of nostalgia is evident in the writings of Red collectors themselves. Beijing collector Qin Jie (2008: 12) explicitly positions popular and nostalgic remembrances around the time of the 'Mao fever' in 1993 as centred on cherishing the memory of Mao, but also points out this was powered by the 'emotional remembrance of the fairness and justice of the revolutionary era … against the background of the widening gap between rich and poor' (in this context, the reference to 'revolutionary era' likely refers both to the pre-1949 period and to the Mao years themselves). He draws a contrast between the perceived equality of the Mao years and the inequality and corruption of the reform era, and links this not only to nostalgia for Mao, but also to interest in collecting. He writes that '[f]or many people, red collectibles is [*sic*] collecting their own soul, youth and enthusiasm' (Qin 2008: 12), thereby highlighting the role that Maoist ethics played in many collectors' youth and tying this system of ethics to the material culture of the era.

Yet, we can also understand these laments in another way: they are not just about missing the past, but also about a future that the CCP had promised to these people in their youth. Roxanne Panchasi (2009) argues in her book on interwar

France that differing visions of 'the future' contributed to different eventual forms of remembrance and commemoration. Panchasi's work highlights that nostalgia, while seemingly past-oriented, is also about visions of the future. Socialism, as with many ideologies, is in many ways fundamentally future-oriented: China in the Mao era may have been poor and 'backward', but socialism held the potential of a future China that was prosperous and equal. Indeed, this is one interpretation of the art of the era: the posters and paintings represented not the China of the day, but the China of the future—a China remade under socialism (Tang 2015). What post-Mao nostalgia represents is thus not the loss of the existing conditions of the Mao era, but the loss of the promised future. It is a harking back to the past, not for the sake of the past itself, but to retrieve a vision of the future different from that which emerged.

Red collectors, most of whom were young people in the Mao era, were raised in the spirit of optimism for the future, only to be confronted with the uncertainty of the reform era, with its new social order driven by values at odds with those of their childhood. One Shanghai collector, for example, who came from a revolutionary family and was first a Red Guard and then a sent-down youth during the Cultural Revolution, spoke about his disappointment in the direction China had taken in the reform era:

> Corruption in China really is the most serious problem. The whole society has broken down … I look at the portrait of Chairman Mao: it represents fighting for socialist construction. I look at it and it brings you to tears that such a good system, a moral system, a socialist system, has been affected by capitalism. (Interview, October 2017)

For this collector, the Red relic he looks on represents not the conditions of his youth, but rather the spirit of the time during which they were fighting for a socialist future. This fight has now been, in the collector's eyes, abandoned in China's pursuit of wealth and power.

The grassroots nostalgia that is evident in the quote above certainly played a role in Red collecting, particularly in its early stages in the 1980s and 1990s. However, it has become a more marginalised aspect of the field in recent years, as over the course of the 2000s, Red collecting has become more professionalised and legitimised as part of mainstream collecting. The Party-State has recognised many types of Red relics as cultural relics, and the major collecting associations now all have government approval through the Ministry of Culture.

While many collectors still express their belief in the moral legitimacy of the objects, this is increasingly framed not as a criticism of the CCP's path in reform-era China, but rather, at least publicly, as a vindication of the CCP's 'correct' historical path. Hebei collector Niu Shuangyue, who is prominent in one of the two national collecting associations, argues that Red culture and relics are the 'spirit and the soul' of the CCP, which has led the Chinese people from 'victory to revival' (Personal communication with Niu, June 2018). There has been a shift in the public discourse on Red collecting to frame these objects not as reminders of past ideological correctness (to be contrasted with present lapses), but as patriotic symbols of the hardship of the past that led to present happiness. Fujian collector Hong Rongchang, for example, sees a link between the struggles of the revolutionary predecessors, the correct policy of Reform and Opening Up, and present prosperity (Wang 2015). For Hong, today's happy and prosperous life reflects the fulfilment of the dreams of the revolutionary era, which were only possible because the CCP was victorious in the fight for state power, which it truly realised after 1978. Engagements with Red relics represent, then, not just different understandings of the past, but also different understandings of what future that past promised.

These new understandings more closely resemble what we can view as 'official memory' in China and have become more common in the field of Red collecting in recent years. This has been matched by the growing prominence collectors have given to pre-1949 objects, which we can understand in the context of the renewed focus on Party history under Xi Jinping. This has led to an

increased focus among both scholars and collectors on the Party's historical role in the rejuvenation of the nation, while brushing over historical tragedies such as the Cultural Revolution ever more swiftly than before. Red collectors take seriously Xi's call to 'pass on the Red gene' (把红色基因传承好) and believe their ownership of Red relics leaves them uniquely placed to educate the next generation in the spirit of determination, perseverance, and, of course, acquiescence to Party authority that won the CCP the revolution in the first place. Collecting association publications are keen to position themselves within the mainstream as patriotic members of the cultural elite, whose selfless devotion to their objects has preserved historical relics for the betterment of the nation. As such, while many collectors still hold the views that I characterised as 'grassroots nostalgia', there is no doubt that public representations of the Red collecting world have been shorn of these critical associations.

Constructing Red Memories

The value of Red relics as a way of backing up official narratives has been recognised not solely by Red collecting associations; rather, as this essay examines, a 2021 moral education campaign launched by the Suzhou Municipal Education Bureau invited schoolchildren to 'search for Red treasures' (寻访身边的'红色宝贝') in their homes and use them to tell 'Red stories' (Suzhou Municipal Education Bureau 2021). The campaign ran from April to July and resulted in a WeChat account that received thousands of pictures from schoolchildren, as well as at least 15 features on *Suzhou News* (苏州新闻) that were also shared online on Weibo and other social media platforms. The campaign itself did not limit the period of acceptable objects, with the official announcement stating only that these could include 'military medals, commemorative medals, old objects, old photos, letters, videos, and recordings, among others'. The Red treasure must have 'Red stories and Party history stories', but, while a Chairman Mao badge from the Cultural Revolution could fit this description perfectly well, the schoolchildren (or their parents) understood this was not what the campaign was soliciting. The majority of entries submitted on WeChat were from either World War II or the Chinese Civil War. In other words, these items were primarily from the pre-1949 period, with a small number of Korean War medals.

The promotional material for the campaign is clear about the relationship the initiative is trying to establish between these objects, their original owners, the Party, and the schoolchildren:

> These 'Red treasures'
>
> It's the Party leading the people to work hard
>
> The testimony of continuous development
>
> It's the children studying Party history
>
> An important vehicle for drawing strength
>
> To further create an atmosphere for studying Party history.
>
> (Greet the Spring Middle School 2021)

The value of the objects is clear: they represent the Party's wisdom in leading the people and the children studying the objects today. A network is constructed between the object, family history, the Party, and the individual child, driven by the Party's attempt to construct an explicit relationship between them. One can understand the campaign as the Party's attempt to create a 'constructed nostalgia' in which the CCP establishes an emotional link between the younger generation and their revolutionary forebears through the practice of telling the object's Red story.

As mentioned above, the main publicity for the campaign were several professionally made short films released on *Suzhou News* and Weibo. All the films share a similar pattern: they begin with the children looking at the 'Red treasure' with admiration before hearing the object's 'Red story' from their family member, which is brought to life with historical film footage and photographs.

我是苏州市沧浪新城第一实验小学二（6）班的王浩然，我爷爷是一名优秀的退伍军人，还是一名优秀的共产党员，爷爷在部队的时候因公受伤，摔断了腿，后退伍回乡，爷爷经常回忆部队里那段难忘的时光，回忆和战友并肩作战的日子，每次回家都会把那两颗红心拿出来给我们看，我知道那里饱含着爷爷对部队的想念、对战友的思念，更有为如今强大祖国坚固国防事业的自豪，我也要向我的爷爷学习，学习他不畏艰险的精神，学习他坚韧不拔的精神，更要努力学习，用自己的知识，为建设强大的祖国贡献自己微薄的力量。

李静俏红娘

我是许诺，我来自常熟市辛庄中心小学四年级（1）班。今天我分享的是我表哥的太爷爷。他出生于1929年名叫王灯全。 他曾参加过参加抗美援朝战争。 在我哥哥小时候经常讲故事: 我哥哥的太爷爷在和他的妈妈去找他爸爸时，他被远方射过来的子弹差点打到，但是他裤子口袋里的一个硬币挡住了子弹。抗战结束，他响应号召把家里的金银捐献给国家，他一个也没有留。太奶奶让他自己留点，他一个也没留，说:“国家需要我们，应该倾囊相助。” 他是一个伟大，爱国，为了国家不惜一切的人，我要努力学习，长大也要成为他这样的人!

A sample of the contributions uploaded by students on the WeChat platform, combining the student's explanation of their family's Red Treasures and photos of the selected items.

The videos end with the children expressing what the object means to them and what they can learn from knowing its Red story. For example, one story featured by *Suzhou News* shows a young girl visiting her great-grandmother (aged 100) in the hospital. The girl tenderly pins a medal from the Korean War to her elderly relative's chest, and they look at a photo of the great-grandmother as a young woman. The woman joined the army as a teenager against her family's wishes and became a frontline nurse. The old woman's memories, the voiceover muses, are ever blurrier, but the objects remain a testament to a time that was hard yet full of hope. It suggests that even after the woman passes away, the memories will not be lost because they have been passed down already to her grandchild through the Red story of the object itself. The story clearly has the desired effect on the child, who speaks of her pride in her grandmother when she hears her story (Suzhou News 2021b).

In another story featured on *Suzhou News*, the individual memory-holder is replaced altogether with the object. A young boy presents his great-great-grandfather's martyr's certificate. His great-great-grandfather had joined the CCP as a university student and was in the Eighth Route Army, but he and his wife were killed by the Japanese, orphaning their children. The boy reads out a letter he has written to his great-great-grandfather, saying that while he never met him and did not even have any photos of him, hearing his grandfather tell his story made him realise that this long-deceased relative was the family's greatest hero. The object has replaced the individual as the recipient of the boy's attention, but it is framed as embodying the spirit of the forefather. The boy concludes that now life is so good, everybody must study well, thus making clear the relationship between his ancestor's sacrifice and his own good fortune—all mediated by the Party.

In this story, an emotional link is formed between this boy and his long-deceased relative, facilitated by the martyr's certificate and the story he has learned from his grandfather. In their own telling of their family stories, the schoolchildren then come to embody the family's experience of revolution, in which greatness comes from proximity to the Party and is given material form in the historical object. Although calls to pass on the so-called Red gene are often vague, this campaign represents the CCP's attempt to transfer the mantel of Red inheritor to children through their encounters with Red relics (Suzhou News 2021a).

Other news stories also demonstrate the ways in which the campaign was accessible to those whose family lacked Red treasures. Some schools organised events in a 'show-and-tell' style in which the aged owners of objects came into the schools, recounted their stories, and passed around the objects for all to see. On show, then, are the object and the person, and through the telling of the Red story, each child has a chance to come into contact with Red history.

Red Treasures as Patriotic Education

We can see this initiative as a type of patriotic education campaign—variations of which have been common since at least the early 1990s. While we may think of patriotic education as dull Party history lessons in schools, it is increasingly sophisticated and aims to inculcate the correct values and understandings of history through lived experience (Gow 2021). In tracing the different associations with Red relics, we can see, then, a clear transformation from the grassroots nostalgia of the 1980s and 1990s, in which collectors used objects of the past to criticise the present and to lament the loss of a promised future, to the contemporary uses of Red relics, such as in the Suzhou Red Treasures campaign, which aim to construct nostalgic memories of the revolutionary era in the younger generation. This campaign uses objects of the past to legitimise the present and sees in the present the fulfilment of the promise of the revolution. Memory is by nature plural and incomplete; it operates in ways at once official and social, collective and individual; it leapfrogs over time periods, entrenching some moments with great significance while excluding others; it pieces together meaning in ways that are typically more about the needs of the present than the past. Historical objects share these tensions, as they can embody both official memory and other kinds of remembrances. As this essay has shown, Red relics have been and continue to be associated with a variety of historical and ideological perspectives, ranging from a grassroots nostalgia in the 1980s and 1990s, to something much closer to official memory today. ■

Tourists posing for a photo in Yan'an. PC: Tauno Tohk (CC), Flickr.com.

Magic, Religion, and the Naturalisation of Chinese Communist Party Rule

Frank N. PIEKE

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has developed strategies that draw on a dedication to the Party that is specifically religious yet does not require belief in a doctrine. These strategies revolve around the Leninist concept of 'party spirit', which, paradoxically, has become a commodity that is produced, supplied, and consumed. This essay discusses these strategies of the CCP in the context of party-cadre education and so-called red tourism. The article concludes that the Party is evolving into not just an infallible bearer of ideological dogma, but also a sacred object of worship as part of a new 'communist civil religion'.

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) increasingly presents its leadership, decisions, and strategies in terms of aspirations to the greatness that lies ahead. Maoist techniques to instil belief in the Party have returned with a vengeance, but the Party's mission is no longer to transform China into a communist utopia. Ideological innovations emphasise the enduring importance of socialism and Marxism, but on closer inspection, specifically Marxist analysis or socialist ideals are conspicuously absent. Even Dengist aims of a prosperous and advanced society are no longer goals; they have become means to a

higher end: the 'China Dream' that will 'rejuvenate' the country, making it strong, proud, and able to stand tall against even the strongest nations in the world—an example for others to follow, distinct from the worn prescriptions of the West.

The rejuvenated China the CCP seeks to construct is built not solely on the transformation of the Party's organisational dominance, governance performance, and irredentist nationalism. This short essay investigates what I call the *naturalisation* of the CCP's rule. The legitimacy of the Party is about much more than simply ideas and how these are instilled by techniques of more conventional propaganda campaigns, thought reform, education, and training. The Party currently confronts problems that are in certain respects similar to those faced by Mao Zedong in the 1960s when he concluded that the Party had been taken over by 'people who walked the capitalist road' (走资派). Mao complained that cadres were learning communism from books instead of from labour and revolutionary practice. Cadres abused their power and party discipline had to be enforced from above instead of followed from below. Mao's solution was to strengthen the personality cult around himself and launch the Cultural Revolution that turned the country in a chaotic direction and took the Party to the brink.

Barring exceptional events such as the massive rescue operation after the Wenchuan earthquake in 2008, real struggle and violence are no longer options to strengthen the commitment of party members and cadres. Instead, synthetic revolutionary experiences have been created to take their place. Indoctrination, commitment, and conformity are guided by the Leninist concept of 'party spirit' (*dangxing*, 党性), which encompasses the distinct and unconditional dedication to the party and its mission—a reading that was first popularised by the book *How to Be a Good Communist*, CCP second-in-command Liu Shaoqi's guide for party members that was first published in 1946 (Sorace 2016).

Under President Xi Jinping, the fostering of party spirit and party discipline has become the main aim of cadre education and training at party schools and has replaced, to a large extent, professional skills and knowledge (Pieke 2009). Xi prides himself on having reoriented party schools back to 'the correct political direction' since he took over as the principal of the Central Party School in 2008 after the Seventeenth Party Congress (Xi 2016). Cadres ought to become an ideologically united elite who are stripped of their individuality. Cadres must faithfully obey the political line laid down by the party centre with Xi Jinping at its core and suffused with party spirit (Tian and Tsai 2021).

Under Mao, the veneration of the Party included not only submission and dedication, but also the worship of CCP leaders and their words, deeds, and objects (Mao's *Little Red Book*, for instance) associated with them. The emerging official veneration of Xi Jinping indeed takes many of its cues from Mao. Unlike Mao's, however, Xi's rule is not a personal one that eclipses the Party. In contemporary China, party spirit and party discipline remain explicitly about the Party as a whole and not about one or more of the individuals who lead it. Despite the increasing concentration of power in Xi's hands and the fawning in the official press over his leadership, Xi is certainly no Mao.

Below, I discuss the fostering of party spirit in the context of party-cadre education and so-called red tourism (红色旅游), which selectively draw on the remembered revolutionary past to inform behaviour in the present that will herald in a glorious future of a fully modernised, socialist China.

Red Tourism

Like pilgrimage centres, red tourism sites serve as nodes where the sacred power of the Party becomes accessible. Sites and objects associated with the history of the CCP's revolutionary struggle and especially with the words and actions of its major leaders have long been preserved—in some cases, since the 1950s. Tourism at these sites has been encouraged for almost as long. From the early 1990s, as part of the patriotic education campaign that followed the suppression of the 1989 protests at Tiananmen and elsewhere, selected CCP history sites were included among the patriotic education

bases designated to strengthen loyalty and respect for the nation and the communist revolution (Callahan 2010; Zhao 1998).

However, the systematic and centrally coordinated effort to list, restore, and build sites of CCP revolutionary history as 'red tourism' bases began only in 2004 (Li et al. 2010; Takayama 2012). Red tourism deploys significant places and objects associated with events during the revolution as bearers of revolutionary history revolutionary events, and revolutionary spirit for tourists to recall, study, and observe. Red tourism has become a policy priority area for the central party and government. A book of poems on display at red tourism sites published in 2013 lists no less than 123 such sites. Together, these sites present a narrative of the revolution consisting of 12 phases, from 'the birth of the Party' to 'the final victory' (Yu 2013).

Red tourism and patriotic education have become an industry. According to official figures, already in 2007, red tourism sites drew 230 million visitors, most of whom travelled in groups organised by work units or schools. In 2013, the number of visitors to red tourism sites had risen to 786 million (Li et al. 2010; CNTA 2014). Official documents present red tourism as rooted firmly in the present and looking forward confidently to a bright and enduring future for China and the CCP. These documents showcase the party's commitment to the market economy, economic growth, the revolutionary mission, innovation, and fair and sustainable development all at once—a perfect example of how the party would like to be seen.

Red tourism is not only directed at the general population but has also become a prominent component of the education and training of CCP members and cadres. The 2013–17 plan for cadre education and training emphasised the importance of cultivating party spirit and the vital role study of the revolutionary history of the CCP and its leaders should play in forging the dedication of cadres to the Party.

In the development of bases for cadre education in party spirit, the central authorities took the lead in 2003 when they decided to establish and fully fund three completely new, high-profile executive leadership academies, which opened in 2005. They are located in Shanghai, where the Party was founded, but more importantly also the pinnacle of China's modernity and international opening up; and the sacrosanct revolutionary sites of Jinggangshan, the first base area and the 'cradle' of the Party, and Yan'an, the base area from which Mao launched the Party's conquest of China. Together, these three sites offer a carefully constructed, material representation of the Party's self-narrative of its own birth, growth, and maturation in which the academies offer an 'experiential education' (体验式教育) (Interview in Beijing, 27 April 2007; see also Shambaugh 2008: 148–49).

In addition to the three cadre academies, since 2010–11, the CCP's Central Organisation Department has recognised (but not funded) nine more bases for party-spirit education, for a total of 13 such centrally recognised sites. More than 60 further sites have been established by provincial or other lower-level authorities to cater to the needs of their own party-spirit cadre education plans. The most important are Xibaipo in Hebei Province and Hongyan in Chongqing.

Cadre Education

The effort to build party-spirit education bases sounds impressive until one realises that virtually all party-spirit cadre education bases are established sites on China's red tourism trail. Only the three central cadre academies have been purpose-built. The recent surge in cadre party-spirit education uses the existing infrastructure of red tourism, with additional investment and elaboration at selected sites for a more discerning clientele of cadres.

During my fieldwork visit to one such site, Hongyan village in Chongqing in July 2015, the Party secretary of the village flatly stated that cadre education at Hongyan 'uses a tourist site as a teaching site'. Hongyan village was the location of the CCP's Southern Bureau during the Japanese occupation when the government of the Nationalist Party (Kuomintang, KMT) had moved to Chongqing (1937–46). Headed by Zhou Enlai, the Southern Bureau had to operate carefully, navigating between cooperative relations

Mao badges. PC: Jacky Czj (CC), Flickr.com.

with the Nationalists as part of the United Front against the Japanese and the reality of increasing animosity and sometimes even open armed conflict elsewhere in China between the two parties.

Official CCP history as narrated in Hongyan emphasises the distinct nature of the contributions of the Hongyan essence to the Party's 'system of revolutionary essence' (革命精神体系). In terms of its contemporary relevance, the unique experience in Hongyan is the origin of the CCP's united-front cooperation with the eight patriotic democratic parties and non-party elements, China's peaceful and pragmatic foreign policy (exemplified by Zhou Enlai), and cooperation between the CCP on the mainland and the KMT in Taiwan to unify the fatherland.

As per national policy, entry to the Hongyan museums was free of charge in 2008, but red tourism remains good business. The museums are paid for the guided tours, courses, and events they organise for visiting groups of cadres or tourists, and sell souvenirs, produce performances, and release DVDs of theatre, dance, and music.

In June 2011, China's premier English-language newspaper, the *China Daily*, ran an article on Hongyan's successes. In the article, the Hongyan director stated confidently that '[t]he sector is ready to be expanded and we have engaged consultants to help restructure the Hongyan Culture Business Group to be qualified to be listed [on the stock market] in three years' (Wang 2011). The article then quotes a policy researcher at the China Tourism Academy in Beijing, who said 'the market will take over the role of the government in future in driving the development of red tourism, as is already happening in Chongqing'.

Revolutionary Commodities

Importantly, red tourism and cadre party-spirit education benefit from each other, and both are based on the same premise—namely, that the Party's history and distinct character can be transformed into transferable commodities to be consumed for different purposes and by different client bases. In the course of its revolutionary history, the Party and its leaders were charged with the party's spirit, which enabled them to face unimaginable hardship, make tremendous sacrifices, and above all, make sagacious decisions of which ordinary men and women would not have been capable.

Exposure to the records and remnants of the revolution turns this general spirit into a concrete and transferable quality that is referred to as *jingshen* (精神), which one can translate as 'essence' or 'efficacy'. Like *dangxing*, party spirit is largely passive, sacred, and almost transcendental. One ought to study, emulate, cultivate, or restore it. *Jingshen*, however, is presented as an active force that affects people, institutions, words, and deeds. *Jingshen* can even be turned into a commodity that can be produced, supplied, and consumed.

The new emphasis on party spirit is anything but a return to a dark totalitarian past. It is yet another aspect of the neosocialist fusion of Leninist politics and capitalist business practices that has become the bedrock of CCP rule (Pieke 2016). Under neosocialism, markets emerged for a vast range of commodities, resources, and services previously provided and controlled by the state, including social security, housing, education, and health care. The Party has even turned support for and belief in itself into a commodity. A quote from Xi Jinping serves to illustrate the power of *jingshen*:

Every visit to Jinggangshan, Yan'an, Xibaipo or another sacred revolutionary place is a spiritual [精神] and ideological baptism. Every time I come there I receive vivid education in the party's nature [党的性质] and mission, again confirming the awareness and feeling for the people that we as public servants have. (Wang and Liu 2014)

Despite the appearance of a return to old-fashioned communist practices, the business and politics of party spirit reveal all the trappings of modern-day neosocialist governance: a capitalist market that is not merely tolerated by a communist party, but also actively deployed to shore up and develop its Leninist political system. *Jingshen* manifests the Party's sacredness in the ordinary world to reinvigorate belief in the Party and its mission. The CCP is well on its way to complementing its role as an infallible bearer of ideological truth with that of a sacred object of worship and source of magical power.

The vacuity of the CCP's ideology has compelled many people in China to turn to Christianity, Buddhism, or Confucianism as a source of meaning and direction in life. It now transpires that the CCP itself has turned to religion, too, but not in search of alternative systems of thought, ethics, or belief to fill an ideological void. As we have seen, red tourism and party-spirit education are replete with religious language and methods. The old concept of party spirit has been revamped and the Party has started to use the repertoire of heritage, tourism, and pilgrimage to create a commodified magical power that imbues the party and its rule with a sacred nature. However, religious thought or ideological dogma have no place here. Instead, religious and magical practices serve as an additional source of neosocialist governmental techniques.

A Communist Civil Religion

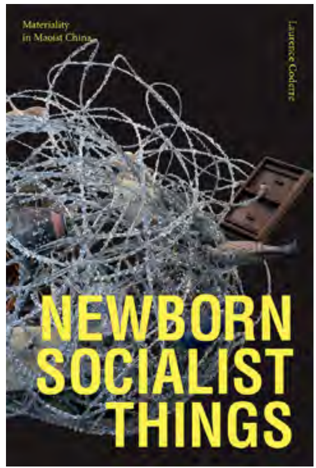
The CCP is turning itself rather than its ideology and mission into a sacred entity and an object of religious awe. This is, in fact, not all that dissimilar to the 'civil religion' in the United States that borrowed and adapted Christian religious practices for the purposes of a strictly secular worship of the American nation (Bellah 1967). Red tourism and cadre education are small but significant components of a long-term strategy to produce what I call a *communist civil religion*.

Importantly, this communist civil religion is not simply a return to Maoist ideology and Maoist dictatorial rule. It uses some of the language and images of China's Maoist past, but in the context of a highly commercialised economy, a much more autonomous society, and neosocialist rule. This

communist civil religion in turn is part of a long-term reorientation of the basis of CCP rule that draws on an eclectic range of approaches and ideas.

In addition to a communist civil religion, other components include Confucian and more generally traditional Chinese concepts about hierarchy, authority, benevolent rule, and harmony. The distinct contribution of a communist civil religion to this grand project is that it further naturalises the Party's rule and legitimacy and makes it unquestioned and unquestionable. If successful, in the long term, this has the potential to further insulate the Party from the demands to have a coherent ideology, ultimate mission, or possibly even any legitimising ideas. At this point, the Party would no longer have to be believed; it would simply be believed in. ■

This short essay has been updated and adapted from the author's article 'Party Spirit: Producing a Communist Civil Religion in Contemporary China', published in 2018 in *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 24(4): 709–29.



Newborn Socialist Things: Materiality in Maoist China (Duke University Press, 2021)

Newborn Socialist Things

A Conversation with Laurence Coderre

Laurence CODERRE, Matthew GALWAY and Christian SORACE

I recently participated in an event on 'Socialist Stuff' hosted by Stanford's *materia* working group. Fittingly, it featured all the technical difficulties typical of hybrid in-person/remote gatherings, but we nonetheless muddled through in pursuit of a productive alchemy between Jacqueline Loss's work on Cuba and mine on China (Loss 2013; Loss and Prieto 2012). I do not know that we necessarily succeeded in sparking new modes of thought in the moment, but in the following days, I found myself ruminating on a host of questions, many of them about nostalgia. During the event, I averred, somewhat unthinkingly, that my book *Newborn Socialist Things: Materiality in Maoist China* (Duke University Press, 2021), which examines the material culture of the Cultural Revolution (1966–76), was not itself a product of nostalgia for the era. I said, rather, that it was a quest for inspiration in the difficult task of imagining a world beyond capitalist commodification. Now, I have begun to think this might be a distinction without a difference. Whence my investment in inspiration over nostalgia? What would it mean to recoup nostalgia in this context? Specifically, what might nostalgia-as-method look like?

Those of us who research the Mao era (1949–76) are used to accusations of naive revisionism, if not wilful disregard for the historical suffering seen in the starvation of tens of millions and the dogged persecution of millions more—to name but two of the most conspicuous examples. The current flowering of People's Republic of China (PRC) history as a field is built on the assertion that, unlike the concerned China scholars of the 1970s, perhaps, whose work was inextricably tied to their leftist politics (Lanza 2017), for us, researching something does not mean implicitly endorsing it. I have made some version of this claim more times than I can count, typically to a member of the public or a student with intimate or familial knowledge of the Cultural Revolution. Faced with an emotional narrative—generally one of tremendous pain—the denial of a nostalgic motivation on my part has become well nigh reflexive.

And yet, as the following conversation with Matthew Galway and Christian Sorace elucidates, such denials—in my case, at least—are not entirely borne out. My politics *are* relevant to my work and I *do* see value in a historical project bent on imagining a very different world—that is, a world beyond the capitalist commodity.

Thus, *Newborn Socialist Things* might in fact be deemed nostalgic. More precisely (more charitably?), it could be read as an exercise in 'reflective nostalgia', to use the late Svetlana Boym's influential typology, insofar as it implicates 'an ethical and creative challenge' rather than a transhistorical return (Boym 2001: 18). But whereas Boym centred nostalgia as an object of study—as a thing unto itself at work in various circumstances and social forms—to the extent that my scholarship *is* nostalgic, I hope it is so in method rather than mood or even content. Put differently: I hope the admittedly generous look back enacted in my book challenges us in the present—note the active voice—to expand our current imaginative horizons. This is a repeatable and productive tack, regardless, perhaps, of the immediate subject matter at issue.

Indeed, one might say, if one were inclined to go way out on a limb, that at its best—by which I mean progressive, engaged, and engaging—all history is nostalgic history.

Laurence Coderre

Matthew Galway: What inspired your interest in the history of objects and material history? What drew you precisely to the Cultural Revolution as a period of historical inquiry?

Laurence Coderre: The Cultural Revolution came first in terms of my interest. I was already hooked on modern China and Chinese history. My interest then shifted to the model operas (样板戏 *yangbanxi*) and I was totally floored by what to me was incredibly weird. I was fascinated by a world that could create that and *not* think it was weird. The fact that *yangbanxi* were something that I did not have immediate access to presented a kind of fascinating puzzle to solve, but the pieces were also cultural products representative of the period more broadly. Once I started getting into it, it was all so clear. I was an undergraduate, I graduated college in 2007, so this was before Paul Clark's *The Chinese Cultural Revolution: A History* (2008), Barbara Mittler's *A Continuous Revolution: Making Sense of Cultural Revolution Culture* (2013), and all the work that has been done since then. It seemed to me like the entire scholarly landscape was merely elite politics, and as interesting and important as that was and is, there was so much missing, including what people were actually interacting with in the period. That is ultimately what led me to material objects, because we seemed sort of stuck collectively, the scholarship and me, in this place of decoding propaganda, the meaning of which we already thought we knew. So, it did not really grant access to questions of experience, interaction, and life in a way that I felt that materiality could potentially give us access. That was my trajectory.

Christian Sorace: There was a perfect moment for me when reading about your work when a question came to mind: how do we engage and relate to the materiality of Maoism and the Cultural Revolution, and not simply regard it as an endless string of signifiers? Your animating question—what are the conditions that can create *yangbanxi*, similar works of art, and their diegetic worlds—is a brilliant one.

LC: Yes, what originally interested me about this subject was signification: metaphor, the go-to concern of literary scholars, is precisely that which is so overdetermined in all these official works because that is what revision after revision after revision paid attention to, that mode of signifying. All this labour went into trying to push a singular idea over and over again that way. It is no wonder, then, that when we, as scholars and critics, try to find something interesting to say at that level, it seems totally banal and simplistic. So, it sort of sucks the marrow out of what are otherwise really interesting works if one approaches them in their full materiality. The world that people heard, felt, smelled, sat in, worked within—the fullness of living and doing—re-instilling that means that we then have a way of potentially using that fullness to read against the grain in a *historical* way. It is really easy to read against the grain if you do not care about such things. But if we are serious about historical methodology then we need to figure out a way to say something interesting in a way that is still historically grounded. That, for me, is the sweet spot.

MG: I have always been fascinated by the history of objects and why people collect. The questions I have for you relate to why people take an interest in these objects, why people purchase them, and why they develop emotional attachments to them. In your introduction, you raised two fascinating questions that you sought to answer in the book: what makes a socialist thing *socialist* and what makes it a *thing*? So, how does your book answer these questions? As a follow-up to that, what makes a socialist thing *newborn*?

LC: I am not entirely sure I managed to answer these completely, mostly because I am not sure they are answerable. But I took a stab at it. The short and glib answer to the first one—what makes a socialist thing *socialist*—is that it is not capitalist, therefore it is socialist. A tremendous amount of work—thinking, internal debate, writing, and rewriting—goes into trying to maintain, establish, and police the line between things that are socialist and things that are capitalist. Although these objects look the same, they cannot be the same because … they just cannot be, because if China is socialist then they cannot be capitalist. Much of this declaration is ideological and even arbitrary. But what interests me is all that labour and ideological work that goes into trying to establish a radical difference. That happens in some cases aesthetically, and in others through historiographical means as with the rehabilitation of particular materials and forms of labour, for example. In some cases, it means trying

to foreground the labour that goes into the making of a thing, the packaging of it, the way that it is sold, or the way that people use it. All these characteristics can supposedly make a thing socialist, but what makes it a thing?

This is where this bleeds into the second question, which is basically, what is a thing? Is it an object? Or is it an object in addition to the social factors around it that make the object possible and meaningful? This is where the results are mixed. At its most ambitious, the kind of sources and discourse that I outline do imagine a world where materiality and the social are fused in complex, insuperable ways. But on a day-to-day basis, those distinctions reemerge and we wind up with the conclusion that 'a thing is an object'. So, this is how I would answer your two questions. These are somewhat unsatisfying answers, I would say, but my failure is my historical actors' failure, and their failure is my failure.

The newborn question is a little easier to answer in some ways. This is because it relates to a quite clearly defined idea of historical progress. The idea of forward movement as signposted by social and material developments that bring the future into the present is what makes something newborn. Its status and importance are pretty clear. That does not mean, though, that what qualifies as newborn, and therefore progress, is altogether clear. The result is more of a terrain of contestation because, ultimately, it is about the future and who defines that future, and who defines what utopia will be.

CS: I truly appreciate how you frame that, at that time, it was impossible to escape the commodity form. The commodity form haunted the debates: could it be used or repurposed for socialist ends, and would it ever be possible to extricate socialist newborn things from the commodity form? That became this constant problem: the haunting of the necessity of the commodity form and then the inherent danger of swallowing back up all these newborn things under it. Does anybody still think about how to build and create things that do not immediately take the commodity form?

LC: That is strangely one of the parts of the book of which I am most proud—that is, the beginning of the acknowledgements, if I may toot my own horn briefly. A part that I am sure no-one will read. I wrote it well after the manuscript was essentially done, but right after the murder of George Floyd during the pandemic. In the early days, New York was just emerging from the worst of it, and the United States had a protofascist in the White House [Donald Trump], and it was very hard to figure out why I cared about this book that I had spent a decade working on in one way or another. Part of the reason I am proud of that portion of the book—namely, the first two paragraphs of the acknowledgements—is because I managed to put that feeling in writing to a certain degree and answer to myself the questions I had in mind. Which is to say that we, collectively, need to do better than this. For many of us, that

means trying to think our way out of capitalism as it stands today in one way or another. That means grappling with the commodity form, so the least that we could do is to look at other people who have tried to do that before, even if they failed, and to learn from those experiences. Perhaps it was delusional, but that was the way I tried to give meaning to something that, otherwise, was feeling mighty pedantic in that moment. I hope that it ultimately speaks to precisely the questions: 'What do we do? What can we do *now*?'

MG: How do we escape our dependence on or fetishism of the commodity form? How do we move past it? How did the Chinese Communist Party and its ideological champions, mouthpieces, and architects confront that challenge when thinking about making these objects for consumption?

LC: With much consternation, is the answer. Much of the onus was placed on lynchpin figures at the ground level to try to guarantee appropriate behaviour. I discuss this at length in Chapter 2 with regard to salespeople and retailers. There was this really bizarre paradoxical position where they were meant to sell consumer commodities to customers, but that was not all they were doing. Indeed, they were selling in the name of revolution at the same time as they were serving a pedagogical function that was often at cross-purposes with the goal of selling things. It was a lot of desire management that, in theory, was left to the salespeople who had to figure out customer engagement in conspicuous consumption. Did they want it because they needed it [the commodity]? Or did they act for the benefit of the common good, the good of the family, or the work unit? Or was this consumption of a capitalist type? The danger in selling or buying the commodity form risked leading people into commodity fetishism, thereby pulling China off the socialist road and backwards through history. All fell on the shoulders of individuals who were meant to police themselves as well as those around them. It was a tough row to hoe. It is no wonder that it failed, if only because of how easily market forces took over when unleashed.

MG: To segue to China's economic liberalisation, a whole market arose around purchasing and collecting these items from the Cultural Revolution in genuine, original form or as reproduced, high-quality fakes. The symbolic capital that a collector attaches to an authentic version—as if to say, 'I am a good communist', or a good Chinese communist, more specifically—is quite fascinating. Many Chinese and non-Chinese are drawn to collecting these objects to confront past trauma or just because they like the look of them and find the iconography and the radical ideological frenzy of the Cultural Revolution fascinating. Scholars like Jennifer Hubbert and Emily Williams have written extensively on collection. I am particularly drawn to a phenomenon in China among so-called Red Collectors, to borrow from Williams, and the pursuit and encouragement in recent times of people to find, collect, and display objects from their family histories. Can you tell us about this?

LC: Yes, to use objects as a focal point of oral history and/or historical ethnography, not unlike Jie Li does with *Shanghai Homes* (2014), is a tremendously powerful approach to work around some of our tendencies … to foreclose discussions of meaning when we think about 'propaganda'. This is the fallback position, which is why I banned the word from my undergrad classroom: the word 'propaganda' does not lead us anywhere. These are all positive developments. My original thought when I was writing my dissertation was to do something on kitsch in the contemporary moment. I thought this was a great project for someone other than myself and that it would be difficult to do without more historical work on how these objects circulated in the 1960s and 1970s. I wrote the book that I wished had already existed when I was trying to think of projects that relate to these questions. There has been really great work in the Eastern European space and, indeed, China ought to be part of that larger conversation, yet it has not been to this point. That is really a shame. So, I hope that more happens in this space, for sure.

CS: I absolutely agree with how you just put that: what is the book that you need or you want to read? Then, to go and write that book. Just to go back to your previous comment, does the question of communism require a changing of one's own desire? You are right that so much of the Mao era was about reaching into one's thoughts and reforming how one desired and engaged in confessional practices. I keep thinking, even though I often do not admit this: is there a way to think of communism or socialism infrastructurally wherein we can bypass the question of desire? Or does communism always entail an ethical project of creating new humans? Just hearing you talk raised a lot of these questions for me, alongside yet another: was the impasse of Maoism also a deadlock of communist desire?

LC: That is awesomely put and sort of a pickle. I am flying by the seat of my pants a bit here in response to your questions. Because the commodity is the cornerstone of Marxist analysis of capitalism and because commodity fetishism and its necromancy are so fundamental to a Marxist approach to political economy and to mapping out a trajectory towards communism, it necessarily implicates desire. Maybe. Maybe not.

CS: I am riffing here as well, and I cannot articulate it that well. But that belief that, somehow, we can move beyond alienation and achieve the enlightenment project of being transparent to ourselves and sovereign over our relations, seems not to be so desirable, let alone possible. I am okay with being non-sovereign. I am okay with being trapped in desire. I do not see getting out of that as a goal.

LC: I see. I would ask you then, is there a way to move past capitalism without getting rid of commodity fetishism? Because that's ultimately where desire is implicated, is it not?

CS: Absolutely.

LC: If we wish to remain opaque to ourselves, does that necessarily mean that we are always susceptible to commodity fetishism at some level? If so, are we ultimately, for lack of a better term, screwed? This is what I argue, though I am not sure. To get back to the book, the approach to the political economy and socialism that I talk about is tied to this. How are we going to dismantle commodity fetishism? We are going to sort of demystify it and the problem by making everybody super aware of how the commodity works, what it is, and what is going on. Thus, there is no mystery and there is no danger. I did not use this in the book, but it is a kind of talking cure for the commodity fetish, is it not? If we talk about it and exorcise it then we can still deal with commodities and be fine. But it does not truly work that way either because we wind up bringing the fetish in by the back door, and then it becomes another mode of fetishising language itself. I do think that the attempt is to say we will talk our way out of it through knowledge, but it does not work. Perhaps it is best not to try? Is that the other option? I cannot say for sure.

CS: We must try something. Yes.

MG: I have one more question specifically about the book. The one chapter that stood out for me, in keeping specifically with items that could be collected, was your third chapter, 'Productivist Display'. In it, you examine the making of decorative porcelain in Jingdezhen, which is China's porcelain capital, with particular attention to tensions between different regimes of value as they played out in the organisation of labour and the realm of sculptural aesthetics. Porcelain, of course, held its own symbolic and cultural capital. How did porcelain statuettes of revolutionary heroes, including these characters from *yangbanxi*, facilitate porcelain's emergence not as an elitist consumer product, but as a politically viable medium?

LC: This is a little bit of a chicken and egg problem. The fact that the *yangbanxi* is in porcelain form is itself a sign of porcelain's acceptability, but also a way of giving porcelain revolutionary capital. They mutually reinforce each other, if that makes sense. That said, this was the underlying impetus for the chapter as a whole; that there is something, to go back to my acknowledgements section, about why I was interested initially in *yangbanxi* and how their performance works. There is something off about these porcelain figurines in that they are unexpected. Why are they unexpected? Precisely because of what seems to be a disconnect between the ideological inclinations of the iconography and the class and elitist associations of the material. So, when you put them together, it is like there is something incongruous going on. That was what I wanted to figure out. Why not just chuck it and avoid porcelain altogether? Why not

just say, 'Okay, Four Olds, moving on'? Part of the answer has to do with nationalism, as porcelain is significant to China's identity on a global stage, and part of it has to do with the economic importance of exports for hard currency. But also, and this is the part that I explore in the chapter, the uniqueness of Jingdezhen in relation to early party history and forms of labour organisation. A particular set of arguments could be made wherein although porcelain, the material, may have been consumed by the elites, it was made by the proletariat. If that origin could be elevated then the material itself could be reclaimed and rechannelled to more appropriate ends. Part of the rehabilitation is historiographical—that is, telling the story of the rise of the proletariat. The other part is a real-world shift to factories as a form of production because it is important for us to remember that not all labour counts as 'production'. Not every form of labour acquires that kind of exalted mantle. How does one achieve it? What forms are particularly powerful within that frame of reference? Here, it is very clear that the factory emerges as a quasi-sacred space of the worker. In discussing workers, we are talking about factory workers on assembly lines and/or mechanised assembly lines. That is the ultimate vector of rehabilitation for the material whereby the proto-proletariat becomes a full-blown proletariat in the context of these massive factories and assembly lines. All of this is important, especially when one is trying to figure out a way to encourage people to look at something differently. Instead of seeing a thing that they want, they see what they feel they are supposed to see. This results in something like, 'Oh, look at all the labour that went into producing this thing.' It is an impressive but exceedingly difficult trick to pull off. One needs to place tremendous emphasis on production itself. So, turning to porcelain was a way for me to highlight that part of the equation.

CS: Your answer calls to mind different relations of labour and production—notably, how Ai Weiwei's porcelain art installation *Sunflower Seeds* at The Tate in 2010–11 was produced in Jingdezhen. People's experiences of the installation, the kind of art installation it was, the later commodification of *Sunflower Seeds*, and Ai Weiwei's star power, all come to mind here. Is the painstaking labour that went into the porcelain seeds of *Sunflower Seeds* something that someone sees or considers? Or is that labour merely absorbed into the commodity that is Ai Weiwei?

LC: These are good questions. Unfortunately, I was there [in Jingdezhen] in 2014, and all those factories are no longer intact. Some of the compounds have been taken over by small studio potters, so they have become artisanal spaces. If someone out there wants to write a paper on socialist ruins, there is definitely room for one to be written about the modes of production being undertaken within these architectural spaces, some of which have been reworked or bulldozed in certain segments. The smokestack of the main kiln

is still there, and I do not know why that is the case. But it seems like an interesting totemic gesture to a gigantic past that has now become super atomised. Nevertheless, there is something to be written in that area.

MG: In thinking about the themes we have discussed and all we have covered, I cannot help but think of the Mao Mausoleum and his corpse lying in permanent wake. Can we classify, in the prevailing political climate under Xi Jinping, Mao the corpse on display as a newborn socialist thing?

LC: Embalmed, maybe. Petrified. A petrified newborn thing. Erstwhile, to what end, is my answer. In the intro to the book, I discuss a thought experiment about taking the idea of socialism with Chinese characteristics at face value, if only for a second. Everybody knows that it is capitalism with Chinese characteristics, in which case we have to reevaluate how capacious socialism can be and whether such a stretching is even possible. In that sense, if one wanted, one might think of Mao's corpse-on-display and the act of seeing him and all the folks selling the *Little Red Book* to people in line, and its many, many translations, etcetera, etcetera, as a post-socialist thing. A post-socialist newborn thing. Perhaps … but socialism is not what it used to be. ■

Jianchuan Museum Cluster.
PC: Wikimedia Commons.

Ambivalent Nostalgia

Commemorating *Zhiqing* in the Jianchuan Museum Complex

Lisheng ZHANG

Zhiqing, *an abbreviation for* zhishi qingnian *('educated youth'), refers to the nearly 18 million urban young people, most with elementary to high-school education, whom the Chinese Communist Party sent to live and work in China's rural areas between 1968 and 1980. Since the early 1990s, official and unofficial museum commemorations of the* zhiqing *generation have articulated a pervasive nostalgia marked by narratives of a '*zhiqing *spirit' that celebrate qualities of perseverance, patriotism, and self-sacrifice. This essay examines the Museum of Zhiqing Lives in the Jianchuan Museum Complex, China's most high-profile private museum project and home to the largest collection of Maoist artefacts.*

Since the 1990s, China has been host to pervasive displays of '*zhiqing* nostalgia' by the former 'sent-down youths' or 'educated youths' (知青 *zhiqing*, an abbreviation of 知识青年). Born in the 1940s and 1950s, this generation participated in the 'Up to the Mountains and Down to the Countryside' movement (上山下乡), which started in the mid 1950s but gained traction only during the Cultural Revolution (Yang 2003; Bonnin 2013). In those years, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) sent millions of urban educated youths to be 'reeducated' on collectivised farms in remote towns and villages. Once there, *zhiqing* often endured hunger, intensive labour, and other difficulties.

Many eventually had families in the villages and stayed, while others returned to the cities when the movement ended in the early 1980s.

Michel Bonnin (2016: 756) describes the *zhiqing* as a 'lost generation', deprived of 'their youthful illusions and the pure idealism on which they were raised as children' and of 'the opportunity to study'. However, in contrast with Bonnin's argument, being 'sent down' did not prevent some in this group from afterwards becoming well-known politicians, entrepreneurs, artists, and intellectuals in the reform era. Because of their urban and often elite backgrounds, the sent-down youth had the social and intellectual resources to write about and publish their experiences during the Cultural Revolution. These writings made *zhiqing* 'probably the most active group in the realm of collective memory in Chinese society today' (Bonnin 2016: 756). Indeed, in comparison with the 'Red Guards' (红卫兵), who were, like *zhiqing*, 'Chairman Mao's Children' (Chan 1985, cited in Xu 2021), memories of the *zhiqing* appear less politically 'difficult' and their commemoration is better tolerated by the Party-State, though 'it would be incorrect to assume that the memory of the rustication experience was not, and is not, restricted by the authorities', as Bonnin notes (2016: 756).

Considering this, the *zhiqing* movement has been probably the most actively remembered and well-documented episode of the Cultural Revolution, both by these former sent-down youths and by the CCP itself. In the late 1970s, 'scar literature' (伤痕文学) began to voice mournful and critical reflections on the rural experiences of the *zhiqing*, and particularly the elements of personal deprivation, fatigue, poverty, and suffering. This was followed by a wide range of writings, mostly by members of the *zhiqing* generation, including autobiographical accounts, collected essays, memoirs, and academic studies of *zhiqing* history.

These accounts have articulated diverse and sometimes contradictory narratives and attitudes—from the idea of being scarred/wounded and laments for wasted talent and youth, to expressions of nostalgia and claims of pride in *zhiqing* identity. This has resulted in a divisiveness and ambivalence in the expressed narratives regarding how *zhiqing* history should be told today. This essay investigates these competing discourses from the vantage point of the Jianchuan Museum Complex (JMC), one of China's most high-profile private museums.

The *Zhiqing* Generation in Museum Commemoration

Museum commemoration of the *zhiqing* generation began in 1990—the year the Museum of Chinese Revolution in Beijing staged the first exhibition organised by a group of former *zhiqing* under the title *Souls Tied to the Black Soil* (魂系黑土地). These educated youths had been dispatched to Heilongjiang Province, on the border with Russia, and by then had become government officials in Beijing (Xu 2021). The exhibition was a seminal event that attracted more than 150,000 visitors during its two-week run. Other former 'educated youths' with official backgrounds organised further exhibitions in subsequent years, including *History Testifies to Ordinary Life: A Retrospective Look at Educated Youth on the Military Farms in Hainan and Haibei* (in 1991); *Regretless Youth: A Twentieth-Anniversary Retrospective Exhibit on the Life of Youth Sent from Sichuan to Yunnan* in Chengdu (1991); and *Spring Flowers, Autumn Harvests: A Commemorative Exhibit of the Sent-Down Youth in Nanjing* (1993) (Yang 2003: 268). As these titles suggest, these exhibitions recognised and embraced the *zhiqing* identity, along with a proud identification with the collective experience of the movement, thus giving rise to a wave of nostalgia in Chinese society.

In 2002, 50-year-old Chen Shuxin was appointed to build a museum in the historical Aihui District of Heihe, China's northernmost city, of which he was then vice-mayor. Chen spent six years setting up the country's first museum about the *zhiqing* generation, the Heihe Zhiqing Museum. On its opening day in August 2009, the museum in this small city on the border with Russia attracted more than 5,000 visitors.

A *zhiqing* himself, Chen felt strongly about the importance of remembering and honouring that generation. 'Many of us *zhiqing* had our feelings hurt,' he said in an interview, 'having devoted our

best years to the frontier villages and changed the local isolated environment, we need at least some sort of recognition' (Southern Metropolis Weekly 2013). The moment the opportunity presented itself, Chen prioritised highlighting the contribution made to China and the positive values represented by the sent-down youth. He thus made patriotic red the dominant hue of the museum. As for suffering and loss, Chen said the museum 'does not have to tell everything just because they [suffering and loss] happened. History is not a running account' (Southern Metropolis Weekly 2013).

The Heihe museum was soon followed by an array of similar museums and exhibitions across the country—notably, in Shanghai and in the provinces of Zhejiang, Fujian, and Sichuan. A particularly memorable exhibition was organised by the Heihe Zhiqing Museum and the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) on 1 July 2015. This RMB30-million exhibition, entitled *Sharing a Common Destiny of the Republic* (与共和国同命运), was held at the National Stadium in Beijing. The wave of commemorations highlights the positive elements of the rustication movement and extols the '*zhiqing* spirit' (知青精神)—a term coined by National Stadium exhibition curator Pan Zhonglin. Pan characterised this spirit as synonymous with qualities of perseverance, self-sacrifice, and patriotism.

As Yang Guobin (2003: 268) has pointed out, these museums and exhibitions denoted a significant shift in the way the *zhiqing* movement was commemorated in the 1980s. Yang (2003: 269) argues:

> [T]his nostalgia emerged as a form of cultural resistance. At its centre was a concern for meaning and identity newly problematised by changing conditions of Chinese life. Nostalgia can help to maintain and construct identities by connecting the present to the past, by articulating past experiences and their meanings, and by directing moral critiques at the present.

From feeling 'scarred' to being nostalgic, the shift in attitudes of former *zhiqing* towards their memories reflects deeper changes in their moral disposition and social life. In a period of profound socioeconomic transformation, the expression of nostalgia—for a past idealised as an age of fairness, sacrifice, and solidarity—thus became a way for some former *zhiqing* to deal with a crisis of identity when faced with new social problems brought on by the country's expanding market economy, such as unemployment, economic inequality, and cultures of materialism and consumerism.

A Different Approach

In this context, the Jianchuan Museum Complex (JMC) presents a rather distinctive approach to *zhiqing* memories, differing from previous, mostly government-backed, attempts to commemorate this period of Chinese history.

In development since 2003, the museum contains the personal collection of self-made multimillionaire and collector Fan Jianchuan. Over the past three decades, Fan has amassed more than eight million items. The JMC is thus a vast compound comprising more than 30 individual museums organised around four themes: the War of Resistance against Japan (1931–45), the 'Red Age' (1949–76), the 2008 Wenchuan earthquake, and Chinese folk culture. Each topic fits the JMC's motto: 'To collect wars for peace, lessons for future, disasters for safety, and folklore for cultural continuity.'

The fifth museum dedicated the Red Age, the Museum of Zhiqing Lives (知青生活馆, hereinafter the Zhiqing Museum), opened in 2011. Fan was a *zhiqing* from the age of 18, spending three years in a poor village near his hometown in Yibin, Sichuan. On 5 December 2011, as part of the grand opening, Fan unveiled a memorial commemorating 10 female *zhiqing* from Chengdu who died in a fire in Yunnan on 24 March 1971. The monument, which Fan placed right in front of the museum's entrance, entitled *Pink Remains* (粉焚), features 10 gravestones with a display of the women's *zhiqing* certificates. The opening

ceremony was attended by more than 300 former *zhiqing* from across China, but it was not unanimously appreciated.

One critic, Hou Juan, who was a 'celebrity *zhiqing*' during the Cultural Revolution and who met Mao Zedong in person, told Fan Jianchuan directly that she felt the sculpture was inappropriate because the tone was too negative. Fan, however, insisted that the museum ought to address *zhiqing* deaths, too. In his explanation in an interview at the grand opening, Fan said:

> The lack of medical care and the various conflicts between peasants, cooperatives, and zhiqing, all made it easy for young lives to perish under such harsh conditions … [I]n fact, they are us who died, and we are they who live. It is placed at the entrance so that everyone who enters the museum could at least greet them. (Southern Metropolis Weekly 2013)

Unlike the red hues of Heihe Zhiqing Museum, Fan Jianchuan noted, the entire exhibition space in the JMC is a refreshing light green—the colour of youth—giving the museum the appearance of a 'green box' that stores the youthful memories of the *zhiqing* generation. Fan's personal history as a one-time *zhiqing* is also part of the museum. In fact, the first exhibit on display by the door is Fan's *zhiqing* certificate, issued to him by the CCP in August 1975. The centrepiece of the entrance hall is a large oil painting entitled *Youth* (青春) by Fan's friend, famous Sichuan painter He Duoling. The painting depicts a young female *zhiqing*, dressed in a green Mao suit, sitting alone in a field. The expression on her face is blurred by the dazzling sunlight, which symbolises the animated revolutionary momentum in society and the far-reaching power of Mao's personality cult. This solitary young woman, whose state of mind is unclear to the viewer, appears to be lost in thought, reminiscing about some distant memory.

Figure 1: He Duoling, *Youth*, 1984. PC: JMC.

Figure 2: Installation '17.76 Million' in the Zhiqing Museum. PC: Lisheng Zhang, fieldwork 2016.

The exhibition's presentation states clearly that the museum commemorates at once 'the passion and frustration' and the 'joy and pain' that *zhiqing* once engraved on that era with their flourishing youth. The exhibition is organised around four themes: history, life, tribulation, and illustrious *zhiqing*. Distinct from earlier Red Age museums in the JMC, the Zhiqing Museum has a much more coherent and detailed narrative of the historical context. This was possible because of existing commemorative and documentary efforts. The exhibition traces the origin of the Up to the Mountains and Down to the Countryside movement to an editorial published in the *People's Daily* on 3 December 1953 under the title 'Organising Senior High School Graduates to Participate in Agricultural Production'. The campaign first sketched in this article grew into a nationwide movement, with Mao's clarion call in a 23 December 1968 issue of the *People's Daily* to 'let the educated youth go to the countryside' (知识青年到农村去). A copy of this issue is on display in the exhibition. These snapshots of history presented through the lens of *People's Daily* articles effectively set the historical context of the sent-down campaign.

By using original photographs, documents, and everyday objects, the exhibition introduces the key events of the *zhiqing* movement from the 1950s to the late 1970s and the stories of well-known model *zhiqing* figures. Supported mostly by original propaganda materials, the tone of this unit conforms closely to the official narrative. A former *zhiqing* aged in her sixties whom I accompanied on a visit to the museum in 2016 shook her head while going through this unit. She said: 'Look at these young people in all these photos with big smiles on their faces. It [life as a *zhiqing*] was not that great. It was a lot harder. A lot harder.' Fan Jianchuan may agree with her. For many, if not most *zhiqing*, the years in the countryside were characterised by intensive labour, constant hunger, and uncertainty about the future. 'Nothing better describes the *zhiqing* experience than the eternal and repetitive physical labour', Fan said, reflecting on his time

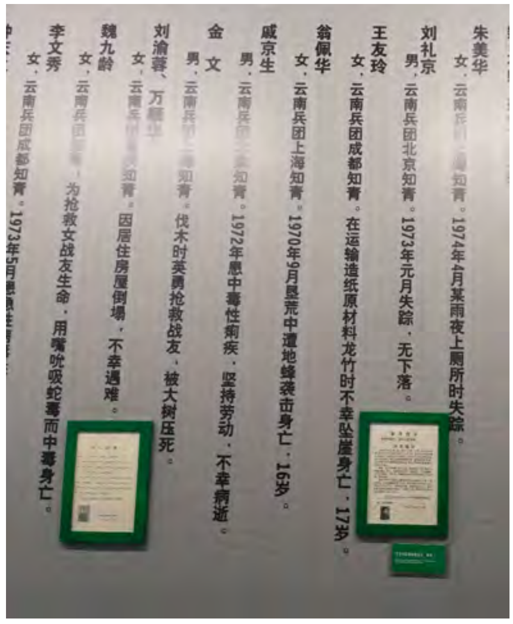


Figure 3: List of *zhiqing* victims (fieldwork photo, 2016). Figure 4: Captioned photographs of *zhiqing* victims. PC: Lisheng Zhang, fieldwork 2016.

as a *zhiqing*. He used callus, rice, and wheat as symbols of his *zhiqing* memories, but found they were too 'idyllic and romanticised' for what really occurred (Southern Metropolis Weekly 2013).

In the introduction to the second unit, '*Zhiqing* Lives' (知青生活), Fan wrote:

> [T]he lives of educated youth are special phenomena in a special era of New China. They are powerful and solemn symphonies of fate played by millions of educated youths. They were all forged in the fire of this special period.

The '*Zhiqing* Lives' unit depicts the extremely harsh conditions *zhiqing* endured while working and in their private lives. On collectivised farms, *zhiqing* laboured to earn 'work points' (工分) rather than wages. Fan has displayed his own 'work points record' (工分本), which shows that in 1975, as an 18-year-old, able-bodied man, he earned nine work points per day—equivalent to 1 *jiao* (one-tenth of a yuan), at a time when the average monthly salary of an urban factory worker was 30–50 yuan (Zhao 2019: 334). The hardships of the *zhiqing* were the same as those borne by the farmers with whom they worked. Fan recalled in his autobiography that the only source of meat available to him as a *zhiqing* was pork from pigs that had died from swine fever. The exhibition tells a gruesome anecdote about seven *zhiqing* convicted by the CCP for eating an aborted foetus in Yunnan in 1975.

The most powerful part of this unit is an installation entitled '17.76 Million' (1776万) (see Figure 2), the official number of youths sent-down between 1962 and 1979. This installation consists of several thousand pieces of broken mirror that have been scattered amid rusty hoes and shovels to fill the central atrium. These poignant symbols of hard labour and broken memories forcefully convey a haunting feeling of abandonment and desolation that features in the collective memory of the *zhiqing* generation.

The third unit, 'Tribulation' (青春磨难), is engaged more directly with the violence and suffering of the rustication movement, including the physical and sexual abuse, safety hazards, and political persecution to which some *zhiqing* were subjected. A display in a long corridor shows a list of more than 100 incidents of unnatural death of *zhiqing*, including work accidents, suicide, sickness, and persecution (see Figure 3). On one side, a printed list of events is displayed in wall-length vertical columns in black and white, with the name, gender, and age of *zhiqing* who died, and the date, location, and cause of death. On the opposite side, black and white portraits of some of the listed *zhiqing* are on display. These excruciating facts and images loom like inscriptions on a mass grave.

Even in the countryside, the lives of *zhiqing* were affected by shifts in the political environment during the Cultural Revolution. This is illustrated by a series of 'unjust cases' (冤案) during the rustication movement: six high-profile cases of injustice and another eight controversial incidents. Ren Yi, a *zhiqing* in a county in Jiangsu Province, was a victim of injustice in the political turmoil. In 1969, Ren wrote a song entitled *My Hometown* (我的家乡), a melancholic tune that expressed his longing for his hometown of Nanjing and sorrow over his lost youth. The song was popular among educated youth and, in August 1969, Moscow Radio even broadcast it—at a time when Sino-Soviet relations were especially tense and hostile. In February 1970, Ren was secretly arrested on charges of 'writing counterrevolutionary songs, destroying the *zhiqing* movement, and interfering with Chairman Mao's proletarian revolutionary line and strategic plan' (according to display text at the JMC). He was sentenced to death, though his sentence was later changed to 10 years' imprisonment, and he was rehabilitated in 1979. As such, the JMC takes an unprecedented step in addressing the issues of death and injustice that other private *zhiqing* museums and exhibitions carefully avoid.

In the final section of the exhibit, 'Illustrious *Zhiqing* Figures' (知青人物), Fan juxtaposes the photographs of 32 former *zhiqing* who are now distinguished figures in politics, business, and the arts with a line of comment and reflection on their memories as *zhiqing*. These remarks show what Bonnin (2016: 763) describes as a 'wide spectrum' of memories of *zhiqing* experiences 'between nostalgia and rejection, denunciation and approval'.

Chinese President Xi Jinping and Premier Li Keqiang were both sent-down educated youth. Xi (born in 1953) suffered from discrimination after the CCP purged his father, Xi Zhongxun, who was a member of China's first generation of leaders, during the Cultural Revolution. In 1969, the 15-year-old Xi was sent down by the party as a 'criminal's son' (黑帮子女) to Liangjiahe village in a poor county in the northern province of Shaanxi (Xi 2016). In this 'strange environment' and among 'untrusting eyes', Xi began his seven years as a *zhiqing* (Xi 2016). According to Gracie (2017), quoting Xi: 'When I arrived at 15, I was anxious and confused. When I left at 22, my life goals were firm and I was filled with confidence.' The museum selected 'I'm forever a son of the yellow earth', the title of Xi's essay, as the quote for Xi, thus highlighting a positive official evaluation of the sent-down campaign.

This is contrasted with other comments in this section that engage more explicitly with the hardships of the *zhiqing* experience. For instance, Sichuan entrepreneur Liu Yonghao's quote in the exhibit is simple: 'I never wore shoes as a *zhiqing*. Steamed white rice was my greatest wish.' Artist Xu Chunzhong is quoted as saying: '[T]he Cultural Revolution and the *Zhiqing* Movement are a trauma for me. It pains to speak about it.' Fan's own line, meanwhile, is brief and unequivocal: 'I fainted twice out of hunger as a sent-down youth.' The juxtaposition of these quotes illustrates the ambivalence and complexity of the remembrance and assessment of *zhiqing* history, with the museum managing to present a more balanced approach than official commemorative narratives by incorporating both positive and negative views.

Youth Wasted or Without Regret?

The exhibition ends with the sentence: 'Either wasted or without regret, it was our youth after all' (无论是无悔，还是蹉跎，总归是我们的青春).

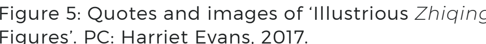


Figure 5: Quotes and images of ‘Illustrious *Zhiqing* Figures’. PC: Harriet Evans, 2017.

Figure 6: ‘Either wasted or without regret, it was our youth after all’. PC: Lisheng Zhang, fieldwork 2016.

Running across a green wall in bold black characters, the words have a strong visual presence, resonating in the empty space. The ‘wasted or without regret’ binary acknowledges the existence of disparate views of the *zhiqing* movement and the possibility of remembering and transmitting it in different ways. For instance, Michel Bonnin (2016: 763) notes how the slogan-like rhetoric of ‘we have no regret for our youth’ (青春无悔) was rejected by some former *zhiqing* in Sichuan whom he interviewed, who claimed ‘we have no means to regret our youth’ (青春无法悔). The JMC tries to convey this kind of nuance. The second half of the sentence, ‘it was our youth after all’, voices what one may interpret as the museum’s stance—a vague and resigned gesture of reconciliation. This sense of resignation resonates with the claim by the Sichuan *zhiqing* discussed by Bonnin that they *are not able* to regret their youths for it was an experience imposed on them by the CCP over which they had no say.

Unlike other Red Age museums, the Zhiqing Museum directly addresses the tribulations of *zhiqing* lives with an unprecedented (and so far, unsurpassed) level of specificity by including explicit accounts of atrocious events and photos of victims. In so doing, the museum challenges the de-politicising pattern of ‘people but not the event’ that dominates both official and popular discourses of *zhiqing*—what Xu Bin (2021: 233) has described as ‘the lowest common denominator of various views of the past, accepted by memory entrepreneurs, local officials, and corporations involved in the production of the museums and exhibits’, with the aim to ‘decouple the *zhiqing*, with their positive qualities, from the controversy and political sensitivity of the event’.

This has been possible partly thanks to existing efforts to commemorate this period in public. Yet, it quite understandably exposes the museum to the risk of censorship. On returning to the JMC for a second period of fieldwork in June 2016, I noticed a new item near the end of the exhibition that had not been on display when I visited six months earlier. It was a calligraphic work by Fan Jianchuan, a handwritten copy of a 17 May 2016 *People’s Daily* editorial entitled ‘Learning from History Is to Move Forward’ (以史为鉴是为了更好

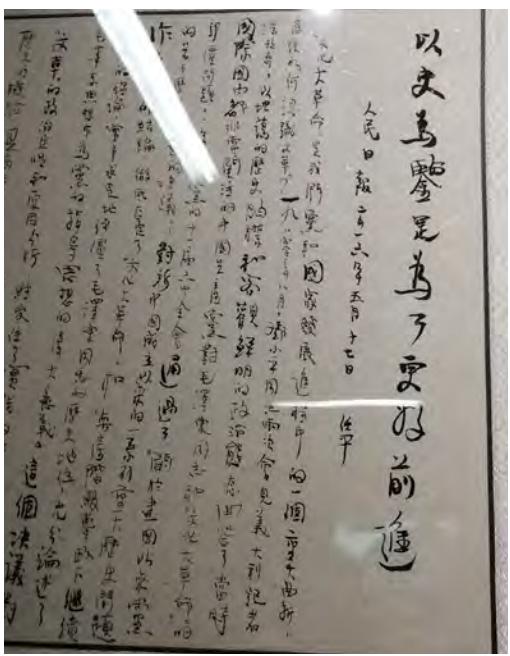

以史為鑒是為了更好前進
人民日報 二〇一六年五月十七日

Figure 7: Fan Jianchuan's handwritten copy of the *People's Daily* editorial of 17 May 2016, and the original editorial. PC: Lisheng Zhang, fieldwork 2016.

地前进), published the day after the fiftieth anniversary of the beginning of the Cultural Revolution. Stringently in line with the 1981 'Resolution on Certain Questions in the History of Our Party since the Founding of the People's Republic of China', the editorial characterises the Cultural Revolution as 'the grave disaster of internal turmoil to the party, country and people of every ethnicity' (Buckley 2016). Created and added to the exhibition in on the day of the editorial's publication, Fan's copy seems to be playing the role of a 'political talisman' to defend the museum's approach, by drawing on the official Resolution.

A Sobering Counter-Memory

The JMC Zhiqing Museum provides a case where we can closely examine what is at stake when engaging with contested memories. As a private museum, it manages to create a space to accommodate perspectives and voices that are missing from official accounts. Running parallel to the dominant official discourse, it must also maintain a semblance of conformity to state ideology.

It is fair to say the JMC has gone further towards confronting the ambivalence of *zhiqing* memories than most other *zhiqing* museums in the country. It therefore constitutes a sobering 'counter-memory' that complicates the prevalent articulations of *zhiqing* nostalgia in Chinese society. Meanwhile, it is important to bear in mind that the museum's unequivocal addressing of the violence and trauma of the *zhiqing* movement also forms a significant contrast to the silence and opacity in the historical representation of many other events of the Cultural Revolution that are in dire need of further critical attention. ■

Arterial road demarcates the mine from the village, Jiangxi Province. PC: Ruiyi Zhu.

‘The Mine Was Our Home’

Narrativising Nostalgia between Socialist and Post-Socialist Mining Zones

Ruiyi ZHU

At a Chinese-owned fluorspar mine in Mongolia, one group of workers stood out from the rest. Their life stories—often narrated with a tinge of nostalgia for home and a golden age of industrial labour—were closely intertwined with fluorspar. Joining them on an annual trip from their workplace to their once fluorspar-rich hometown in Jiangxi Province complicated the narrative. The discrepancy between nostalgic narrative and lived experience raises a curious question: why do the workers claim a past that was never fully their own? This essay points to nostalgia as a strategic self-representation necessitated by the post-socialist labour market as a potential answer.

‘Three generations of our family have worked in the fluorspar industry, from my parents to my siblings and me, and to my niece,’ Feng Jinhua, a 47-year-old laboratory manager told me. Proud of her fluorspar pedigree, Jinhua set herself apart from the other laid-off workers who entered this industry by sheer coincidence. She added: ‘The mine was our home. As soon as I graduated from the middle school for miners’ children, I started working in the mine. It has been three decades now.’

I met Jinhua in 2017 at a Chinese-owned fluorspar mine in Mongolia, where I conducted fieldwork. Established in 2013, the mine employs both Chinese and Mongolian workers. Like her Chinese

colleagues, Jinhua had suffered the consequences of mass layoffs in the early 2000s, which were estimated to have caused between 30 and 60 million job losses in state-owned enterprises (SOEs) across China (Hurst 2009a). A few years ago, she arrived in Mongolia to establish a new economic foothold. While many workers at the current mine had never heard of fluorspar before, several workers hailing from Jinhua's hometown in Jiangxi Province had been dealing with the mineral their whole life. Major events in their lives were closely intertwined with fluorspar, from birth to education, from marriage to migration.

Yu Hongmei, a flotation operator in her early fifties, is another case in point. Although Jinhua and Hongmei used to work at the same fluorspar mine in Jiangxi (hereinafter 'the old mine'), they were not personally acquainted before relocating to Mongolia. Hongmei spoke fondly of the heyday at the old mine, when there were more than 2,000 formal employees, including hundreds of administrative staff. She sorely missed the vibrant social life after work: 'Back in the 1980s, our income was not much, but we built a very good rapport. We joked. We sang and danced. We would play tug-of-war and basketball. We had a lot of fun.' In comparison, the current mine in Mongolia compressed leisure time to increase productivity, discouraging workers from returning to the dormitory. Meanwhile, the fear of Sinophobia in Mongolian society constrained contact between Chinese workers and their Mongolian counterparts, leading to a lack of the sense of 'togetherness' for which Hongmei yearned.

Often narrated with a tinge of nostalgia for home and a golden era of industrial labour, the life stories of Jinhua and Hongmei piqued my curiosity. Their enduring, if not inborn, bond with fluorspar validates their status as experienced workers in the industry. To a historically minded researcher such as myself, their narratives also presented an alluring tale of continuity, withstanding post-socialist transition and transnational migration. To explore the stickiness of their profession, as well as their loyalty and pride as industrial workers, I set out for the fluorspar town in Jiangxi at their invitation. However, the trip not only revealed the discrepancy between nostalgic narratives and lived reality, but also shed light on nostalgia as a constructed self-representation necessitated by the post-socialist labour market.

Homecoming

Hongmei arrived on a caramel-coloured scooter to pick me up in her hometown. She lived in a spacious two-bedroom flat, where the interior decor was simple but indicative of an adequately middle-class taste. In 2013, her family was one of the last to move out of the mine compound to the newly developed urban periphery. Hongmei introduced me to her husband, Lin Deping, who had been a worker and administrator at the mine before the layoff. He warmed to me when I asked about a portrait of Mao Zedong hanging across from the entrance to the flat, emanating talismanic vibes. Deping longingly expressed his enduring respect for Mao: 'Chairman Mao was our saviour and the founding father of the People's Republic of China. Under his rule, material conditions were admittedly tough, but the social atmosphere was excellent. Mao's prestige is still alive and well. Everyone supports him.' I asked him how the interpersonal relations in the Maoist era compared with those of today. 'Of course, it was better then,' he blurted:

> At that time, friendship was friendship, and sisterhood was sisterhood. Now it's all about money. After the Reform and Opening Up, people's mentality has changed. Now the poor are poor, and the rich are rich. Everyone has to migrate for work, and couples divorce more as a result.

Detecting my interest in the history of the fluorspar mine in Jiangxi, Deping gave me a nostalgia-infused mini-lecture. The mine began operation at the beginning of the Great Leap Forward. As a useful flux for steelmaking, fluorspar was increasingly mined amid the enthusiasm for steel production. Being an SOE, the mine offered promising economic prospects and stable employment, which drew labourers from Jiangxi and nearby provinces.

Portrait of Mao in a laid-off worker's home. PC: Ruiyi Zhu.

During the 1960s and 1970s, the mine began to provide infrastructure and maintain social facilities in the previously rural area. After graduating from a technical secondary school (中专), Deping was assigned a job at the mine, where both of his parents also worked. Reminiscing on that era's sense of prosperity, he said: 'Everyone was united in one goal—that is, to ensure the smooth running of the mine. We were told that workers could be masters, and leaders should adopt any opinions and suggestions from us. The mine was our home.'

A major change occurred at the mine in the early 2000s. After a protracted slump in the fluorspar price, the mine was sold to a businessman from Fujian Province. The workers were asked to sign a buyout agreement to terminate their employment. They were paid RMB600 for each year they had worked at the mine. The change was aptly illustrated by Deping: 'We used to hang a banner outside the headquarters. It read: "Jiangxi fluorspar is the best in the world." It was taken down after privatisation.' The pride associated with being a member of the mining community also faded. Deping added: 'Now everyone just wants to make more money for themselves.' Scholars of postcommunist nostalgia (see, for instance Pine 2002; Todorova and Gille 2010) have pointed out that yearning for the socialist era does not

always indicate a desire for a restoration of the past; rather, it conveys a critique of the present. Deping's nostalgia could also be understood as a disaffected reaction to the economic decline and social decay at the mine (cf. Lee 2007), where the mineral resources were nearing depletion and laid-off workers were moving away.

While Hongmei and Deping had not returned to the old mine since their move in 2013, Jinhua returned every year, as her relatives still lived there. She invited me to join her on her annual trip home. She also took her four-year-old grandson, intending to show him the place where she grew up. Walking on empty roads with closed shops and faded advertisements, she reminisced about how this place had once flourished. She wistfully pointed out the workers' hospital, the school, the coveted restaurant, and the mining company's liaison office—only the shells of which remained. We stopped at a row of dilapidated red-brick houses:

> This row was built in the 1950s, by the workers, and for the workers. I grew up here. Back in the day, each family would set up their dinner table in the yard. We shared our food with neighbours, eating a bit from here and there. I miss the old days.

Recalling vivid memories of her childhood, Jinhua painted a nostalgic picture of her home and its vibrant neighbourhood sociality.

In 1958, Jinhua's parents arrived in Jiangxi, fleeing a disastrous flood in Shandong Province. Her father pushed carts at the mine, while her mother kept records. They raised six children, most of whom held permanent or temporary jobs at the mine. Jinhua knocked on one of the wooden doors: 'Can we come in? I used to live here before 1999.' A young family currently living in the house nodded as they let us in. The new occupants had no connection to the mine and only moved from a nearby village a few years ago. A faded poster featuring Mao and Zhou Enlai watched over the dinner table and safeguarded the fortune of the family amid a row of empty homes.

Divergent Attachments

During my stay at Hongmei's, I woke to a heated argument between her and her husband. The quarrel began with Deping blaming Hongmei for spending lavishly on gifts for her relatives. Hongmei retorted by stating she had a right to splurge to her heart's content because it was her hard-earned money. She then accused him of earning too little, being too complacent, and failing in his manly obligation as the breadwinner.

Hongmei seemed to have lost respect for the man whom she once admired for his literary talents and his 'iron rice bowl' (铁饭碗)—as the cradle-to-grave jobs in the work units of the Maoist era were called. While Deping had a genealogical connection to the mine through his parents, Hongmei was a first-generation mine employee who was born in a nearby village, as she explained to me later. Before her marriage, she had envied the good life of blue-collar workers, who worked only eight hours a day, earned a stable salary, and received urban grain rations (商品粮) from the state. In contrast, village life was rough: she received a pittance for backbreaking labour at the agricultural collective. Marrying a mine worker was an opportunity for her to escape the rural predicament. Through Deping's connection, she found a temporary job at the fluorspar factory as a dependent worker (家属工). A few years later, she changed her household registration status from rural to urban, as people with rural status rarely obtained permanent employment in the state sector (Walder 1986: 55). When she eventually became a permanent employee at the SOE and unlocked privileges such as bonuses and dietary supplements, however, her supposedly lifelong tenure lasted only four years before she was laid off.

The privatisation of the factory turned out to be a watershed in their marriage. While Deping suffered from a layoff that cost him a stable job and a sense of belonging, Hongmei came to relish the economic freedom and personal mobility afforded by migration. In the following decade, she tried her hand at a Foxconn electronics factory, worked as a nanny, and sought employment at fluorspar factories across the country. Although she began

with limited technical skills, she quickly learned flotation techniques from a former colleague and accumulated relevant experience. As the demand for flotation workers remained high with the discovery of new fluorspar deposits in China and Mongolia, she was able to negotiate her salary and move about. Instead of relying on the income of her husband, she began to earn higher wages and dispense her savings, which included contributing to their daughter's mortgage.

In contrast, Deping's choices appeared more conservative and, indeed, nostalgic. He tried to stay on at the old enterprise after privatisation, which proved untenable due to the lowered salary. Forced to join the wave of migration, he bitterly remarked: 'Reform enriched the entrepreneurs, but privatisation harmed numerous workers. We had to find our own way out.' Even though doing the same job in other parts of the country yielded greater income, Deping preferred to stay in his home province. Having reached the age of retirement, he received a pension from the state, while his wages from intermittent work helped contribute to their daughter's mortgage.

According to William Hurst (2009b: 117), laid-off workers' nostalgia can be classified into three subtypes: relational, material, and ideational. The specific combination of nostalgic sentiments not only anchors group identity, but also frames grievance claims. While this system was used to underline regional variation in popular discontent, the narratives of Hongmei and Deping reveal a divergence at the individual level; their uneven status before layoff inevitably shaped their different relations to the past. Despite transitioning from casual to formal employment, Hongmei remained a marginal worker on the shopfloor and a financially dependent wife in the family. Her nostalgia was limited to the non-material aspect of the socialist working life: the convivial spirit and social events. On the contrary, Deping, as a fully fledged worker-cum-administrator before the layoff, was proudly part of the industrial and discursive production of that time. Hence, he felt more acutely the loss of stability, status, Maoist ideology, and esprit de corps in the reform era.

Discrepant Narratives

Whereas Hongmei's migration to Mongolia increased the distance between her and Deping, relocation reinforced Jinhua's extended familial bonds. Jinhua's older sister had worked at the same mine in Mongolia for a few years before Jinhua's arrival. According to her Chinese colleagues, Jinhua's sister was praised for her professional skills and well-liked for her forthrightness. On returning to China to care for her grandchildren, she recommended Jinhua to take up her job at the mine. Intrigued by the interweaving of kinship and work, I asked Jinhua whether I could speak to her sister. Despite her initial enthusiasm for the idea, Jinhua soon became evasive.

Frustrated by her sudden avoidance, I turned my attention to the municipal archive, where historical documents from the old mine had been stored since privatisation. In the roster of workers, I spotted the names of Jinhua's parents and siblings, but not hers. In a later conversation with another interlocutor who was well acquainted with Jinhua's family, it was confirmed that Jinhua had indeed grown up and attended school at the mine. However, unlike what she had implied in her narrative, she did not inherit her parents' jobs (顶职) because her older siblings had already done so. Instead, she held a casual job elsewhere until she was laid-off during the restructuring of enterprises. Contrary to her nostalgic claim of having worked three uninterrupted decades at the fluorspar mine, she had learned the skills of titration and assay from her older sister only a few years earlier. Unlike the inseverable transgenerational connection to fluorspar she had initially declared, her fluorspar career only took off at the confluence of family connections, social change, and coincidence.

Intrigued by the discrepancy between Jinhua's 'continuity' narrative and the messier picture pieced together by archival fragments, I wondered why Jinhua claimed a past that was never fully her own. Without an opportunity to frankly discuss this with her, I could only resort to hypothesis. One possible explanation is that by strategically

adopting a nostalgic narrative, she fashioned herself as an experienced fluorspar worker, irreplaceable in a competitive labour market. Given the limited legal protection of foreign workers in Mongolia, she had every reason to defend her precarious position, including in front of me, as she had initially worried I was an informant for the mine boss. Industrial nostalgia implied abundant experience in the sector, which could be an asset in a volatile job market. My request to interview Jinhua's older sister risked creating a clash between the front stage and the backstage of her self-presentation (Goffman 1959), thereby necessitating an intentional avoidance.

Additionally, the relationship to the audience and the location of storytelling may have impacted the narrative. During my initial field visits, I frequently encountered generic nostalgic narratives from the laid-off workers, who presented their generation as the shock-absorbers of reform-era policies. My interlocutors melded personal experience and social transformation to tell tales of suffering and loss. Only after an extensive period at the mine did they allow me to glimpse the finer details of their personal experience—laden with complexity, contingency, and paradoxes. Jinhua's backstory evinces a more tenuous connection to fluorspar than what she liked others to believe. In the case of Hongmei, her transition from temporary to permanent employment was omitted in her initial narrative. Her lack of reminiscence about the economic and familial arrangements at the old mine only became apparent after learning the fuller story of her life.

Wrinkly Nostalgia

Anthropologists have been accused of 'disciplinary nostalgia' (Berliner 2015)—that is, feeling for the cultural loss of the other and building discourse around it. Meanwhile, nostalgia, as an analytical device, has been critiqued for simplifying complex memories and reducing the protean history to fit neat categories (Lankauskas 2015). By tracing the semantic drift of nostalgia (from homesickness to critique of the present) through the displacement of labour (from a socialist to a post-socialist mine), I hope this essay has illustrated that nostalgia can be a useful analytical frame when applied with caution and attentiveness.

Gail Hershatter (2007: 73) conceptualises the rearrangement, distortion, and omission of the past as the 'wrinkle in time' phenomenon. In her oral history research on rural women's experience of China's collective past, Hershatter and her collaborator Gao Xiaoxian encountered forgetting, misremembering, silence, and hostility from their interlocutors. Instead of despairing at the informational failures, Hershatter (2007: 77) underlines the importance of paying attention to 'what silences structured answers, what fears went unspoken, what uncertainties flattened affect'. While recent discussions of nostalgia have focused on the gaps between official history and popular memory, the inconsistencies between lived experience and personal nostalgia need scholarly attention as well. As an intimate discourse of continuity and change, nostalgia at the personal level requires the researcher to build a relationship with the interlocutor and explore their lifeworld beyond the field site. A refined ethnographic lens is well suited for capturing the incongruent creases and folds in the personal past, which are the building blocks of social history. ■

Liang Shuming (梁漱溟, 1893–1988).

Johnnie Got His Gun, While Liang Took Up the Plough

Nostalgia in the United States and China, Then and Now

Stephen RODDY

This essay examines the nostalgic pragmatism of the reformer and Confucian philosopher Liang Shuming (1893–1988). Liang's responses to the social and economic dislocations of the early Republican era, including a series of concrete steps to ameliorate them, are surprisingly relevant to the spiralling cycles of racism and violence afflicting US society in the twenty-first century. His diagnosis of the harms of industrial society and prescription for restoring the moral as well as physical health of rural populations remain valid both for China and for the United States—in particular, with regard to addressing climate change and its attendant psychophysical trauma known as solastalgia.

He brung [sic] that gun for protection, and to this day if he didn't have that gun, my son would've been dead.

— Wendy Rittenhouse, mother of Kyle Rittenhouse (December 2021)

On 30 November 2021, the twenty-ninth US school shooting of that year (of a total of 32), was carried out in Oxford, Michigan, by a 15-year-old who had reportedly received a gun as an early Christmas present from his parents. Soon afterward, the media discovered a 2016 Facebook post addressed to Donald Trump by the shooter's mother, Jennifer Crumbley, in which she vents anger at immigrants and minorities for allegedly reaping unfair advantages at her family's expense and eagerly anticipates Trump's promise to build a border wall and 'make America great again' (MAGA). This incident was soon followed by the acquittal in the murder trial

of another teenage shooter, Kyle Rittenhouse, in Kenosha, Wisconsin, and his subsequent 'victory tour' with his mother, Wendy, to visit Trump at his Florida home, Mar-a-Lago. One feted by a former president, the other facing decades in prison, these two young killers' fates may ultimately diverge, but the wider contexts in which each acquired his gun, and pulled the trigger, are eerily similar.

It is no accident that both families live on the fringes of once-prosperous industrial cities (Detroit and Milwaukee) now turned into 'sacrifice zones' blighted by the detritus of deindustrialisation. In both their words and their deeds, the Crumbleys and the Rittenhouses blame their personal difficulties on immigrants and minorities, while casting a wistful gaze to bygone days when working-class wages were decent and jobs plentiful—at least for white males. For many progressives, nostalgia for the prosperity of 1960s Motown (Detroit) and other erstwhile manufacturing centres is similarly strong. Few are the voices of those looking further back in time for potential answers to the madness of children killing children, or seeking, as did the legendary Detroit-based Chinese-American activist Grace Lee Boggs (1915–2015), to repair post-industrial landscapes through gardening collectives that attended to the most basic human needs of food, clothing, and shelter—all to the rousing soundtrack of Aretha Franklin and other Motown legends.

Liang Shuming and the May Fourth Precedent

In fact, Boggs' and her fellow activists' efforts were anticipated in a time and place where social peace had deteriorated even more visibly than in the contemporary US Midwest—that is, China, circa 1920. After the decade of chaos that followed the 1911 revolution, the May Fourth (1919) generation mostly favoured making a clean break with the past to chart a new course for achieving economic and cultural rejuvenation. Nonetheless, a few voices of that revolutionary era found inspiration in Confucian and Buddhist teachings and practices and advocated for their revival as antidotes to the social dissolution that was exacerbated, in particular, by the geographic and demographic inequities wrought by the very industrial modernisation that was championed as the key to China's future. Just as bicoastal US 'digerati' oligarchs who are oblivious to the suffering of those in so-called fly-over country wield vast economic and political powers today, and an apathy that leaves children in Oxford or nearby Flint, Michigan, to their own devices—whether that is semiautomatic weaponry or lead-laced drinking water—the concentration of wealth and power in modernising cities like Shanghai, Tianjin, and Hankou left rural hinterlands far behind. Thus, China circa 1920 holds surprisingly relevant lessons for the world today—not only the potential for momentous revolutionary change, but also for how nostalgia might be marshalled as a strategy for healing the putrid decay out of which xenophobia and violence have sprung in post-industrial regions of the United States and elsewhere.

About 1890, the literary celebrity Yuan Zuzhi (1827–98), grandson of the poet Yuan Mei (1716–97), lamented that Shanghai had adopted the consumer tastes and modern production modes of European cities like Paris, from which he had recently returned:

> A million bolts of precious silk
> Cannot buy up all of the Western products
> in this springtime town
> When will we ever go back to simpler,
> more authentic ways?
> The clear-eyed bystander is wracked with
> sorrow.
>
> Author's Note: This tiny patch of land—the most wasteful and extravagant in all of China—brings dread to anyone concerned with the fate of the world. (Wang et al. 2003: Vol. 4, p. 2808)

Although Yuan expressed admiration for the prosperity and general state of society he witnessed during his stay in Europe, the displacement of traditional silk and other native manufactures by Euro-American goods and technologies clearly perturbed him. By the early 1900s, however, ambiv-

alence such as his had faded as younger generations came to accept the presence of modern industries and to actively advocate for their further expansion.

Among the relatively small number of sceptics who remained wary of such trends, one stands out: the renowned scholar-philosopher and activist Liang Shuming (1893–1988). As late as the 1970s, Liang expressed varying degrees of unease about what industrial transformation had wrought in China, whether along Euro-American capitalist lines or later based on the socialist model pioneered in the Soviet Union. His dubiousness towards industrialisation—primarily its cultural and sociopolitical implications, but also extending to the natural environment—echoes that of Yuan Zuzhi and other predecessors of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries.

Importantly, Liang Shuming did not make a bogeyman of Euro-America in totality and found much to praise in the ideas of some of his non-Chinese contemporaries. He perceived that the core of his thinking—elevating 'nature' (自然), which he interpreted as human interconnectedness with the 10,000 things, along with 'life' (生命), as the guiding lights of human action—was fully compatible and even nearly identical with certain trends in Euro-America:

> In my way of thinking, the fundamental concepts are life and nature. I view the universe as a living entity. All things take nature as their leading principle. I share this with [Henri] Bergson and [John] Dewey, both of whom were deeply inspired by the idea of life, perhaps because they were influenced by their studies in the life sciences while in the process of formulating their philosophies. (Li 2013: 145)

As the foil for this overarching ideal of organicism, Liang denounced the 'mechanical character' (机械性) that pervaded modern industrial societies, against which Dewey and Bergson had also rebelled. Modern (Western) medicine, for example, has

> a tendency to view the human body as a composite of discrete parts, and to treat illnesses as if this were no different from repairing a machine. Chinese medicine, at least that which could refer to as learning, is permeated by the concept of life, and this is precisely what distinguishes it from Western medicine. (Li 2013: 147)

As such, he alleges modern science tends to regard the human mind itself 'mechanically', unlike in premodern China and India, where the mind was deployed towards fully crafting the 'life of the self' (自己生命), instead of exhausting its powers in the service of mathematical formulae or other 'external' pursuits (Li 2013).

Liang conceded that the tendency of Chinese medicine and other indigenous practices to examine problems holistically, without subjecting them to analytical deconstruction, had encouraged a metaphysical obscurantism (玄学) in this and other fields of practical endeavour, which resulted in the neglect of fundamental needs like feeding and housing a rising population. In his magnum opus, *The Essential Meaning of Chinese Culture* (中国文化要义, 1963), Liang notes that by focusing their intellectual energies on contemplative pursuits, and not on developing a more scientifically based agriculture or other disciplines with practical applications, traditional literati had failed to do enough to improve the sustenance (养) of society. Yet despite these shortcomings, the literati's ideals of harmonious, peaceful social relations, and indeed what Liang elsewhere referred to as the overwhelmingly ethical character of Chinese culture (Liang 2013), had contributed immeasurably to humanity as a whole:

> Fundamentally, what is to be prized in the ancient Chinese [for their contribution to] the life of humanity, is how they acquired knowledge through kindness and generosity, how they embraced questions of peace and tranquillity within their hearts, and then, through the difficult process of living them out in practice and fully realising their inner natures, they came to a deeply personal understanding, so

that the effort of self-cultivation overshadowed virtually all else in their lives. (Liang 1963: 273)

Putting Theory into Practice

While advocating spiritual and moral renewal through reviving the indigenous values of selflessness, reciprocity, and interpersonal trust, and praising the contemplative orientation of his forebears, Liang was not content to remain an armchair theorist. From the mid 1920s to the late 1930s, he made several attempts to put his ideals into practice as a leader in the grassroots Rural Reconstruction movement (乡村建设). His involvement in this ambitious endeavour began as a search for alternatives to what he regarded as the enslavement and impoverishment of the peasantry by emerging forms of capitalist exploitation that had severed villages from their formerly relatively equitable relationships with regional population centres (Li 2013).

Liang's attempts to restore political and economic autonomy to rural communities came to fruition during his stint as the director of the Rural Reconstruction project in Zouping County, northwestern Shandong Province, in 1931–37. During Liang's tenure there, Zouping made demonstrable progress in raising literacy rates and agricultural yields, while lowering infant mortality and communicable diseases, and achieving yet other markers of material and social betterment. By 1936, more than half the prefectures in Shandong had adopted this model, and it was on the verge of province-wide implementation when the looming threat of Japanese invasion brought it to a halt. Once the Sino-Japanese War began in earnest, Liang evacuated to the interior. In the unsettled conditions that followed the war, he, like prominent rural reformer James Yen (Yan Yangchu, 1893–1990), was unable to fully realise the goals of the movement before the communist revolution swept them all aside.

Liang considered the rural villages (乡村) to have borne the greatest brunt by far of what he regarded as the scourge of urban civilisation (都市文明) that had been adopted under Euro-American tutelage. Their political and economic disempowerment at the hands of the elites of Shanghai and other modernised cities had deprived rural villagers of the means of improving their lives. Hence, to Liang, it was of the utmost importance to restore political autonomy and economic self-determination to rural residents and to prevent their exploitation by predatory urban elites who had no interest in the concerns or welfare of the villages:

> Politics takes the village as the basis. If the root of all rights rests in the [rural] folk, and political power is exercised by these masses, then the power to rule will begin in the village, power cannot concentrate, and classes cannot form. The organisation of the nation's villages will follow a single pattern, and though power is dispersed, this will not harm our national unity. (Liang 1937: 287)

As the scholar Ma Yong (2008) notes, Liang saw this enterprise first and foremost as cultural work, necessary to counter the insidious influence of Europe, the United States, and the Soviet Union—all of which were providing inappropriate models for rural development (Liang 1937). Although he urged the abolition of private ownership of land, and thought bourgeois capitalism was 'outdated', he also regarded the Russian method of agricultural collectivisation as 'mechanical' and, thus, unnatural (Alitto 1979).

Most importantly, the core of this cultural work lay in spiritual renewal through the revival of the values of reciprocity and selflessness that had been eroded by Euro-American individualism. This required a tempering of and control over materialism:

> What does it mean to say that people's lives improve? The improvement of human life means not considering the enjoyment of good fortune as a worthy end, but instead worrying that one's own actions might fail to conform to moral principles. It is as the ancients said: 'While eating, do not seek satiety, in dwelling do not seek comfort, and

> be sensitive to events and careful in speech; if you act thusly, you will be correct in your attainment of the Way.' (Liang 1937: 72)

The seeds of this activist phase of Liang's career are evident in his analysis of the technological developments that were making inroads into China and across the industrialised world. Commenting on the postwar worldwide economic dislocations of 1918–20, he placed blame on the effects of industrial mechanisation and the spiritual vacuity that was its ultimate cause:

> The machine is truly the demon of the modern world. But it is the direct consequence of the Westerner's attitude toward human life. On the one hand, he demands material happiness, and seeks to utilise nature to conquer nature. On the other, he uses his rational, analytical brain to produce science, and combines these together to invent machines. (Liang 1989: 162)

It was only a matter of time before society collapsed under the onslaught of a Darwinian economic system that

> violates human nature—that is, humanity [仁]—to the point where people can no longer endure it … Everyone has had their vitality ripped to shreds by the Westerner. His unnatural attitude, his machines, his desiccated, deadened lifestyle all spring from this source. (Liang 1989: 165)

In writing these words almost simultaneously with the May Fourth leaders' calls to heed 'Mr Science' (赛先生) and 'Mr Democracy' (德先生) to achieve national salvation, Liang's dissonance with this emerging consensus is striking. He shared more in common with some of the Euro-American writers who were similarly disillusioned by the tanks, poison gas, and other technologies of mass slaughter that militaries deployed in World War I and other recent wars, such as Rudolf Christoph Eucken (1846–1926), whom Liang singled out for praise for his advocacy of renewal through *Geistesleben* ('spiritual life'). Even Jean Jacques Rousseau received Liang's qualified approbation for understanding that European thinkers 'without exception strangle, dissipate, murder, corrupt, or bring chaos to life', thereby harming its vitality. Nonetheless, none could equal Confucius, whom Liang credited with establishing a Way that fulfilled the needs of life just as completely in Liang's day as it had two and a half millennia before (Liang 1989).

In Liang's subsequent career as a rural reformer, he may have attenuated his views to the extent of embracing agricultural or biomedical advances where and when they contributed to rural development, but he warned against the uncritical adoption of either machines or the mechanistic outlook that produced them. He remained true to this vision through the subsequent decades of his very long life and re-emerged from obscurity in the 1970s to reaffirm his attachment to and nostalgia for the Confucian values that had just gone through their most lethal drubbing of all, including the defacement of Confucius's tomb at Qufu during the Cultural Revolution.

From Nostalgia to Solastalgia

Paying due respect to Mr Science (and Mr Democracy) certainly could produce a more humane and liveable world, but mass shootings by young people enamoured with semiautomatic weaponry remind us that the malignancy of machine fetishism against which Liang warned has not been excised, let alone healed. Liang did not have the opportunity (or the interest) to watch the 1919 silent comedy *Johnny Get Your Gun*, a forerunner of the vapid celebration of firearms that Hollywood has been churning out ever since, but his principled dissent from prevailing sentiment suggests a prescient understanding of what could unfold if the deadening hand of mechanisation—and its corollary, mechanised violence—was not resisted. In the United States, a revulsion against industrial-scale slaughter briefly emerged in the 1960s, culminating in films such as the classic *Johnnie Got His Gun* (1971, based on the 1939 Dalton Trumbo novel of the same name). But another 50 years later,

as fans of gun-toting screen idols once again reach for their weapons, the world holds its collective breath. The United States and its Anglophone allies are still groping for their weapons—including submarine-borne nuclear missiles—in a scaled-up version of Rittenhouse-style vigilantism against the phantom targets of their fetid imaginations. Let us hope that the eminently pragmatic idealism of Liang and Boggs will prevail over the deranged, MAGA-fuelled nostalgia for the industrial behemoths and hegemonic geopolitical brinksmanship that have left such wreckage—social, environmental, and spiritual—in their wake.

Finally, even if the United States somehow manages to avoid descending into fascism and reins in its tens of millions of cultish gun-worshippers, looming climate collapse may render any such reprieve merely temporary. Despite the encouraging announcement at COP 26 in November 2021 that China and the United States (who are together responsible for 40 per cent of annual greenhouse gas emissions) will work together to reduce carbon emissions (US Department of State 2021), many climate scientists see global temperature rise exceeding 1.5°C as virtually inevitable. Meanwhile, although Xi Jinping and Hu Jintao before him have steadfastly promoted rural development (Gu 2019), including significant environmental remediation, critics note the superficiality of the government's neotraditional 'beautiful village' campaign, such as in the gentrified rural enclaves that inordinately benefit wealthy investors over the original village inhabitants (Guo 2022). And regardless of lofty rhetoric, real estate speculation continues to drive the construction of what is already an estimated 70 million excess (that is, vacant) housing units and the massive production of concrete and other carbon-emitting materials this has entailed.

As climate chaos intensifies with each passing year, it is no wonder humanity's collective mental health deteriorates commensurately, leading the Australian eco-philosopher Glenn Albrecht (2020) to coin the term 'solastalgia'—a mourning for the loss of formerly stable and flourishing local environments—to give a name to the trauma of the Capitalocene. Political and sociocultural crises of the early Republican era in China led Liang Shuming to seek remedies in traditional rural settings, and the decline of the American Rustbelt turned Grace Lee Boggs into an urban gardener. Perhaps solastalgia can resuscitate our innate ethical perspicacity—whether Mencian, Augustinian, or Seventh Generational—that could guide us all towards a survivable future. If not, our children may be condemned to an endless cycle of Kyle Rittenhouse, Jennifer Crumbley, and Trumpian pathological behaviours that will only accelerate our descent into environmental oblivion. ■

Four Four South Village (四四南村), a *juancun* in Taipei. PC: Phyllis Yu-ting Huang.

Mainlanders' Nostalgic Writing in Taiwan: Memory, Identification, and Politics

Phyllis Yu-ting HUANG

After the Kuomintang was defeated by the Chinese Communist Party in 1949, about 1.5 million people followed the Nationalist government to Taiwan. This marked the beginning of four decades of social separation across the Taiwan Strait, in a political standoff that lasts to this day. Over the years, civil war exiles in Taiwan produced much nostalgic writing. This essay examines the evolution of these texts from the 1950s to the 2010s, exploring the authors' narratives of China in relation to the concept of 'homeland'.

During the Chinese Civil War (1945–49), one of the largest Chinese migrations of the twentieth century occurred. About 1.5 million mainland Chinese followed the Kuomintang (KMT, Nationalist Party) government to Taiwan, an island off the southeast coast of China that had been a Japanese colony before the end of World War II (1895–1945). In claiming itself as the legitimate government of China and regarding Taiwan as the 'last fort against the communists' (反共堡壘), the KMT never prepared to stay permanently on the island—until it realised there was no chance of going back. To strengthen its rule, from 1949 to 1987, the Nationalist government imposed martial law on Taiwan—a period

during which the KMT forbade any communications between the two sides of the Taiwan Strait. The strait thus separated these émigrés and their families for four decades.

Longer-term settlers and indigenous people in Taiwan often call Chinese Civil War migrants and their descendants 'mainlanders' or *waishengren* (外省人, literally, 'people from other provinces')—a term that characterises the group's identity as outsiders. About half of these émigrés were KMT soldiers and government officials, while the remainder were civilians. Many of them did not know Taiwan before they arrived there. Under strict political control, there seemed to be no way to express their bitter homesickness. Since literature was one of the very few emotional outlets available to them, they poured their feelings of homesickness into literary works.

Scholars of Taiwanese literature occasionally mention the genre of mainlanders' nostalgic literature (懷鄉文學) (Chen 2011; Yeh 2010); however, it was the subject of few systematic discussions before the 2010s. Yang Ming's *Aesthetics of Nostalgia: Nostalgic Literature by Chinese Civil War Migrants* (鄉愁美學: 1949年大陸遷台作家的懷鄉文學, 2010) was one of the first studies to examine mainlanders' nostalgic writing closely. Yang argues that while the largest number of nostalgic works by mainlanders was produced in the 1950s and 1960s, the works of the second generation also merit inclusion in the discussion, since they 'inherited' their parents' nostalgia, along with their perceptions of China (Yang 2010: 208–9, 225). Indeed, mainlander writers' nostalgia did not freeze at the moment of their departure from home, but developed and evolved in Taiwan, reflecting the war migrants' anxiety and frustration about living in exile under KMT martial rule. The migrants passed down this sense of nostalgia to their children. This sentiment later turned into a heavy cultural and identity burden for the second-generation mainlanders who were born in Taiwan, educated to love China, and presented with the dramatic sociopolitical transformations of democratisation and Taiwanisation in the 1990s.

This essay traces the trajectory of mainlanders' nostalgic writing from the 1950s to the 2010s, from the works by the first generation of Chinese Civil War migrants to those by the second generation. It examines how this nostalgic writing was exploited by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the KMT to serve the respective parties' political agendas. The essay argues that mainlanders' nostalgic literature shows the émigrés' divergent interpretations of China in different spatiotemporal contexts and their increasingly distant relationship to it.

The Use and Abuse of Nostalgia

In *The Future of Nostalgia* (2001: 8), Svetlana Boym associates nostalgia with the concept of home, writing that modern nostalgia 'could be a secular expression of a spiritual longing, a nostalgia for an absolute, a home that is both physical and spiritual, the Edenic unity of time and space before entry into history'. That is, the place for which the memory-bearer feels nostalgic represents the person's longing, sense of belonging, and identification.

The most well-known nostalgic writing by Chinese Civil War migrants from the early days in Taiwan is often characterised by the authors' strong emotional and cultural ties to mainland China. As Taiwan is most often described as an alien land, this writing can be rightfully considered as part of Chinese diasporic literature. Because the writers still had clear memories of their lives in their homeland, their narratives of China are vivid, lively, and relate closely to their personal experiences. Lin Hai-yin's (1918–2001) *Memories of Peking: South Side Stories* (城南舊事) (2010) is one of the most representative nostalgic literary works from this period. It is a collection of short stories about a girl named Ying-zi, a fictionalised version of the author. The work recounts Ying-zi's (Lin's) childhood experiences in Beijing in the 1920s and presents the distinctive lifestyle and cityscape of Beijing during the Republican era (1912–49). The warm tone and subtle narrative style have been praised by many mainland Chinese literary critics, such as Zhang Fan (2015: 82), who said Lin's narratives of the 'cityscape and society in

Beijing during the Republican period reveal a sense of cultural nostalgia, showing a strong "mainland Chinese feature"'.

In the realm of poetry, Yu Kwang-chung's (1928–2017) 1971 short poem 'Homesickness' (鄉愁) is the most well-known, showing the mainlander poet's painful nostalgia for homeland and family:

> When I was young, my homesickness was a small stamp,
>
> I was here, my mother was there.
>
> After [I grew up], my homesickness was a narrow ticket,
>
> I was here, my bride was there.
>
> Later, my homesickness was a little tomb,
>
> I was outside, my mother was inside.
>
> And now, my homesickness is a shallow strait,
>
> I am here, the mainland is there. (SCMP 2017)

The poem is brief and the language is simple, yet the emotion it reveals is intense and touching. By using a parallel sentence structure to narrate various forms and understandings of separation at different stages of life, Yu shows an émigré's irrecoverable loss and sorrow.

The literary value of Lin Hai-yin's and Yu Kwang-chung's work lies in their reflections on war migrants' collective trauma, suffering, and strong yearning for their homeland at a time when going home was forbidden. However, whereas both Lin's and Yu's literary narratives emphasise their very personal nostalgia for their homeland and families, and avoid sensitive cross-Strait political issues, they have been widely used by the KMT and the CCP for political purposes. In fact, the popularity of their oeuvres owed much to the two parties' political dictatorships. In Taiwan, Yu's poem above was published when the KMT government exercised strict censorship, and its message fit with the KMT's ideology of Chinese nationalism and its call to 'go back to/fight China'. In the People's Republic of China (PRC), Yu's poem served as an example of 'Taiwanese' people's desire for reunification. Lin's and Yu's works were included in primary and secondary school textbooks on the mainland (BBC News 2017). For many postwar mainland Chinese, the great nostalgia the works by the two authors expressed became their first impression of Taiwan and the Taiwanese people, which led them to believe an 'inseverable affection' existed between Taiwan and China.

An important factor to consider is that migrants' feeling of nostalgia was subject to transformation over time, as individuals gradually settled into their new place. As Shu-mei Shih (2013: 37) pointed out in her research on overseas Chinese migrants, 'diaspora has an end date'—that is, migrants tend to localise. In 2003, then premier of the PRC Wen Jiabao quoted Yu Kwang-chung's poem, saying: 'A shallow strait is our deepest national trauma, our strongest homesickness' (一彎淺淺的海峽, 是我們最大的國殤, 最大的鄉愁). However, Yu once said that after visiting China several times, he realised there was no cure for homesickness (Huang 2021: 135). While Wen used the trope of homesickness to justify the PRC's national goal of reunification, he neglected the fact that mainlanders' nostalgia continues to metamorphose with the changing social and political situation on the island. Wen also failed to mention the changing cross-Strait relations, particularly after the end of martial law in Taiwan in 1987, when mainlanders were finally free to visit or move back to China. Many mainlanders were disappointed with the China they found and decided to stay in Taiwan (Fan 2011). Yu was one of them.

Similarly, in 1983, Lin Hai-yin's *Memories of Peking* was adapted into a film of the same name, directed by mainland Chinese Wu Yigong (1938–2019). The film won China's Golden Rooster Awards for Best Director, Best Music, and Best Actress in a Supporting Role, as well as several international film awards. China's marketing of Lin's oeuvre often highlights the theme of nostalgia but understates or even overlooks how Lin contributed to the formation of Taiwanese literature in Taiwan—a genre the CCP sees as contesting the One-China Policy. Lin worked as an editor of several important newspapers and literary maga-

zines in Taiwan during the martial law period. She played an important role in encouraging local Taiwanese writers to express alternative opinions to the Chinese nationalism promoted by the KMT. This led to the emergence of Taiwanese literature, which emphasises Taiwan's distinct culture and values compared with those of mainland China.

Lin's and Yu's works demonstrate the complicated, entangled relationships between mainlanders' nostalgic literature and political dictatorship. Although these authors did not write to serve politics, politicians of all stripes have used their writing. In contrast to political discourses that tend to be relatively rigid and fixed, the two writers' works capture a certain moment in their nostalgia; yet, these emotions changed over time against the shifting social background.

In the early days of the KMT's relocation to Taiwan, the party not only exploited mainlanders' existing nostalgic writing for its own purposes, but also actively took advantage of mainlanders' homesickness to further its political agenda, as exemplified by the emergence of anticommunist literature (反共文學) during the 1950s and 1960s. The KMT encouraged this genre through its establishment of a party-sanctioned Chinese Writers' and Artists' Association (中國文藝協會) to seize control of media and publications, hold writing competitions, and provide monetary rewards. The organisation effectively dominated the direction of mainlander authors' writing.

Anticommunist literature often took the form of fiction, with the stories set in mainland China. The authors expressed the pain of losing their country (that is, the Republic of China) through the fictionalisation of righteous and loyal KMT supporters fighting against evil communists. Novelist Pan Ren-mu's (1919–2005) 1952 book, *My Cousin Lianyi* (漣漪表妹, 2001), is one such example, as it depicts how the Chinese communists mislead a university student named Lianyi and ruin her life. Yet, as Taiwan-based literary critic Chen Fang-ming (2011: 299) commented, 'as the anti-Communist writers all focused on the imagined setting [China], their literary works ultimately broke away from the reality [of their life in Taiwan]'. Indeed, anticommunist literature represents a simplified and formulaic interpretation of China constructed within the ideological KMT–CCP binary. Blending the political advocacy of anticommunism with nostalgia, such narratives about a homeland lose their sincerity. This genre provoked severe criticism from young mainlanders in the 1960s who were discontented with the KMT's political manipulation of literature.

Evolving Nostalgia: Second-Generation Mainlanders' Writing

As the Chinese Civil War migrants' stay in Taiwan lengthened, their children gradually came to regard their parents' intense homesickness and nostalgia as the means by which the first generation evaded dealing with the difficulties they faced on the island. Pai Hsien-yung's (1937–) highly acclaimed work *Taipei People* (台北人) (2018) offers such a critical stance, but with deep sympathy for the first generation of mainlanders. Pai was born in 1937 in Guangxi Province, China; he and his family moved to Hong Kong in 1948 and to Taiwan in 1952. He is one of the key people who introduced literary Modernism to Taiwan as he sought literary freedom through internal exploration, to contest the KMT's political dictatorship. The main characters in *Taipei People* are mainlanders who feel 'trapped' in Taipei. The book is most notable for the characters' indulgence in their nostalgia as they remember their days in mainland China, which blinds them to the reality of their relocation to Taiwan. Literary critic David Der-wei Wang (2018: xi) remarks that 'the people in these stories turn their nostalgia into lived reality'. Indeed, the nostalgia in *Taipei People* belongs solely to the mainlander characters. The stories arouse not so much the readers' nostalgia towards China as a sense of sympathy for the émigrés, since Pai presents all the mainlander characters as painfully trapped in their memories of a sweet past in China and, thus, failing to recognise they have a present and a future in Taiwan.

Pai authored most of the stories in *Taipei People* after his move to the United States in 1963. One may regard this work as Pai's re-contemplation

of mainlanders' nostalgia from a distance after he experienced his second relocation. In comparison with Pai Hsien-yung, who critically addressed the first-generation mainlanders' indulgence in their memories of China, the second-generation mainlander writers—who were born in Taiwan during the 1950s and 1960s and were educated in the KMT's ideology of Chinese nationalism—tended to 'inherit' the previous generation's nostalgia and unwittingly replicated the state ideology in their work. The postwar mainlanders' 'inherited nostalgia' is most evident through their shared 'quasi-exilic mentality' (Hsiau 2010: 16). Although they never lived in China, their writing reveals a strong spiritual attachment to an imagined China and detachment from Taiwan.

Rich examples of this sentiment in literature are Chu Tien-hsin's (1958–) biographical novel, *The Song of Life* (擊壤歌, 2011), and novella, *Everlasting* (未了, 2001). In these works, the narrators put forward a strong affirmation of mainland China as their real homeland. Yet, in both works, the image of 'China' is abstract and stereotypical: the narrators only mention China when they describe their and their parents' anticipation of a 'return' (Huang 2021: 51). They depict nothing concrete about China, which demonstrates the fragility of such secondhand nostalgia.

The more concrete narratives of nostalgia by second-generation mainlander writers can be found in *juancun* literature (眷村文學), a genre that emerged in the late 1970s and reached its peak in the 1980s and early 1990s. Prominent writers of this genre include Chu Tien-hsin, Su Wei-chen, Yuan Chung-chung, and Chang Ta-chun. *Juancun* literature can be seen as a product of the KMT's authoritarian regime, as *juancun* (or 'military dependants' villages') were compounds the KMT established for its soldiers and their families in the 1950s. Under direct military management, these enclosed communities facilitated the development of a distinct mainlander culture in Taiwan.

The 1980s and 1990s were turbulent decades for most mainlanders, particularly for those who lived in *juancun*, because they faced several significant social and cultural changes. In those years, the Taiwanese Government demolished the military dependants' villages for the sake of urbanisation, forcing those who had lived there for several decades out of their homes. This reminded them of their traumatic experience of losing their homes in China. In addition, starting from 1987, mainlanders were finally allowed by the Taiwanese Government to travel to mainland China. Nonetheless, a great number of the returning mainlanders were disappointed by their trips. Their closest relatives on the mainland had already died and PRC society resembled neither the homeland the first-generation mainlanders remembered nor the homeland the second-generation mainlanders imagined (Fan 2011).

At the same time, Taiwan rapidly moved towards political democratisation and cultural Taiwanisation (or *bentuhua*, 本土化). More and more residents in Taiwan became conscious of the fact that post-1949 mainland China had become a totally different society from Taiwan. As the KMT's China-centric ideology gradually lost its dominance, most mainlanders felt left out of the huge social change (Yang and Chang 2010). Many mainlanders suffered multiple losses and felt exiled once again after losing their *juancun* home in Taiwan, their spiritual home in China, and their belief in the superiority of Chinese culture.

The changing social milieu forced the second-generation mainlander writers to reconfigure their self-identity and reconsider what it meant in the context of Taiwan. *Juancun* literature presents the second-generation mainlander writers' transformation from having a high level of self-confidence in the 1980s, when the KMT's Chinese nationalism was most dominant in society, to 'a significant degree of self-doubt' in the 1990s (Huang 2021: 59). A major feature of the *juancun* writing published in the 1990s is the authors consciously depicted *juancun* instead of China as their characters' nostalgic home. For instance, the narrator in Su Wei-chen's (1954–) *Leaving Tongfang* (離開同方) (2002) notes that his mainlander mother's last wish was to return to Tongfang New Village—the *juancun* where they had lived for about 10 years. He also directly calls the village, not China, his home (Su 2002: 3–6). By tackling the second-generation mainlanders' emotional attachment to China, the novel shows this cohort's idea of 'China' is in fact based on their

experience in *juancun*. As the narrator says, when they were young, they believed the *juancun* was China and that 'to be outside the *juancun* was to be outside China' (Su 2002: 153). Although Su's work presents the author's uncertainty about the identity of mainlanders in Taiwan, it also reflects a momentous shift in the idea of homeland these mainlanders held, showing how they had started to pay attention to their lived experience in Taiwan.

The script of the 2008 theatrical production *The Village* (寶島一村, 2011) by Lai Sheng-chuan (1954–) and Wang Wei-chung (1957–) is an example of mainlander writers' most recent nostalgic work. Akin to Su's work, the play shows a strong sense of nostalgia for *juancun*. *The Village* is significant in that both Wang and Lai have been active in mainland China: Wang has produced several variety shows there since 2010, and Lai co-founded the popular Wuzhen Theatre Festival in Zhejiang Province in 2013. *The Village* allows us to examine how mainlander writers' self-identification was informed by China, as they expanded their businesses there.

In presenting Wang and Lai's confidence in calling Taiwan home, *The Village* tells the stories of three mainlander families who moved to the island with the KMT. It follows them from the early days when they saw themselves as exiles in Taiwan to the present when they finally call Taiwan home. China plays a minor role in the play. Only one scene, 'Visiting Families', is about China, and it depicts the three families' 'reunions' with their mainland relations. Yet, all three reunions are painful and 'unfulfilled': one character finds his beloved family members have already died, while another character dies, leaving his son to take his place to reunite with relatives he has never met. The third character finds his wife, whom he left behind in China, still waiting for him, but he has already remarried and has a happy family in Taiwan. The play does not end with the cross-Strait family reunions, but continues to depict these mainlander characters as they decide to live in Taiwan. By emphasising the harmonious relations between mainlanders and Taiwan's majority Hoklo Taiwanese population, as well as the shared memories of the two groups, *The Village* reveals the authors' attempt to 'Taiwanise' *juancun* by showing the characters' identification with *juancun* and belonging to Taiwan. As the first-generation mainlander character Old Zhao says, he has 'set roots down' in Taiwan. In other words, 'mainlanders' are no longer represented as outsiders or 'people from other provinces', but as settlers who belong to Taiwan.

No Longer Home

The rapid increase of cross-Strait interactions in the past three decades led many Taiwanese, including a significant number of mainlanders, to move to China. Yet to interpret this as a representation of the Taiwanese migrants' longing for a return to their original homeland, or as evidence of their support for cross-Strait reunification, is to oversimplify and overstate the case. If, as Boym (2001) argues, the place for which one feels nostalgia reveals one's belonging and identity, by tracing mainlanders' nostalgic writing from the 1950s to the present, this essay has argued that their work reflects the group's transformation from identifying China as their homeland to affirming their belonging to Taiwan. Such a change is especially noticeable in the second generation's work.

This identity transformation in mainlanders' literary work corresponds with the results of a long-term survey of Taiwanese self-identity conducted by the National Chengchi University, which indicates that increasingly fewer Taiwan residents call themselves Chinese (Election Study Center 2022). In 2021, only about 3 per cent of the interviewees identified themselves as Chinese. Most residents in Taiwan neither regard China as their home nor identify as Chinese. Although the influence of China on Taiwanese migrants in China requires further analysis, it is certain the discourses the CCP most often adopts to arouse Taiwanese people's nostalgia for China—phrases such as 'blood is thicker than water' (血濃於水) and 'Come back home, Wan Wan' (灣灣回家吧)—have lost their appeal among most Taiwanese, including mainlanders. ■

Vita Chieu (周德高, 1932–2020).
PC: NewCenturyNet Blog.

Peasant Worker Communist Spy

A Chinese Intelligence Agent Looks Back at His Time in Cambodia

Matthew GALWAY

This essay examines the nostalgic reflections of Sino-Khmer journalist turned Chinese Communist Party (CCP) intelligence agent Vita Chieu (周德高, 1932–2020) on his time working for the CCP and the Chinese Embassy in Phnom Penh. The essay engages with Chieu's memoir exegetically to underscore his activities as an intelligence agent and highlight how he reflected nostalgically about working for the CCP even decades after resigning from the party and renouncing communism.

I was not the most qualified member of the ethnic Chinese revolutionary movement, but I was nevertheless the one who the PRC Embassy in Cambodia trusted the most.
— Chieu (2007: 77)

Today, CCP foreign affairs personnel stationed in Cambodia still cherish Mr Vita Chieu with deep remembrance, and some of them sighed and said: 'We were unfair to Vita Chieu.'
— Vita Chieu Obituary, *Sino-Khmer Histories* (高棉华人史话) Facebook Page, 25 May 2020

The name Vita Chieu (周德高, 1932–2020) is unfamiliar to most scholars of China and Cambodia. Few, if any, have heard of him, or know that he authored a memoir, entitled *My Story with the Communist Parties of China and Kampuchea* (我与中共和柬共, 2007), which details the operations of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) equivalent of the US Central Intelligence Agency or the Russian Committee for State Security

(better known as the KGB), the Central Investigation Department (调查部) (Chieu 2007: 38–39, 105, 107; Faligot 2019: 104). Fewer still know that he was a translator, journalist, acting president, and managing director of the *Sino-Khmer Daily* (棉华日报), a popular Chinese-language newspaper that operated as the 'official propaganda outlet' (事事昕命于中国大使馆的宣传媒体) of the PRC Embassy in Phnom Penh until 1967 (Galway 2021: 275–76; Chieu 2007: 35–36; Willmott 1967: 89). The *Sino-Khmer Daily* was remarkable for its unequivocal support for Cambodian leader Norodom Sihanouk and the China–Cambodia friendship, with countless articles lauding Chinese and Cambodian leaders for their stance against imperialism. But as the Cultural Revolution erupted in the PRC, the pages of the *Sino-Khmer Daily* became an outlet for broadcasting radical iconoclasm to nearly 400,000 overseas Chinese (华侨) in communities across Cambodia (Galway 2021; Kiernan 2008: 288; Osborne 1994: 108).

To date, there has been little scholarship on CCP intelligence operations at home and abroad. Aside from Michael Schoenhals' (2013) study of the CCP's internal covert surveillance and control apparatus, the Central Ministry of Public Security (中央公安部), during the early PRC years, we do not know much about what Chinese spy work entailed. Studies by George Xuezhi Guo (2012) and Roger Faligot (2019) of CCP security agencies and international intelligence operations, respectively, are the most comprehensive and authoritative extant analyses of CCP international intelligence work, but tend not to highlight individual experiences of agents in the field. Memoirs authored by those who worked as intelligence agents for the CCP thus emerge as eye-opening accounts that allow readers to peer through the dense, prohibitive fog and gather glimpses of what CCP intelligence work entailed on the ground—notably, outside China.

One such intelligence agent and author, Vita Chieu, was neither the only CCP intelligence agent in Cambodia, nor the only ex-spy to author a lengthy memoir of his life, career, and involvement in important events during that time. Huang Shiming (黄時明, also known as Tie Ge 铁戈), for one, was a spy who went underground when the Communist Party of Kampuchea (CPK)—the infamous 'Khmer Rouge', to use Sihanouk's derisive nickname for the party (Becker 1998: 100)—seized control of Phnom Penh, which was a place he described as a 'ghost town' (Tie 2008: 643). Yet, Chieu's nostalgic reflections on his roles with the *Sino-Khmer Daily*, the PRC Embassy, and the CCP as a journalist and a spy across 12 years highlight how he was an integral part of Beijing's larger plan to broadcast Maoist enthusiasm and propaganda to Southeast Asia (Galway 2022: 55–84; Mok 2021).

This essay examines Chieu's nostalgic reflections on his time as a journalist and CCP spy while highlighting his pivotal role at the nexus of the Cultural Revolution's unfolding outside the PRC's bounds. Here, I engage with Chieu's memoir exegetically to, at once, underscore his activities as an intelligence agent and highlight how he reflected on working for the CCP even decades after resigning from the party and renouncing communism. The essay tracks his early life as a peasant worker who struggled to make ends meet to his first encounters with leftist materials and entry into the orbit of the CCP in Cambodia. It concludes with a section on his later years as a humble school custodian in the American South who held American values as paramount, yet nonetheless clung tenaciously to the idealism of his younger years.

Nostalgia and the Central Investigation Department

Nostalgia, which is defined by Svetlana Boym (2001: xiii) as 'a sentiment of loss and displacement, but … also a romance with one's own fantasy', provides a particularly useful definition for understanding the force behind Vita Chieu's attachment to his days as a left-wing journalist and communist intelligence agent. The two main features of the modern condition of nostalgia, Boym (2001: xviii) elaborates, are: 1) 'restorative nostalgia', which claims itself less as nostalgia and more as 'absolute truth' in its placing of primacy on '*nostos*' and 'a transhistorical reconstruction of the lost home'; and 2) 'reflective nostalgia', which 'thrives in *algia,* the longing itself, and delays the home-

coming—wistfully, ironically, desperately'. Chieu's nostalgic retellings of his past idealism and career with the CCP are more akin to the latter category and, indeed, his outright renunciation of the restorative (highlighted, for instance, by his resignation from the CCP and ardent criticism of communism) further enunciates how much his reflections traffic in the reflective.

In his capacity as an intelligence agent, Chieu worked for the Central Investigation Department (CID), the agency responsible for collecting information on events in Cambodia. Its tasks also included, as Guo (2012: 357) details, reporting to Beijing, 'helping the CCP's security agencies protect CCP leaders when they visited foreign countries', and 'assisting CCP leaders in presenting a united front abroad'. Chieu worked under men like PRC Embassy commercial attaché and CID Guangzhou branch appointee, Wang Shuren (王树仁), who Guo (2012: 353) asserts 'was responsible for sending CID agents to foreign countries' during the 1960s and 1970s. Agents like Chieu who received postings at Chinese embassies abroad, as Guo continues, 'were most likely to receive orders not from the Foreign Ministry but from the CID' (Guo 2012: 353–54). Chieu's (2007: 39) own recollections corroborate Guo's claim: 'Only then did I understand that the CCP Central Investigation Department was above the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, so they were the most important figures in the PRC embassy [in Phnom Penh].'

Chieu's tasks as an intelligence agent were manifold. The most important of these, which I explore below, entailed working closely with PRC Embassy officials in Phnom Penh in his capacity as a journalist—often undercover to investigate overseas Chinese communities in Phnom Penh to report suspected Guomindang (GMD) loyalists to the CCP. He reported a 1963 alleged GMD plot to assassinate Liu Shaoqi when he was on an official visit to Phnom Penh that was hosted by Cambodian Prime Minister Norodom Sihanouk (reigned, 1941–55; Prime Minister, 1955–70) (Chieu 2007: 39–40). Chieu also reported 'advance information' that leftist national assemblymen Hou Yuon, Khieu Samphan, and Hu Nim—the first two of whom were contemporaries of Pol Pot and all three of whom were leftists with high public profiles—were to be arrested after a peasant rebellion in Samlaut in 1967 (Wang 2018: 26–27).

The location and era during which Chieu's covert activities occurred were equally important. Chieu worked in neutral Cambodia, the PRC's dearest regional ally amid the Sino-Soviet Split–era tensions in peninsular Southeast Asia. Cambodia's democratically elected head of state, the former king Sihanouk, was avowedly neutral in theory and governance, occasionally to the detriment of his own National Assembly's leftist ministers (Galway 2019: 150–52, 2022: 60–61, 130–31, 138–39; Zhai 2014; Kiernan 2004: 188–89, 197–98, 204). In holding firm to what Nicholas Tarling (2014: 4) describes as 'a policy of neutrality' to safeguard Cambodian independence, Sihanouk's Cambodia stood as an important ally to the PRC to counterbalance Moscow-aligned Vietnam to China's south. Chieu reported on, wrote, and published extensively on fraternal China–Cambodia relations during this time and, later, Cultural Revolution–inspired articles to reflect the radicalism of the era.

Peasant Worker: Vita Chieu's Early Life

Vita Chieu was born in 1932 in Svay Cheat village, Battambang Province, Cambodia. His father was a farmer from Jieyang County, Guangdong Province, who immigrated to Cambodia, and his maternal grandmother was an ethnic Khmer from the then-French protectorate of Cambodge. Vita Chieu grew up poor but was ambitious and considerate from childhood into adolescence. He did not stay in Svay Cheat for long—drought and schooling forced him to leave home and, later, enter the workforce. As Chieu (2007: 32) recalled:

> I remember when I was six years old, there was a drought in Svay Cheat and the lake was dry and tear-like. My parents fled the drought with my brother and I to Pursat province, where we lived for one year before our return. At age eight, I went to a monastery school to study Khmer in the same class as

> my maternal aunt and paternal uncle. Before the Japanese surrender, the Thai army occupied Battambang Province, which led me to study Thai in the monastery school for a year … At 12, my father took me to Battambang City to work as an unpaid apprentice in a bakery. From then on, I was far away from my parents and younger siblings and began to lead a vagrant's life. One day, the son of the bakery-owner, seeing that I was young, asked me to compete with him in wrapping sweets, which he lost. He then cursed at me and called me derogatory names that meant I was a rustic, unimaginative country bumpkin who was neither Chinese nor Khmer. I was very angry, so I quit.

Betwixt and between—a Sino-Khmer of rural origins who tried to carve out a living in Battambang City—Chieu worked several odd jobs before landing at the *Sino-Khmer Daily*. He worked in a fruit store, then a grocery store lugging loads of river water every day. The store's proprietor, Uncle Ung/Huang (黄伯伯, Huang Mingqiang 黄明强), discovered that he could exploit Chieu's adeptness in Thai to speculate on gold prices and exchange rates that were wired via telegram from Bangkok to Battambang. After an unceremonious disagreement with Huang over a 72-riel balance, Chieu grew disillusioned with his employer and sought work elsewhere. As he (2007: 32) recounted, it was then that 'I began to understand the true meaning of "boss"'.

Chieu then worked in a general store by grace of his father's friend Yal/Yao (姚), who also provided room and board for him. Chieu assisted in keeping the store not only profitable, but also thriving after Battambang's handover to Cambodia in 1953, the year of national independence. He earned a monthly salary of 26 riels, paid off his balance with Ung, and pooled his savings to pay for schooling. Chieu enrolled at the Battambang Overseas Chinese School (马德望侨校) elementary division, despite his advanced age for that level (he was 17). As an enrolled student, Chieu continued working after hours, handling household chores, delivering food, and doing custodial work for the school (Chieu 2007: 32–33). 'I had suffered for as long as I can remember, so I cherished any opportunity that came my way,' he reminisced (Chieu 2007: 34).

After four difficult years of study during which he learned to read and write in Chinese, Chieu graduated and sought out work opportunities. 'From my start in third grade to my graduation from elementary school,' Chieu noted, 'those four years of sorrowful yet joyful living were deeply engraved in my heart' (2007: 34). His first post after completing his studies was as the handler of weights and measurements for grain and, later, as a manual labourer, for a grain store in Mongkol Borey, a town in southern Banteay Meanchey Province about 60 kilometres from Battambang. A family tragedy then brought him into the orbit of the *Sino-Khmer Daily* and the CCP. His father fell ill, which forced Chieu to head to Phnom Penh to tend to him in the city's Chinese Hospital. On his father's untimely passing, Chieu nearly lost all hope: 'My father's death left me, as his eldest son, with sorrow and helplessness' (Chieu 2007: 35). Now that his family was entirely dependent on the matriarch, Chieu looked for ways to provide for his grief-stricken family. In 1953, colleagues of his from Battambang pitched to him an opportunity to return to Battambang to work in community service for the Chinese communities there via the establishment of an athletic club—one that, unbeknown to Chieu at first, was CCP-endorsed (Chieu 2007: 35).

Worker Communist: Vita Chieu Enters the CCP's Orbit

In 1953, 23-year-old Vita Chieu found himself engaged in CCP-sponsored activities that exposed him to radical ideas. As he committed himself fully to serving Chinese communities in Battambang, the CCP underground was slowly emerging from sight in the form of party-organised athletic clubs. In joining one such club, Chieu was exposed to communist literature, reading leftist writings such as Liu Shaoqi's *How to Be a Good Communist* (论共产党员的修养), Mao Zedong's speech 'Serve the People' (为人民服务), and Mao's published eulogy

'In Memory of Norman Bethune' (纪念白求恩). As Chieu (2007: 35) recalled: 'Absent thought, I had entered the fold and had grown familiar with figures such as overseas Chinese leader in Battambang, [Cambodia-born Chinese] Zhang Donghai [张东海], and Vietnam-born anti-French resistance figure, Cai Kangsheng [蔡抗生].' Zhang handled overseas Chinese affairs for the CPK in Battambang and, in so doing, served as Chieu's first direct link to the CPK underground—that is, before Zhang was 'transferred to the Khmer Rouge in the 1950s' (Wang 2018: 28; see also Chieu 2007: 112, 123; Carney 1989: 92).

Chieu's interest in leftist materials, participation in CCP-endorsed athletic clubs, and ties to Chinese communists in Battambang soon won him the attention of the Battambang Overseas Chinese Party Organisation (马德望侨党组织; BOCPO). As Chieu recalled (2007: 35), in 1956, the BOCPO 'recommended me for a post in the newly established *Sino-Khmer Daily* in Phnom Penh', a newspaper that Wang Chenyi (2018: 26) notes 'was created in 1956 by some *Huayun* [华运 standing for 华人华侨革命运动, an ethnic-Chinese revolutionary movement] members and the local pro-PRC leaders of various Chinese associations'. Chieu worked for 12 years as a translator, journalist, director of journalism, acting president, and managing director (1956–67). The *Sino-Khmer Daily* was arguably the most important Chinese-language newspaper in Cambodia. Although founded in Battambang two years before the formalisation of diplomatic relations between China and Cambodia, the paper was sponsored by the CCP via the BOCPO and affiliated with the PRC Embassy in Phnom Penh. Through this affiliation, the daily grew into China's official propaganda outlet in Cambodia. Among as many as 13 newspapers published in Phnom Penh in 1962–63, William Willmott (1967: 89) notes, 'five were Chinese, accounting for almost three-fifths of newspaper readership … [and] about half the Chinese adult population of the capital reads at least one Chinese newspaper daily. Many read several papers.' Among those Chinese-language newspapers, Willmott continues, 'the *Mian-Hua* [*Sino-Khmer Daily*] and *Gong-shang* [*Business & Industry Daily*] are the most important, carrying local and international, financial and commercial news'.

The *Sino-Khmer Daily*'s content made the outlet especially remarkable. Initially, it published Chinese-language articles to provide invaluable information to its readership about China's support for, and genuine fraternal relations with, neutral Cambodia (Galway 2021: 275–76; Sino-Khmer Daily 1958b). Issues published between 1956 and 1964 were replete with praise for the Cambodian leader, Norodom Sihanouk, and lauded his commitment to neutrality and independence (Sino-Khmer Daily 1956, 1958a, 1964). As time progressed, however, the newspaper's content reflected the increasingly radical tenor of politics in the PRC (Galway 2021: 296). Warm China–Cambodia relations increased the *Sino-Khmer Daily*'s popularity among Chinese communities in Cambodia, especially with CCP figures visiting the country frequently. Beijing deputy mayor Wang Kunlun (王昆仑), for one, even published poetry in one of its issues. His 'literary style gave a face to *Sino-Khmer Daily* and won over many new readers', Chieu (2007: 36) noted.

This patriotic enthusiasm went hand-in-glove with a mounting zeal for Maoist China among Chinese communities in Cambodia, and cemented Chieu's position as an asset to the newspaper. In the 1960s, ethnic Chinese accounted for 400,000 of Cambodia's total population of roughly six million (Kiernan 2008: 288; Willmott 1970: 6). Chinese communities in Cambodia were fiercely nationalist and, as Geoffrey Gunn (2018: 182) notes, had previously rallied together in support of China during the Japanese occupation by sending 'donations amounting to one million piastres along with clothing in support of the nationalists'. Decades later, this enthusiasm for the homeland remained intact, albeit split between supporters of the CCP and supporters of the GMD.

In his memoir, Chieu (2007: 45) recounted that the *Sino-Khmer Daily* echoed the Cultural Revolution rhetoric of the day by printing 'ultra-leftist statements' (极左言论) in its editions. He also noted that the radical enthusiasm of the Red Guards for Chairman Mao had extended to

urban and rural Cambodia via Chinese communities. The Red Guards' 'individual fanaticism for Mao' extended there through the 'transmission of overseas Chinese communities' "homeland mindset"', and 'issues of *Quotations from Chairman Mao* flooded urban and rural areas of Cambodia' (Chieu 2007: 36, 45; Galway 2021: 276). Chinese schools in cities and the countryside alike, Chieu notes, instructed students to 'study the writings of Chairman Mao' and 'study the achievements of Comrade Lei Feng', not unlike parallel campaigns in the PRC (Chieu 2007: 36, 45; see also Galway 2022: 72). As for Chieu (2007: 35), his class origins and zeal for the CCP made him indispensable: 'I came from impoverished class origins. I was especially enthusiastic about, and loyal to, the Party. I was willing to go through fire and water for the Chinese Communist Party. Thus, the Chinese embassy [in Phnom Penh] trusted me completely.'

Figure 1: Book cover of Vita Chieu's 2007 memoir, 我与中共和柬共. PC: Matthew Galway.

Communist Spy: Becoming an Intelligence Agent for the CCP

The CCP's trust in Vita Chieu extended to him protecting Chinese interests in Cambodia. At a dinner party hosted by the *Sino-Khmer Daily* for embassy personnel, Chieu's superior, Wang Shuren, told him: 'You really are a Cambodia hand' (你真是一个柬埔寨通啊) (Chieu 2007: 39). Indeed, Chieu was valuable to the PRC Embassy in Phnom Penh: a young, well-connected, enthusiastic person who could speak Khmer and Chinese and who had deep roots in overseas Chinese communities in Battambang and Phnom Penh. 'At that time,' Chieu (2007: 39) reflected, 'I was young and had a good memory, so I was often consulted by the embassy on matters of Cambodian political personnel about whom the embassy was unfamiliar, which is why I earned a reputation as the "Cambodia hand".'

As the 'Cambodia hand', Chieu's responsibilities included investigating Chinese communities in Phnom Penh in his guise as a journalist to uncover who among them might be GMD loyalists. Chieu (2007: 36) recalled that his tasks entailed the investigation of visa applicants to distinguish 'friends from enemies':

> After the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Cambodia, a large number of overseas Chinese [Chinese Cambodians] applied for visas to visit relatives in China. Because there were still members among the overseas Chinese communities in Cambodia who were GMD supporters, and I was quite familiar with overseas Chinese communities, the PRC embassy entrusted the work of 'distinguishing friends from enemies' [辨别敌友] to me alone. I visited various places to investigate as a journalist. Although the power to approve visas rested solely with the embassy, I wielded 'executive authority' [首批权] and the embassy rendered decisions based on my investigation reports.

農曆丙午年五月十四日 第3405號 1966—7—2 星期六 (第一版)

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Figure 2: Cover article of 2 July 1966 edition of 棉华日报 with the headline 'Long Live Mao Zedong Thought!' (毛泽东思想万岁). PC: Matthew Galway.

Chieu's recollections of his activities for the PRC Embassy during his time with the *Sino-Khmer Daily* reveal his devotion to the CCP and the global communist movement in general. After Sihanouk shuttered all Chinese-language newspapers in 1967, Chieu and his comrades attempted to protect the press with their lives. 'At that time,' Chieu (2007: 36) recalled,

> a number of rightist groups sought to mobilise students to destroy the newspaper office [of the *Sino-Khmer Daily*], and the situation was especially critical. I was determined to lead my colleagues to defend the newspaper, and prepared myself mentally to defend the newspaper to the last man.

He continued: 'I remember my friend, Xiao Ma [小马], intimated to me: "We may not have been born in the same year, but may we die on the same day."' Yet this dire, potentially life-and-death situation did not lead Chieu to reflect negatively on this period. 'Today,' he remarked, 'although I have broken with the Chinese Communist Party, I still feel exhilarated every time that I hark back to these struggles. After all, when I was young, I was still a man of courage and uprightness' (Chieu 2007: 36).

Chieu also reported on the scene at anti-government protests in Phnom Penh. In one incident, he risked imprisonment as an accused CCP spy and lost his German-made Leica camera to 'two special agents' of the Sihanouk government. Despite the tumult, Chieu likewise reminisced nostalgically about his and his family's commitment to the CCP. As he recalled:

> I spent my youth and adulthood in revolutionary fervour, and my wife and daughter also became members of the revolution. My wife was a bookkeeper at *Sino-Khmer Daily* and, later, worked as a liaison officer within and outside the [CPK] liberated zones. At eight years old, my clever and imperturbable daughter delivered letters to the PRC embassy. All of us gave our all for the revolution. (Chieu 2007: 36)

Chieu's tasks as an intelligence agent also included the protection of major CCP officials on diplomatic visits to Cambodia and PRC-friendly leftist ministers in Sihanouk's cabinet. He recounted that PRC Embassy first secretary Mao Xinyu (毛欣禹) called on him and two other Sino-Khmer CCP loyalists, Hong Tel/Hong De 洪德 and Uong Chong/Weng Chun 翁春, to investigate an April 1963 'Guomindang plot to assassinate Liu Shaoqi, his wife Wang Guangmei, Sihanouk, and the Queen Mother Kossamak' (Chieu 2007: 39). Chieu undertook the covert operation at great risk to himself:

> At that time, there was an agreement that if an unforeseen mishap were to occur, I would assume personal responsibility and not disclose [our] relationship with the Embassy, while Hong Tel and Uong Chong dealt with the Security Bureau and the General Staff Headquarters. (Chieu 2007: 53)

Mao Xinyu asked Chieu specifically to author three anonymous reports in Khmer and send them to the Security Bureau, the Department of Defence, and the royal family's steward, the fiercely loyal General Mey Hool/Mai Hu 麦胡将军, alerting them to the plot (Chieu 2007: 39–40; Guo 2012: 357; see also Wang 2018: 26). The PRC Embassy then tasked him with tracking down and identifying suspected GMD loyalists. Chieu (2007: 40) described this task in detail in his memoir as involving undercover investigation, violence, as well as search and seizure:

> The PRC embassy ordered me to scout where the explosives were hidden. On the road from Pochentong Airport to Phnom Penh's city centre, I checked house by house to assess which houses might have burrows under them, and then went to the back of the houses to check for traces of evidence. One day, I finally found a suspicious rental house on the street, one which was less than two metres from the sidewalk. I went there with my wife, pretending to rent an apartment. During the conversation with the landlord, I found out that a middle-aged Chinese man wearing glasses lived in that house, that he had a cleft harelip with stitches, and that he was absent during the day and came back at night. Based on this facial feature, it was determined that this man was Zhang Dachang [张达昌].
>
> At that time, with the help of activists in [the] Chinese community, the PRC Embassy had almost become a 'national stronghold' in Cambodia, mobilising the Chinese community to monitor the movements of GMD loyalists in Phnom Penh, even the hiding places of explosives. The embassy ordered us to make our move early to avoid unexpected circumstances. One day, a comrade came to me and told me to go to the Khmer Dance Hall on Kampuchea Krom Street at 6:25 in the evening to pester Zhang Dachang, resort to violence and make a scene, and then seize him and turn him in to the police station.

Evidently, Chieu's deep ties to Chinese communities in the capital granted him exclusive access to insider information so he could protect PRC interests in Cambodia. In this instance, Chieu's intelligence may have saved Liu Shaoqi's life: 'If we had not uncovered the plot in such a timely manner, then Liu Shaoqi and his wife Wang Guangmei may have surely died' (Chieu 2007: 41).

Chieu's close ties to overseas Chinese communities also connected him directly with the ethnic Chinese revolutionary movement, which Wang (2018: 26) describes as 'a loosely formed organisation' operated by the CCP's Overseas Branch (侨党). 'Under the Chinese embassy's directive', Wang (2018: 27) contends, Vita Chieu's links to the movement may have saved the lives of national assemblymen, the avowedly leftist and widely popular Hou Yuon, Khieu Samphan, and Hu Nim. After Sihanouk's policies spurred peasant uprisings in the Samlaut subdistrict of Battambang Province in March and April 1967, the Cambodian leader accused leftist ministers of instigating the rebellion. He berated Hou and Khieu for allegedly ginning up peasant unrest and threatened their lives for

the role that he alleged they had played in Samlaut (Kiernan 1982: 180–82; Galway 2022: 112, 143). Both men were clearly at risk.

At the time, Hou, Khieu, and Hu were prominent members of the Khmer–Chinese Friendship Association (Samāgam Mittphāp Khmer-Chin/ សមាគមមិត្តភាពខ្មែរ-ចិន; KCFA), a 'China-curious' association of Cambodian intellectuals, students, and politicians who supported cultural and diplomatic exchanges between Beijing and Phnom Penh (Galway 2021; 2022: 61–72). Their leading roles within the association drew the ire of Sihanouk, who, although he was the KCFA's honorary president (see KCFA 1965) and friends with the highest rung of CCP leaders (Mertha 2014: 5–6), increasingly regarded the PRC-endorsed and funded KCFA as problematic. Hou, Khieu, and Hu all served within Sihanouk's National Assembly, after all; their continued involvement in an association that by the mid 1960s reflected the Maoist zeal of the Cultural Revolution could compromise, in Sihanouk's view, the neutrality that he wished to maintain at all costs. Sihanouk's solution—strongly supported by Lon Nol's political right-wing, which had gained traction in the National Assembly in the wake of the Samlaut Rebellion—was to neutralise all three popular ministers (Kiernan 2004: 181, 204; Chandler 1999: 55; Galway 2022: 138–43; Um 2015: 93).

Chieu (2007: 44–45) recounted how in March 1967, on hearing from members of the ethnic Chinese revolutionary movement that Hou, Khieu, and Hu were targets, he notified them immediately to ensure their safe passage out of Phnom Penh and into the CPK's liberated zones:

> At that time [in 1967], the office of *Sino-Khmer Daily* organised a basketball team in the overseas Chinese community. There was a young man on the team who was very close to the son of a high-ranking government official. One day in April 1967, I went on a walk with him and we passed by this high-ranking official's house. He took me inside. The parents were not home, so the son [my friend's friend] confided in us that the army had captured a CPK informant and they were cruelly torturing him to coerce him into providing evidence that Khieu Samphan and Hou Yuon were behind the Samlaut Rebellion. Once such a confession is made, the government will go after both of them.
>
> I was very energetic and had many friends in the [overseas Chinese] communities, including a file clerk with the National Assembly. He provided me with copies of congressional documents and government budgets, and I often delivered them to the Chinese Embassy. This time, I reported the news about the government's disposal of Khieu Samphan and Hou Yuon to Secretary Zhang of the Chinese embassy, who was my direct contact there. Two days later, Secretary Zhang called and asked me to go to the embassy to meet him. He ordered me to contact Khieu Samphan and Hou Yuon so that they could flee to the liberated zones as soon as possible. I am certain that he [Zhang] consulted Beijing for instructions before assigning me this task.

To alert them of the danger, Chieu rushed to a Chinese art exhibition hosted by the KCFA—likely at the Chaktomuk Auditorium, where association members often 'conduct[ed] political activity through art' (Martin 1989: 109; Hu 1977: 14; Galway 2021: 295). Khieu and Hou were often present at such events in their capacity as members of the KCFA press and periodicals subcommittee and inaugural committee, respectively (KCFA 1965: 6). Although Chieu's first effort to track them down failed, he was successful on the second day of the exhibition.

Fortunately for Hou and Khieu, Vita Chieu reached them right on time. Chieu (2007: 45) recalled that he immediately relayed the information to both men, who, according to Milton Osborne (1994: 194), were 'in genuine fear for their lives'. After informing them, Chieu received personal thanks from an unnamed CPK figure:

> I told Khieu Samphan when no one was paying attention, and he immediately turned his face to Hou Yuon, and I added: 'Please act immediately, this must not be delayed.' A few

> days later, at a Khmer–Chinese Friendship Association reception, the head of the CPK underground organisation in Phnom Penh came to shake my hand and said: 'Thank you, they have safely arrived at the revolutionary base areas.'

Disillusionment, Renunciation, Reflection

By the late 1960s, Vita Chieu was as devoted to the CCP as ever. His loyalty and consistent work on the party's behalf led Kang Sheng, China's internal security and intelligence czar, to organise Chieu's first visit to China (via Guangzhou and Changsha) to report to Beijing on the situation in Cambodia. Chieu's love of the party was on full display during a 1969 drive past Mao Zedong's residence. A CID section chief named by Chieu only as 'Mr Cai' drove him by Chairman Mao's house—a moment that brought Chieu to tears. 'Once he and I passed the bridge between Zhongnanhai and Beihai Park by car,' Chieu (2007: 47) recounted,

> he [Mr Cai] said to me: 'Chieu, you are very lucky. You have arrived by Chairman Mao's side.' He pointed out the window and said: 'Chairman Mao lives right here.' A warm current rushed through my heart, and tears began to flow uncontrollably. At that time, I was not yet 40 years old, but my determination to go through fire and water for the revolution was unshakeable.

Vita Chieu's reflections on his time working for the CCP, however, change in tone by the 1970s. After his 2 January 1970 return to Cambodia, Chieu experienced first-hand the Lon Nol coup, on 18 March 1970, and the CPK takeover of the country on 19 April 1975. Between the two events, Chieu met with leading CPK figures So Phim, in early 1971, and Nuon Chea, the man who would become 'Brother Number Two' (that is, Pol Pot's second-in-command), three times, but 'never met with Pol Pot or Ieng Sary' (Chieu 2007: 61). These meetings occurred because the CCP had reassigned Chieu and many ethnic Chinese revolutionary movement members to the CPK after the Lon Nol coup, and Chieu assumed responsibility for liaising with CPK leaders (Wang 2018: 30). Contrary to what he expected, he did not encounter much camaraderie or friendliness from his brothers-in-arms in the liberated zones.

CPK cadres told Chieu and his fellow overseas Chinese revolutionaries in 1971 that they were unwelcome. Chieu (2007: 62) voiced his protest to his new comrades:

> The Chinese Embassy stationed in Cambodia notified us that we were to go to the liberated zones and join in the revolution. Every day, the Cambodian Revolutionary Organisation [CPK] also called on the people under the rule of the Lon Nol clique to make a clear class distinction between themselves and the Lon Nol clique by fleeing to the liberated zones. But instead, you are driving us to the enemy's side.

Chieu could not understand why the CCP reassigned him to work with CPK representatives who refused Chinese assistance. He also could not comprehend why, in 1974, the CCP handed over responsibility for the extraction of Chinese operatives in Cambodia to the Vietnamese (Chieu 2007: 70–71).

> Ever since the CPK became the CCP's 'friend's wife' [友妻] Cambodian overseas Chinese have become worthless 'domestic servants' … the CCP has taken all Cambodian overseas Chinese, including those who have been loyal to it for decades, and gifted them to the CPK. (Chieu 2007: 75)

The CCP's communication to him and his CCP loyalists was what stung the most. 'The CCP then officially informed us: "From now, you have no affiliation or association with the CCP" … since then, we have become orphans abroad [海外孤儿], fish meat to be cut up by CPK knives [任柬共刀组

宰割的鱼肉]' (Chieu 2007: 75). After two decades of reliable service to Beijing, Chieu's loyalty was beginning to wane.

The CCP's perplexing decision was one thing, but hearing about CPK atrocities against ethnic Chinese pushed Chieu to develop a seething hatred for the CPK and, later, resentment towards the CCP for abandoning overseas Chinese as 'pawns to be sacrificed at will' (随时供牺牲的卒子) in its superpower chess game (Chieu 2007: 79). Chieu does not mention in his memoir that he bore witness to CPK mass killings. Many Chinese experts and CCP operatives travelled around Democratic Kampuchea 'at their own risk' if they dared to move about freely, and if they voiced their protest to CPK atrocities, they risked compromising their livelihoods once they returned to China (Mertha 2014: 59). Chieu does recount that after the CPK captured the capital, 'two of my cousins were executed by peasants on order from the Party' (Chieu 2007: 52). He also noted that the Cambodian communists targeted Chinese Cambodians as class enemies because many had worked in the commercial sector before the takeover. The CPK applied this class enemy label indiscriminately. 'CPK propagandists emulated the CCP line on class analysis', Chieu (2007: 76) recalled, but 'propagated that ethnic Chinese are "the bourgeoisie that sucks the blood of Cambodians." This meant that overseas Chinese faced a more perilous predicament than Khmers.' The CPK targeted Sino-Khmers and overseas Chinese, Kiernan (2008: 288) intimates, not because of their race, but because 'they were made to work harder and under much worse conditions than rural dwellers. The penalty for infraction of minor regulations was often death.' More than half of the pre–Democratic Kampuchea era population of ethnic Chinese (430,000) had died from overwork, diseases like malaria, or starvation by 1979 (Kiernan 2008: 295–296, 458).

Unable to return to Phnom Penh after the CPK takeover because the CPK forbade it, but relatively free to travel in and out of country, Chieu was safe from persecution (Wang 2018: 31). He even enjoyed the freedom to travel to Hanoi and meet with Le Duan, General Secretary of the Vietnamese Communist Party (the CPK's geopolitical rival and enemy), without CPK interference. The CPK, Chieu (2007: 76) noted, was 'in deference to the CCP' so it 'treated those of us in the ethnic Chinese revolutionary movement fairly well'. In place of firsthand witness, then, Chieu relied on what he heard from contacts in and outside the liberated zones about killings. Of the nearly 800 ethnic Chinese revolutionary movement members who were stranded in Democratic Kampuchea, 100 died 'in the jungles' during those years (Chieu 2007: 64; Wang 2018: 31).

In April 1977, the CPK granted Chieu and his family safe passage to Phnom Penh so that they could return to Beijing. Grateful for an opportunity the CPK did not afford other CCP members in Democratic Kampuchea, let alone its own people, Chieu departed with the knowledge that the CCP-backed CPK was committing atrocities against ethnic minorities—notably, ethnic Chinese. He appealed to his CCP handlers in Beijing to do something about the overseas Chinese whom the party had abandoned to the CPK. His superior, Wang Tao (王涛), replied angrily:

> You are so undisciplined. The Party recalls you to report, and then you are done. Why do you keep bringing up these matters? Do you still have the Central Committee in your mind? Even if someone is extracted [by the CCP] in the future, it is not according to your opinion, but instead it is the decision of the Central Government. (Chieu 2007: 79)

The reason for the CCP's hardline stance on this matter was clearly geopolitically motivated, thus Chieu's pleas fell on deaf ears.

Two years after the CPK's establishment of the reclusive Democratic Kampuchea (1975–79), CCP leaders like Zhang Chunqiao (张春桥) and Chen Yonggui (陈永贵) still supported the CPK rhetorically and materially—short of sending troops—as a counterbalance to Moscow-aligned Vietnam in the region (Mertha 2014: 4–5, 9). Although it often 'ended up as the subordinate party', as Andrew Mertha (2014: 4) notes, the CCP maintained that the CPK leadership comprised of daring revolutionaries who were taking a brave stand against US imperialism and Soviet-backed Vietnamese adventurism. The CCP's continued endorsement

of the CPK, Chieu (2007: 39) reflected, was in contravention of the seismic shift in domestic policy in post-Mao China: 'The Cultural Revolution was over, the CCP totally lacked discipline, and its hopes for a global revolution were completely shattered.' 'At that time,' he continued (Chieu 2007: 103), 'I already abhorred the CPK line even though the CCP continued to support the CPK as a genuine revolutionary Party.' His confidence in the CCP shaken, Chieu's loyalty to the Beijing line continued to erode.

As the party to which he had devoted his life and spirit continued to distance itself from him, Chieu's disillusionment with the CCP grew ever stronger. Chieu had devoted the previous two decades of his life to serving the CCP faithfully in a range of capacities, yet he held only unofficial party membership at the time. 'We understand your revolutionary history, but we do not recognise your organisational affiliation so you will have to formally reapply for membership', Chieu (2007: 106) remembered hearing from an unnamed superior. Chieu nevertheless reported to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Department of Consular Affairs (外交部领事司), whereupon he urged Chinese intervention in Democratic Kampuchea to stop the killings of ethnic Chinese.

Chieu's full report, entitled 'The Political Line and Policies are the Lifeblood of the Party' (路线和政策是党的生命), was written 'according to Mao Zedong Thought' to support his oral testimony and to communicate his steadfast commitment to the party (Chieu 2007: 103). Because of Chieu's (2007: 103) 'infinite faithfulness' (无限忠实) to the CCP, he noted, his report 'held nothing back' in criticising the CPK. But Chieu's report and strident criticisms therein ran counter to the prevailing Mao-era support for the Cambodian communists—a line that continued under Mao's successor and then-PRC paramount leader, Hua Guofeng. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs quickly turned on Chieu and, in late 1977, reassigned him to Hong Kong—a move that Chieu (2007: 39, 103–4) inconsistently explains as the CCP's attempt to shut him out and as something that was brought about 'because of financial hardships'.

While the CCP's betrayal of the ethnic Chinese revolutionary movement in service to supporting the murderous CPK represented a major reason for Vita Chieu to part ways with the party, the horrible conditions that awaited him in Hong Kong further drove him to reconsider his allegiance. As Chieu (2007: 39) recalled, 'my wife and I were sent to Hong Kong, practically forced from our home without the chance to take anything with us, to do hard labour in a factory'. Chieu and his family suffered greatly after the move. They lived for a time in a slum, the infamous Kowloon Walled City (九龙寨城), and worked in a jeans manufacturing plant for the duration of their stay (Chieu 2007: 106).

Chieu's opinion of the CCP and communism moved from faithful devotion to bitter hatred, and his family's mistreatment in Hong Kong left a lasting imprint on him. As he (2007: 107) recounted in his memoir:

> I was born in a traditional Cambodian village, and from my childhood, I yearned for the 4,000-year-old civilisation of China. I believed that my ancestral homeland was replete with heroic Communist figures. I was disappointed that I did not see or meet a Lei Feng, who found pleasure in helping others. Nor did I encounter a Jiang Jie, who had the courage to sacrifice the self. Instead, I encountered degenerate bureaucrats in Beijing who did not care about our lives. In Guangzhou, I encountered unruly shrew-like people who fought endlessly for trifling profits. Communism had not only rendered society utterly penniless, but it had also reduced human nature to its most despicable and base level. I no longer held the homeland, which had disappointed me so much, in my heart.

Over time, Chieu could not bear to put his children through 'suffering great maltreatment and abuse in the Central Investigation Department guest house' where the family lived. He officially submitted his resignation to the CCP office in Hong Kong (Chieu 2007: 39). Wang Shuren tried his best to persuade him to stay on, but Chieu was firm in his convictions. 'At this point,' Chieu (2007:

39) reminisced, 'I was completely disillusioned with the CCP and politely refused, only promising perfunctorily to do "something patriotic".'

It took another few years, but Vita Chieu eventually left a life of merely scraping by to support his family in Hong Kong. He lived in the British colony between 1978 and 1979 amid worsening China–Vietnam relations but relocated to Thailand in 1979 to reconnect with escaped comrades and, finally, moved to the United States in either late 1979 or 1980 (his memoir does not specify the date). In the process, from a once diehard CCP spy, he transformed into an unequivocal anticommunist critic. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, PRC paramount leader Deng Xiaoping—and, by extension, the head of Cambodian missions under Kang Sheng, the above-mentioned CID section chief Wang Tao—gradually distanced Beijing from the CPK (Faligot 2019: 104; Chieu 2007: 78, 103–4; see also Byron and Pack 1992: 356–57). By then, Vita Chieu had long parted ways with the CCP.

In a short concluding section of his memoir (2007: 111) entitled 'Later Years of Happiness' (幸福的晚年), Chieu describes how he settled in the United States, became an American citizen, and found work as a custodian for a high school in Greenville, South Carolina. 'I once regarded the United States as an enemy, but today, I find that it is the most perfect place in the world and I deeply love this country of democracy, freedom, and the rule of law,' he remarks (Chieu 2007: 111). But here, as throughout his memoir, he reflects nostalgically on his generation of true believers in the CCP mission. 'Today's CCP,' Chieu (2007: 111) concludes longingly,

> has ceased to reflect on these matters, and our generation's former believers of, and active participants in, the Communist revolution are about to pass away. Most of my comrades witnessed the CPK's devastation. Some of them escaped from CPK rule but were imprisoned by the Viet Cong for many years. Today, they are all outcasts of the CCP and scattered all over the world. I leave my experience to future generations as a token of my remorse to history.

Vita Chieu's memoir provides us with a glimpse into the experiences of a CCP intelligence agent. His life story is replete with peaks and valleys and concludes with its protagonist at peace in a new land and with a new, albeit much more modest, occupation. But his words of longing for a time when he truly believed in something, and that something was the CCP's mission for global communism, shine throughout his retelling of events in Cambodia, China, and Hong Kong. These moments of nostalgic reflection on the man he once was or could have been had the CCP not driven him away, shed light on a fascinating and very *human* story of a CCP spy's life in one centre of the Cultural Revolution's unfolding outside Maoist China. ■

FORUM

Covid-19 in China

Image 1: A meme that circulated on WeChat during the 2022 Omicron outbreak in Shenzhen. The text reads: 'Shenzheners have humble wishes: to be able to go home when they leave the office and to be able to sleep until dawn without being woken up by a loudspeaker [calling them for emergency Covid-19 testing].' The management team is wearing hazmat suits that have not only become a symbol of the city's mobilisation to fight the outbreak, but also allow teams to cross quarantine cordons.

Covid among Us

Viral Mobilities in Shenzhen's Moral Geography

Mary Ann O'DONNELL

This essay offers an ethnographic account of Shenzhen's response to the Omicron outbreak in February and March 2022, introducing how the country's 'grid management' (网格管理) was implemented in what many have labelled the 'silicon valley of hardware'. It tracks viral mobilities online to understand how physical mobility emerged as a site for the evaluation of the commitment to zero-Covid, the quality of implementing protocols, and what were perceived as acceptable forms of policy enforcement. In so doing, it shows how the city's role in the material development of Chinese social media predicated how Shenzhen perceived, managed, and experienced the outbreak.

The unity of our society is threatened by troublesome and restless minorities.

我们社会的团结遭到了一小撮滋扰生事、不安分守己的群体的威胁.

— First example of how to use the expression '安分守己' ('remain in one's proper sphere') on the Baidu Chinese–

A plumber was called to fix a toilet. It was a standard job, requiring about 45 minutes to clear and connect pipes. However, in the time required to analyse and resolve the problem, the building was locked down and the plumber had to live with the customer's family for 14 days. A man swam across Shenzhen Bay from Yuen Long in the Hong Kong New Territories to the

Shenzhen Bay Corridor Park in Shekou, where he was quickly detained and taken to a quarantine hospital. A mother arranged a birthday party for her daughter, inviting four friends over for cake and games. However, even before the candles had been blown out, the residential community had been locked down and the four girls could not return to their homes, making the host a house mother for the quarantine period. Residents of one urban village were getting fat from food deliveries because they received not only three square meals a day, but also afternoon tea and a late-night snack. In contrast, residents of a neighbouring urban village were going hungry, while their representatives claimed food deliveries were being mishandled somewhere higher along the distribution chain of command. Meanwhile, delivery people had taken to sleeping on the street and in parks to avoid being locked down and unable to do their job, which was defined as essential to keeping locked-down residents fed and watered.

These and similar stories emerged and circulated on Shenzhen social media from late February to March 2022, when the city struggled to contain the Omicron variant of the Covid-19 virus in compliance with China's zero-Covid policy. As a policy, zero-Covid asserts that no preventable death is acceptable and, thus, everything must be done until nothing else can be done. Here's the rub: although zero-Covid asserts the absolute value of human life, in practice, the meaning of 'preventable death' shifts depending on how the policy is operationalised. For example, during the Xi'an lockdown from 3 December 2021 to 24 January 2022, a hospital refused to admit a pregnant woman because her negative test result was four hours too old. She began bleeding outside the hospital doors and ultimately lost the child even though the hospital eventually admitted her. The case generated nationwide outrage because the child's death was clearly preventable; why had the hospital not immediately admitted her? In making their decision, hospital personnel would have asked zero-Covid questions such as: 'What are current zero-Covid protocols?' 'If I don't comply with zero-Covid protocols, what will happen to me?' After all, if zero-Covid is an absolute policy goal and the protocol to achieve this is mandatory testing, then—from the perspective of hospital management—the child's death could only have been prevented if the mother had complied with Covid testing policies. In this formulation, the responsibility for the child's death shifts from the hospital to the woman and her family because they did not arrange a timely Covid test. Indeed, Joseph Brower (2022) reported that although there were no deaths due to Covid during the Xi'an lockdown, there were deaths and unnecessary suffering caused by policy enforcement.

The Xi'an child's death makes salient the (often absurd and frequently tragic) transformations that general human values undergo as they travel from imagined value into policy and from policy into implementable and enforceable protocols. In turn, communities end up focused on enforcement—rather than political context—when debating issues. Indeed, many argue that numbly applying policies and following protocols are at the violent core of modern bureaucracies (Graeber 2015; Herzfeld 1993). This may explain why Covid-related death statistics have not been released to the Chinese public. After all, accepting responsibility for causing a preventable death may result in consequences, such as removal from one's job and public disgrace. However, it may also be that publishing the lack of Covid-related deaths in Shenzhen in 2022 would suggest that enforcing grid management (a very specific form of societal control that I will define below) to achieve zero-Covid was too extreme, begging the question of whether grid management has been deployed to achieve other, more authoritarian purposes. Among the social media posts I have seen, for example, doubts about the degree of the response and its real purpose (in the absence of Covid-related deaths) hovered at the edges of engagements that drew attention to policy breakdowns.

In the rest of this essay, I provide an ethnographic account of Shenzhen's response to the Omicron outbreak during February and March 2022. I track viral mobilities online to understand how physical mobility emerged as a site for the evaluation of the commitment to zero-Covid, the quality of implementing protocols, and what were perceived as acceptable forms of policy enforcement. This level of specificity highlights how

technocratic methods and ideologies of steadfast trust in the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and government were deployed to control the outbreak and attendant uncertainties. Considering Shanghai's zero-Covid crisis, which began just as Shenzhen reopened, the latter's success (on its own terms) has provided a robust model of how the government used rational, scientific principles to achieve public health goals. In turn, this has had at least two ideological consequences. First, it has strengthened many Shenzheners' belief in their city's special status. Second, it has served to mute accounts of policy failure in other cities, especially Shanghai. After all, the logic holds, if Shenzhen can, why can't you?

My discussion highlights two themes that emerged in online discussions of the outbreak: consensus about staying in place and anxieties about mobility. On the one hand, compliance with lockdown protocols became the normative use of space. On the other hand, delivery people, cross-border drivers, and Shenzhen and Hong Kong residents who were free to physically move around the city provoked intense feelings in the social media posts of locked-down Shenzheners. Until the weeklong full lockdown (from 14 March through to midnight of 20 March 2022), there were neighbourhoods where ordinary people still moved throughout the city. Many of these people came under the unofficial surveillance of their neighbours and other Shenzheners. Indeed, one of the key elements of grid management, especially in densely populated areas, was citizen reporting of noncompliant people and events. Consequently, during the outbreak, social media discussions of and frequent debate about out-of-place mobilities and policy breakdowns showed the implicit social contract between the CCP and the people, making visible Shenzhen's implicit moral geography. Baldly stated, the CCP and the government had a moral responsibility to take care of the people. This care was expressed through correct policy and protocols. In turn, the people had a moral responsibility to comply with policy and protocols, ensuring the proper functioning of society.

Shenzhen, 2022: Moral Geography, Transgression, and Zero-Covid

The anthropologist Mary Douglas famously based her analysis of purity and danger on quotidian hygiene; dirt, she argued, is simply matter out of place. Human ideas of pollution and taboo, she continued, may be imaginative elaborations of spiritual worlds, but in practice, 'separating, purifying, demarcating and punishing transgressions have as their main function to impose system on an inherently untidy experience' (Douglas 1984: 4); ordering space and spatial order are fundamental to the construction and maintenance of a recognisable (and often taken for granted) world system. As a system, moral geography is one in which people know their place, correctly reading and responding to the normative expectations that are coded through the built environment and its use. In practice, these expectations become apparent through actions that are recognised as transgressive. In other words, transgressions reveal what was previously invisible or taken for granted, requiring ongoing physical and ideological work to contain transgressive effects and maintain and/or restore the expected order. In this sense, a moral geography can only be reconstructed through public debates about which actions are transgressive and the status of those transgressions. Were they intentional or not? Is this action acceptable for some and not for others? In turn, how those transgressions are punished (or not) may reinforce the moral geography, but may also undermine it, shifting expectations both about how space is to be properly used and about how stable those expectations are (Cresswell 1996). Crudely put, how much force (or how great a show of force) is necessary to maintain an established moral geography?

These questions became especially salient during Shenzhen's response to the 2022 Omicron outbreak, when its previous celebration of mobility—especially migrant mobilities that resulted in realising one's dreams and concomitant improvement of one's class position (O'Donnell 2001)—came into conflict with grid management protocols. As mentioned above, zero-Covid was presented as a

policy that expressed a commitment to the absolute value of human life. As the outbreak unfolded, the rhetoric and emotions around the city's viral mobilities resonated with earlier discussions of 'hoodlums' (流氓) (Barmé 1992) and the 'floating population' (流动人口) (Zhang 2001), reflecting an older cultural value of 安分守己 ('remaining in one's proper sphere', according to the Baidu translation provided above), which is simultaneously an ideological and a physical imperative. Many people interpreted their role in achieving zero-Covid as staying in their place and making sure others also stayed in theirs. In turn, unofficial surveillance became part of the public record through police reports, especially calls to the police on the '110' number. This form of surveillance resembles recent trends in other Shenzhen contexts, such as students reporting on their teachers for using politically incorrect speech or introducing unconventional opinions during class. In the context of lockdown immobility and viral mobility, the standard for licit movement was to prevent further infections, and only in official contexts. This meant that leaving one's residential area to purchase food or go to work could be interpreted under the rubric of illicit mobility. To avoid any semblance of noncompliance, for example, one housing estate notified residents that they were allowed out to go to the market but were required to return with purchased food.

My discussion focuses on WeChat because the Shenzhen Government released policy announcements and infection statistics via official WeChat accounts at the municipal, district, subdistrict, and community levels of government. In addition, property managers communicated decisions about a building or housing estate via WeChat, while businesses communicated with their clients via WeChat. Two consequences emerged from this organisation of information. First, an individual's WeChat account would include governmental communications, status notifications from property management companies, and updates from businesses, in addition to personal communications and forwarded posts. Within WeChat, information was organised by when it was posted, allowing for 24-hour notifications. Second, most people relied on unofficial information to interpret the practical meaning of announcements. Once official information had been posted, it could be reposted with or without commentary to different groups, allowing individuals to curate implied experiences with respect to an intended audience. In addition to typed comments, with a more or less explicit interpretation of the content, including the ever-popular 'speechless' (无语), a two-character expression that I understand as equivalent to the English 'wtf?'—an expression of cognitive dissonance between expected and actual events—commentary also included a wide variety of posts that ranged from real-time videos and memes to news reports and analysis of domestic and international Covid outbreaks. All this is to say, while WeChat permeated everyday life during the lockdown, the way it was used often obscured more than it revealed about what was happening on the ground because there were few (if any) means to confirm the truth of any post, not excluding official posts. Instead, government posts became an unverifiable truth standard, where 'trust in the party and government' (信党信政府) became the official basis of social action and public morality and individual experience became the standard for evaluating how much trust should be offered.

The connection between keeping one's place and moral geography is as commonsensical in Chinese as it is in English. However, in Chinese, saying someone 'knows their place' (很本分) is a compliment, while in English the phrase is often used to insult a person's lack of independence. This different valuation of knowing one's place means China's continued use of mandatory testing and lockdowns makes sense in domestic contexts, even when it appears highly coercive in foreign contexts. Similarly, decisions taken by foreign countries to keep cities open and to make testing and quarantine voluntary are often read in China as a lack of concern for human life. I have had numerous discussions with friends and acquaintances about why Chinese and foreigners value human life differently. The implied critique is that Chinese people's compliance with lockdowns and mandatory immobility demonstrates a deep respect for preserving human life that (from the news reports they have seen on social media) foreigners lack. Clearly, there is generalised agreement world-

wide that Covid deaths should be prevented, but (often volatile) disagreement over whether any deaths are acceptable, as well as how much effort, social organisation, and policing should be brought to bear on preventing Covid deaths because we (often) cannot agree on where the locus of responsibility ultimately lies.

Significantly, the lack of fear about dying from Omicron distinguished Shenzhen social media during February and March 2022 from social media during the initial Covid outbreak in 2020. During 2020, WeChat posts were initially fearful, expressing concerns that the government was lying to citizens about what was happening. However, as the situation unfolded and lockdowns became a global phenomenon, WeChat became a site for expressing nationalistic pride in China's successful handling of the pandemic (de Kloet et al. 2021; Zhang 2020). In contrast, in Shenzhen in 2022, the lack of fear about dying meant posts tended to focus less on keeping physically well and more on maintaining one's health passport, which quickly became a gloss for one's (implied) political health.

By focusing on posts that were generated in Shenzhen during February and March 2022, I am interested in mapping discrepancies between lived experiences and allowable presentations of those experiences on Shenzhen social media. At both the official and the unofficial levels, Shenzhen social media was intentionally curated. From the perspective of the Shenzhen Government, grid management successfully contained the spread of Omicron. In the examples above, the boundaries between infected and non-infected spaces held firm. However, from the perspective of ordinary residents, especially those who were locked down in buildings or control areas, boundary enforcement resulted not only in practical difficulties, but also in being cut off from information about how the policy was being enforced elsewhere. For residents of locked-down buildings, social media became the primary means for learning about how grid management was enforced outside their front doors. From the perspective of those in locked-down control areas, it was possible to gossip with neighbours, but much of that gossip was used to confirm or deny what had been first seen on social media.

Geography of Zero-Covid: Shenzhen's Grid Management System

The deployment of geography to contain a virus at first sounds counterintuitive: how do you keep respiratory droplets and virus particles in place when the Omicron variant seems selected for effective, high-speed transmission? Omicron incubates in three days—much faster than Delta (4.3 days) and other variants (five days); it multiplies 70 times faster than Delta in the upper respiratory system, which means Omicron is not generally affecting the lower lung but is continuously spewed into the environment; and it has (thus far) successfully dodged human antibodies and other defences so that both vaccinated and unvaccinated people can become infected (Stone 2021). In March, Japanese researchers confirmed Omicron has higher environmental stability than previous variants, surviving for up to 193.5 hours on plastic and 21.1 hours on skin (Hirose et al. 2022). Moreover, Omicron-infected people can be asymptomatic, making it possible for carriers to unknowingly infect swathes of people on public transportation, in offices and commercial buildings, and in public spaces such as footpaths, parks, and queues for mandatory Covid testing even after they have left an environment.

Given the mobility of the Omicron variant, the only way to control its spread spatially is to bring the city to a standstill—an undertaking that involves mass quarantine, shutdowns, and controlled movements of essential persons and things, begging logistical questions, such as: Where will infected people be housed? Where will non-infected people wait out the infection? How will these people be fed? How will water and electricity be provisioned? How will solid waste be removed and processed? How can more than 17 million people (in the case of Shenzhen) be mobilised to collaborate with a project of this size and scope? How is this project imagined, discussed, and refigured in and through other discursive fields? In a practical nutshell, the question becomes: how does a government identify, notify, and manage millions of individual cases?

The twelve Bing Dundun stickers that Shekou and Zhaoshang Subdistricts issued upon completion of testing. The first three stickers are undated. However, on 26 February 2022, testing became mandatory for the foreseeable future. From 1 March, the stickers included images of Bing Dundun and Xue Rongrong visiting Shekou landmarks, which were closed to ordinary people during the lockdown.

Locally, Shenzhen's spatialised response to Omicron not only makes sense, but also (in retrospect) seems predetermined. Throughout early 2022, the city's spatial politics, sophisticated telecommunications infrastructure, and belief in the CCP and government were deployed to overwrite the Omicron outbreak as a story of national strength and urban vitality. Shenzhen would prevail! Shenzhen's strategy had two explicit foils: Chinese cities and foreign cities.

In contrast to Chinese cities that implemented what were described as 'rigid' (一刀切) citywide lockdowns to manage the spread of the Omicron variant, Shenzhen identified lockdown (封控区), control (管控区), and prevention (防控区) areas. This management system refined the grid management system (网格管理), which had been implemented nationally in response to the Wuhan outbreak in January 2020. Cities were overlaid with grids, with the goal of allowing governments

to effectively perform health checks, monitor the movement of residents, and take preventative measures (Pei 2021). A lockdown area was defined as a place where an infected person had been found, lived, or worked, as well as the surrounding environment. In case of emergency, locked-down residents were instructed to register their information at their community office and apply for a permit to leave. If their application was approved, they would be brought to their destination in a closed-loop system. A control area was defined as a place where close contacts and subcontacts of infected persons lived, worked, and visited. These areas—usually urban villages or residential communities—were cordoned off, with residents allowed to leave their buildings, but not to gather in large groups. These residents were expected to gather at designated stations within the control area for Covid testing. They could order food and supplies online and these items would be delivered to designated places inside the control area. In a prevention area, residents were allowed to leave their buildings as well as their urban village or residential community, but not to gather in large groups. They went to general Covid testing stations, which were usually in central public areas.

This determination to prevent mass infections was pursued in explicit contrast to the highly publicised failures of North American and Western European countries to prevent Omicron infection rates that peaked at more than 750,000 cases per day in the United States in January 2022, and where, on 11 January 2022, the country reported 1.35 million new cases in one day (USAFacts 2022; Shumaker 2022). Through social media, Shenzheners also followed the Omicron outbreak in neighbouring Hong Kong, where low vaccination rates resulted in Asia's deadliest outbreak to date. Indeed, the giving of popular Olympic Games mascot Bing Dundun (冰墩墩) badges to reward residents for participating in daily Covid tests underscored the extent to which national honour was at stake in this public health campaign. Other Chinese cities also made the explicit connection between national performance during the Olympics and national Covid rates. During the early days of Shanghai's 2022 Omicron outbreak, for example, residents of one neighbourhood made Olympic-style placards with their building address. Videos showed residents lined up, holding their placards, and marching into the testing station just like national teams had during the opening ceremony of the 2022 Beijing Olympics.

Spatial Politics under Grid Management: Solidifying Borders between Urban Villages and the Formal City

Before the 2020 Covid outbreak, the boundaries between Shenzhen's urban villages and the formal city were ideologically solid but, in practice, almost invisible, allowing residents, neighbourhoods, and the city itself to create value by arbitraging regulatory differences between formal and informal spaces (Bach 2010; Fu 2020; O'Donnell et al. 2017). During the 2020 outbreak, the ideological cohesion of these borders allowed physical borders to be erected around urban villages, while protocols for entering gated communities, public buildings, and commercial areas in the formal city tightened. This regulatory infrastructure remained in place during 2021, even when gatekeeping protocols relaxed. Consequently, during the first phase of grid management in 2022, Shenzhen could immediately cordon off designated areas with relative precision. The capacity to target urban villages, like the villages themselves, was a result of the rural urbanisation that occurred between 1992 and 2004 (O'Donnell 2021). Within the municipal apparatus, what are colloquially known as 'urban villages' (城中村) are designated as 'communities' (社区) that comprise multiple 'natural villages' (自然村), their branches (坊), and nearby institutions, formal commercial areas, and housing estates. Administration of an urban village, therefore, involves coordination at the district, subdistrict, community, and natural village-branch levels because many of Shenzhen's most densely populated subdistricts resemble patchwork quilts of formal and informal spaces. The eight branches of Futian Village, for example, are near one another, but not all are contiguous, and they are administratively integrated into the municipal appa-

ratus via Futian Community (see Image 2). In the discussion below, I will use the term 'urban village' to refer to colloquial neighbourhoods, but will include the full designation of an administrative unit when relevant—for example, Xitou Branch, Futian Village (福田村西头坊), or Yeshu Village, Shangsha (上沙椰树村).

... And Thus It Began

At 3.56 am on 17 February 2022, the Futian District New Coronavirus Pneumonia Prevention and Control Command Office (福田区新型冠状病毒肺炎疫情防控指挥部办公室) issued its first announcement via the Happy Futian (幸福福田) WeChat account. The post stated that, as of 16 February, Futian District was implementing grid management of Covid outbreaks. Shatou Subdistrict was responsible for implementing protocols on the ground. Six buildings in Branch 1, Shazui Village, were locked down; the Shatou prevention area comprised the block around the shutdown buildings as well as three nearby residential areas; and Shazui and Shawei urban villages were designated prevention areas. As the virus spread, Futian District secured urban villages and its Hong Kong borderlands, blockading roads and alleys between and within urban villages and borderland neighbourhoods. These areas were primarily located south of Shennan Road, in Futian and Shatou subdistricts. In contrast, the city seat of government and expensive housing estates to the north of Shennan Road—in some cases, directly adjacent to locked-down areas—were placed on alert but not immediately brought under grid regulation (see Image 3). Under this protocol, administrative borders were enforced to achieve epidemiological ends, not only conflating residential addresses and public health status, but also intensifying a presumed connection between an individual's residential address and their physical health. Indeed, at the beginning of the crisis, many Shenzheners assumed the Futian outbreak could be contained because the sharp social divisions between urban villages and the formal city (wrongly) implied secure geographic boundaries. However, subsequent discoveries of Omicron in high-end Shekou neighbourhoods led to emoji face-palming and quips such as 'Rich people catch Covid, too!' (有钱人也感染新冠!).

Image 2: Futian Community (colloquially known as Futian Village 福田村) comprises eight branches (grey spaces) woven into less densely populated residential, institutional, and commercial spaces of the formal city (dark brown). PC: Map produced and circulated on Baidu.

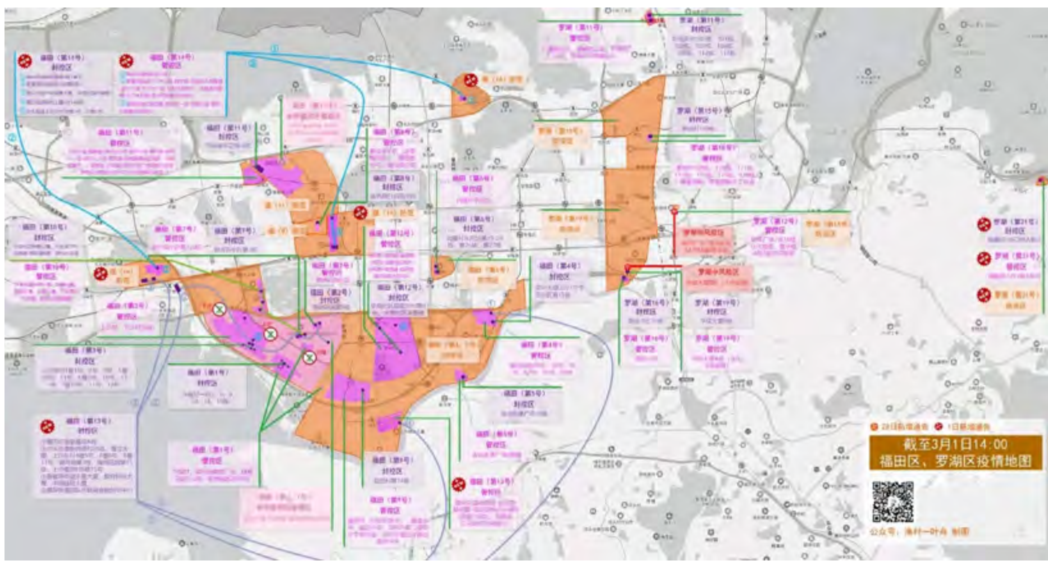


Image 3: Grid management of Covid areas in Futian District as of 2 pm, 1 March 2022. Red buttons signal locked-down buildings, dark purple swathes are lockdown areas, light purple swathes are control areas, and orange swathes are prevention areas. PC: Map produced and circulated by WeChat account 渔村一叶舟, 2022.

Sophisticated Telecommunications Surveillance: Monitoring Transgressive Itineraries in and from Locked-Down Shenzhen

Shenzhen's high-tech giant Tencent launched WeChat on 21 January 2011 and the comprehensive telecommunications app quickly became one of the most powerful on the planet. WeChat integrates direct and group messaging, payment functions, and banking services in addition to other functions ranging from a social media platform to calling a taxi. In May 2016, five years into WeChat's undisputed dominance of Chinese telecommunications, China's Ministry of Industry and Information Technology (工信部) announced the promulgation of the real-name registration system (实名制), requiring telephone numbers to be linked to identity cards (in the case of Chinese nationals) or passports (in the case of foreigners). Tencent abruptly had unprecedented access to the personal data of its users, both in real time and cumulatively. Thus, in 2020, when it became clear Covid could not be ignored, provinces and cities organised the health QR code system via WeChat, which had already compiled profiles of all its users.

The colloquial name for the QR code on China's virtual health passport is 'green horse' (绿马), which felicitously puns the phrase 'green code' (绿码), highlighting the connection between health status and mobility. At the time of the 2022 outbreak, the system was upgraded to include an individual's most recent Covid test and vaccination status. In addition, the national travel card (通信行程卡) tracks and displays an individual's interurban itineraries for the past 14 days. Combined with the city's spatial politics, this system facilitates the tracking of individuals' peregrinations, their contacts, and subcontacts. Offline, friends commented that this level of monitoring was not only intrusive, but also potentially embarrassing. Some joked that even if they did not have any 'private matters' (隐私) worthy of the name, that did

not mean they were comfortable having all their relationships open to investigation. When a QR code on the passport turned red due to a positive test or through contact with an infected person, the holder was transferred to a quarantine hospital. Public announcements of positive cases concluded with the assurance that 'the aforementioned cases have been transferred to the emergency centre of XXX hospital for isolation treatment. The situation is stable' (上述新增病例均已转送至XXX医院应急院区隔离治疗, 情况稳定).

Almost immediately after the system was implemented, the mobile phone passport became the most trusted form of access to buildings, public services, neighbourhoods, and residential areas. Some security guards—especially at elite office buildings and gated communities—had been required to record the temperature of all visitors during the first months of the 2020 pandemic; nevertheless, in 2022 their job quickly devolved into enforcing compliance with facemask regulations and checking QR codes. For many, the quality of a building, neighbourhood, or public place could be evaluated by the vigilance of its security guards, who were expected to be always alert and at their post. Enforcement of protocols and the proper ethos of being a security guard exemplify how cultural assumptions about mental steadfastness and physical presence have been embodied and recognised within the moral geography of combating Covid.

The reliance on big data allowed the system to automatically update the colour of a person's QR code depending on expected compliance with management protocols. For example, during the early weeks of the Omicron outbreak, it was recommended, but not mandatory, that Shenzheners get tested every three days. The results appeared as 24, 48, and 72-hour negative status below their QR code. After 72 hours, the status box simply recorded the date and results of the holder's most recent Covid test. However, as management of the outbreak became stricter, residents living in lockdown and control areas were expected to undergo daily Covid testing. If they missed a test, government representatives contacted them by telephone, asking where they were physically and reminding them to get tested. If they did not get tested within a designated time frame, their QR code turned yellow, preventing them from passing through any gates, hobbling their 'horse'. A yellow QR code could be turned green only at designated hospitals after three negative tests.

There were three important caveats to this system. First, while green QR codes automatically turned yellow, yellow QR codes did not automatically turn red; that status could only be assigned after a test. Later, however, as the outbreak intensified, QR codes did become red when people missed mandatory testing, making the connection between physical and political health explicit. Second, when Shenzheners travelled outside Guangdong Province, their QR codes turned yellow on missing a mandatory test. To sidestep this protocol, most travellers used the provincial health passport to exit Guangdong because leaving Shenzhen and entering another province required a 24-hour negative test. On arrival in another province, visitors downloaded the relevant provincial health code and used it to navigate local spaces. In practice, this meant their Guangdong QR code might be yellow, but their local QR code was green. Third, the national travel card used an asterisk to indicate Shenzhen's critical situation. Many cities began mandatory onsite quarantine for visitors from Shenzhen even when their QR code was green and they had a valid 24-hour test result. These self-funded quarantines lasted between three and seven days, depending on local enforcement. After a person had been outside Shenzhen for more than 14 days, the city and its potentially damning asterisk disappeared from the health passport. When the city's risk level was lowered and the asterisk was removed from the national travel card, Shenzheners celebrated by saying they had 'plucked a star' (摘星).

Moral Fortitude: Trust the Party and the Government

The ideological framework for managing the outbreak was unwavering trust in the CCP, the government, and their decisions to manage a total-city effort to achieve zero-Covid. Campaign rhet-

oric and symbolism were explicitly militaristic. Decisions came from a command office; health professionals and volunteers wore identical hazmat uniforms, and they were filmed while marching (and even dancing) in step. Health professionals were the heroes of this war. During the 2003 severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) epidemic, Shenzhen's Centre for Disease Control played a critical role in facilitating the transformation of China's grassroots, low-tech public health apparatus into a professionalised, high-tech system that could address international concerns—albeit often at the cost of overlooking the health needs of ordinary people (Mason 2016). Shenzhen has recognised those heroes through two public memorials. Along Shennan Boulevard in the city's Central Park, there is a public statue dedicated to the heroes of the war on SARS and in Lianhua Park, the 'Reform and Opening 30-Year Anniversary' triptych includes a dedicated section to SARS. Thus, by the time of the 2022 Omicron outbreak, the city not only was prepared to micromanage the new Covid-19 variant, but also boasted one of the country's most advanced public health apparatuses.

Ordinary Shenzheners expressed their trust in the CCP, the government, and their representatives through compliance with protocols, maintaining a healthy social media profile, and volunteering to work in test stations and to deliver food to locked-down residents. Compliance with protocols involves being where one is supposed to be—at work, at home, or in line for a test. The result of this compliance was a 'green horse' and the implied, but rarely realised, possibility of mobility either within or outside Shenzhen. Online trustworthy behaviours included reposting official communications, creating and reposting content that encouraged Shenzheners to keep striving, and shutting down 'rumours', which included false content, accounts of system breakdown, and complaints about how an area was mismanaged. The most proactive form of trust—becoming a Covid volunteer—had a particular resonance in Shenzhen, which was the first Chinese city to promote the idea that 'the hand that gives the rose stays fragrant' (予人玫瑰、手留香) and to incorporate volunteers into urban management.

One of two SARS public memorials in Shenzhen. PC: Mary Ann O'Donnell.

In addition to medical personnel working so hard they fainted on the job, stories of steadfast volunteers became common throughout official and social media, while in WeChat groups, volunteers offered testimonials about how contributing to the public health campaign had allowed them to better appreciate both the party's leadership and the hard work of governance. Parents of young volunteers also commented that before the pandemic, their children uncritically worshipped all things Western, but through Covid volunteerism, their children have learned to 'trust the party and the government'.

Licit Movement: Urban Villages, Delivery Boys, and the Online Performance of Proper Governance

Given the high stakes of controlling the Omicron outbreak, not to mention the large number of people who were locked down at home with nothing to do but play on their phones, unsanctioned narratives about the 2022 outbreak proliferated on Shenzhen social media. Most of these jokes, rumours, and stories neither explicitly challenged the legitimacy of the CCP nor directly questioned the intentions of the government. Many posts were simply videos of events as they unfolded in real time. Nevertheless, posts, personal accounts, and chat groups kept disappearing from virtual platforms. In and of itself, managing the circulation of information about Covid conformed to ongoing Mainland censorship practices (Tai 2014). Offline, it was explained to me that even documenting breakdowns of the grid management system could be interpreted as criticism of the CCP and/or the government, and viewed as spreading rumours, which in China can have legal consequences depending on the content and influence of said rumour. Conventional wisdom held that one should take care when posting or forwarding posts that described problems, rather than highlighted successes. However, especially in more conservative chat groups, many expressed surprise about the disappearance of what they felt was legitimate and necessary information to share. They articulated confusion over what may have caused the online disappearance of a post or group, especially when they believed that information-sharing worked as unofficial surveillance to support party and government efforts.

But here's the rub: as the outbreak progressed, some online accounts of system breakdown did elicit favourable government responses, making everyday survival easier for those involved. What allowed some posts to be successfully heard, while others were dismissed or even suppressed? The answer to this question makes salient how the city's moral geography is experienced as an expression of proper governance.

During lockdowns, for example, continuous operations relied on efficient movement throughout the city. Demographics played a fundamental role in how services were provided on the ground. Housing estates might have been home to several thousand people, but an urban village could be home to more than 100,000 people. This had practical consequences. Moreover, it was significantly more difficult to coordinate people through volunteerism, for various reasons, including population densities, levels of transience, and the fact that most urban village residents held jobs that directly contributed to the material functioning of the city, such as preparing or delivering food, fixing basic infrastructure, operating public transportation, and maintaining public spaces (Huang 2017). In addition, unlike most people living in housing estates who had office jobs and could work from home, most urban village residents had jobs that were located outside their residences. To earn money, they had to be mobile, interacting with people who were also on the move.

To deliver food to each family in a locked-down building, grid staff (网格员) were assigned to coordinate deliveries and, in emergencies, to liaise between individual households and the responsible office. In formal residential estates, the grid program succeeded in large part because these neighbourhoods enjoyed both low population densities and high levels of volunteer experience. The Shekou area in Nanshan District, for example, comprises two subdistricts, Zhaoshang and Shekou. In terms of zoning, Zhaoshang Subdistrict includes

official settlements and neighbourhoods, while Shekou Subdistrict includes the area's urban villages. Zhaoshang has a population density of approximately 9,000 people per square kilometre, while Shekou has a population density of almost 24,000 per square kilometre (NSGO 2021). As part of the grid management program, Zhaoshang residents in both control and prevention areas volunteered to facilitate mandatory testing, food deliveries, and liaison with people in locked-down buildings. They also produced gratitude videos for health workers, grid staff and volunteers, which were often picked up by Nanshan media outlets as examples of government and citizen cooperation. In contrast, residents of Shekou Subdistrict's urban villages were struggling to make ends meet. Volunteers in these neighbourhoods were more likely to be assigned from elsewhere, rather than volunteering at home, as was the case in Zhaoshang Subdistrict.

A WeChat avatar poignantly named 'antsmoving' gave voice to the precarity of urban village life under lockdown in a comment posted on the Shenzhen Health Commission WeChat account:

> Chaguang Village [in Shuguang Community, Xili Subdistrict, Nanshan] is locked down. I am a 30-year-old man. I have a breakfast shop, and I rely on this shop for my entire income. This evening I am truly breaking down! My family is scattered, and I am the only one responsible. I am a father, a son, and a husband … Since March 1, my breakfast shop hasn't earned a single penny. All I do is pay rent, buy supplies and pay my workers. I thought it would get better. But I look at my family photographs and tear up. I really have broken down.

This post quickly went viral, receiving more than 100,000 likes. Nanshan District's response to this post brought the issue to millions of Shenzheners via social and traditional media. According to multiple reports, Nanshan arranged for the Shuguang Community Party Secretary to visit 'antsmoving' at his home. The Shuguang representatives brought prepared foods and fruit, and the party secretary sat down with him to explain grid management. The secretary also suggested that antsmoving's shop could provide breakfasts for community health workers and volunteers, resolving his economic difficulties. In subsequent publications of this encounter, antsmoving is quoted as saying how the government's 'warmth' (温馨) allowed him to overcome his difficulties. Unstated in this report is the relationship between antsmoving's compliant immobility and the official mobility of Shuguang cadres, who resolved the issue through an inspection tour, which echoed the performance of proper governance in China. Deng Xiaoping's 1984 and 1992 inspection tours of Shenzhen, for example, were critical to the successful implementation of Reform and Opening Up. In contrast, the mobility of urban village residents was always already potentially transgressive.

Throughout the crisis, pressures to provision food—one of the legitimating features of party hegemony (Yue 1999)—intensified as grid management spread from initial epicentres in Futian and Shekou throughout the city. To provision people in lockdown and control areas, the city relied on delivery companies such as Meituan, Hema, and volunteer groups, while Jingdong, Shunfeng, Yunda, the postal service, and others supplied essential commodities acquired through 'internet purchases' (网购). However, most of these workers lived in urban villages, which were often classified as lockdown areas, where residents 'could only enter, but not leave' (只进不出). This caused significant glitches in the efficient provisioning of essential goods and services. Delivery boys who wanted to work the next day slept on the street, rather than risk going home to a building or neighbourhood that was or could be locked down at any time. The complexities of provisioning food peaked from 18 to 22 March, when the city's 'don't cross from a red into a green area, freely cross from a green into a green area' (红绿别跨、绿绿可通) policy immobilised Shenzhen's six most-populated districts (total population, 15,477,315), while its four least-populated districts and the Shenzhen–Shantou Special Cooperative Zone (total population, 2,082,746) were green-lit (SSB 2020). In practical terms, this disrupted supply chains

because delivery boys from green-lit districts could still move about the city, but they could not cross zero-Covid cordons to enter red-lit districts, where food was needed.

An essay published on the WeChat account 'Riders' World' (骑手地带) explained the delivery boys' dilemma. On the one hand, they wanted to keep working because they realised their jobs were essential to the city's functioning during the Covid outbreak. On the other hand, they knew that sleeping outdoors, without access to comfortable beds, toilets, and showers, meant they looked like hooligans (Dong 2022). According to article, practical homelessness meant delivery people suffered the shame and indignity of being unable to care for their bodies even though they were doing their utmost to fulfill their responsibilities—in their case, immobility would be dereliction of duty. Consequently, they had no choice but to persevere and hope the city would be understanding. The article also emphasised that the convenience of residents was built on the suffering of delivery riders. In addition to garnering public sympathy for hardworking riders, the circulation of images of and articles about their practical homelessness encouraged the Nanshan and Longgang district governments to arrange for free room and board at participating hotels, simultaneously buttressing trust in the government and rewarding riders for their steadfast contribution to city management.

Antsmoving's account of his breakdown and the plight of the delivery boys exemplify the supplication-and-response format of public petitions that received positive government responses. In these petitions, the abject conditions of people pushed to their limits brought attention to systemic breakdowns, while 'warm' government responses modelled the expected form of self-correction of the system. During the lockdown, when residents were unable to leave their homes, forwarding and reposting images, articles, and clips enabled them to comment on the situation, air their grievances, and garner support for their unaddressed needs. There were even petitions written on behalf of pets, as middle-class pet owners advocated to be allowed to quarantine with their pets and, when not possible, safe places for their pets to be sheltered, fed, and watered while they were quarantined. The Shenzhen-based animal rescue account 'Shenzhen and Them' (深圳与它) published a petition with a list of requests for securing the health and wellbeing of pets. In keeping with the overall value of avoiding 'preventable death', each of these petitions emphasised how individuals and pets were doing as much as they could, were blameless of wrongdoing, and yet still needed help to prevent (implied) deaths.

Perhaps more importantly, the cases of antsmoving and the homeless delivery boys facilitated public performances of the moral geography of zero-Covid governance: good citizens stayed in place waiting for the situation to be resolved, good officials toured sites, and good delivery boys did their jobs and then went 'home' to government-provided housing. These cases may have emphasised that zero-Covid included maintaining the 'people's livelihood' (民生), which can be literally translated as 'people's lives', but they also did so in a format that embodied the public morality of trusting the party and the government. Thus, online petitioning and having one's complaint go viral were important strategies for securing resources in tightly controlled lockdown and control areas because only government-authorised teams could legitimately cross cordons and resolve the problems that immobilising the city had wrought.

Covid among Us: The Public Shaming of Shatou Subdistrict, Futian

The problems of immobility burst out of online narratives in Shangsha (and other densely populated urban villages), where police, healthcare, and grid workers were videotaped in confrontation with angry residents as local management devolved into lockdown enforcement, rather than food provisioning and service maintenance, including garbage collection. Many complaints and calls for equitable treatment were often neglected and suppressed until they became impossible to ignore—usually because viral stories were picked up by official media outlets in other Chinese

cities. During February and March 2022, Shenzhen's publicised failure to provision foodstuffs occurred in Shangsha, an urban village comprising four natural villages in Shatou Subdistrict, Futian. Locked-down Shangsha residents claimed that locked-down residents in neighbouring Xiasha were not only eating, but also getting fat. In one case, the grid worker responsible for provisioning a Shangsha building announced he was quitting because he could no longer endure his superiors' indifference and residents' complaints. He used supplication rhetoric in his resignation, posting on the building's WeChat group. In a screenshot of his apology to group members, he stressed that he had done his best. He hoped that in the future, group members would remember a grid staffer named XXX had once served them. In this case, a locked-down building lost its government liaison, exacerbating an already fraught situation.

In fact, simple demographics made managing Shangsha Village specifically, and Shatou Subdistrict generally, significantly more complicated than managing low-density Zhaoshang or even relatively high-density Shekou subdistricts during the crisis. The average population density of Shatou Subdistrict is 19,500 persons per square kilometre, which is less than that of Shekou Subdistrict. However, the distribution of Shatou's 265,673 residents across its 13.59 square kilometres is much more concentrated. The population of Shangsha Village, for example, is officially 67,896 people, who live on 0.38 square kilometres, which is equivalent to an average population density of 178,000 persons per square kilometre (FTGO 2021a). Xiasha, which was redeveloped over the past decade, now has a population density of roughly half that. However, these densities are distributed across blocks of urban village housing and high-end gated communities, indicating that, as in Shekou, there were at least two different zero-Covid management contexts in Xiasha. As the lockdown continued, posts circulated about urban villagers, especially in Shangsha, where residents took advantage of the permanent yellow QR code to wait out the campaign in their apartments.

The most common building in an urban village is the 'handshake building' (握手楼), a six to eight-storey tenement, which accommodates high-density settlement. One floor, for example, can have 10 apartments, with the number of residents in individual apartments ranging from one to eight persons. Once building sweeps started, 'handshake buildings', which were already important landmarks in public debates about the norms and forms of urbanisation, functioned as key landmarks in Shenzhen's zero-Covid geography. Online, many debated how responsible landlords were for the noncompliant behaviour of renters. The question became even stickier because testing holdouts first came to the city's attention during the brief rush of Hong Kong Covid-19 refugees into the city, many of whom were reported to be hiding in urban villages. Many on Shenzhen social media assumed these refugees were kin to Shenzhen locals (本地人), and thus must be related to the landlord of the building in which they were found (for an in-depth discussion of differences between indigenous and local Shenzhener identities, see O'Donnell and Bach 2021). Indeed, reports of Covid refugees fleeing to Shenzhen to escape the Hong Kong outbreak consolidated for many on Shenzhen social media their belief that illicit mobility both within Hong Kong and between Shenzhen and Hong Kong had caused the city's crisis. Shangsha again embodied the overlap between transience, Hong Kong residence, and indigenous identity. Here, an overwhelming majority of residents (66,216) hold long-term residence permits, rather than Shenzhen *hukou* (household registration). And, in fact, at the last census, there were more registered Hong Kong residents than local *hukou*-holders living in Shangsha (FTGO 2021b).

The pivot from urban villages to Hong Kong as the source of the outbreak shifted Shenzhen's online discourse from questions about urban management to the importance of securing China's national borders against outside threats, echoing the earliest complaints that the establishment of special economic zones would undermine the socialist project (Bachman 1986). Significantly, in these posts, the Shenzhen–Hong Kong ('Shen–Kong') border was abruptly understood as dangerously porous, when historically, the cross-border integration of the two cities not only made Shenzhen 'special' (O'Donnell 2001), but also fuelled the city's unprecedented economic growth (Wu 1997).

On Shenzhen social media, complaints about Hong Kong people highlighted their unwillingness to be vaccinated, their refusal to shut down their city, and their distrust of mainland health workers who had been deployed to help manage the outbreak. A sense of *schadenfreude* permeated these discussions. Commenters consistently mentioned that it used to be that mainland people wanted to live in Hong Kong, where the standard of living was higher, but now Hong Kong people were learning that Shenzhen was a safer option. Moreover, as frustrations grew with Shenzhen's management strategy—especially the inability of Futian District to bring Shatou Subdistrict more generally and Shangsha Village specifically into compliance—anger against Hong Kong escalated. In the minds of many, Hong Kong had repaid its beneficial relationship with Shenzhen by (potentially willfully) spreading the Omicron virus and then refusing to take responsibility for their actions.

In viral posts, debates about the management of cross-border mobility between Shenzhen and Hong Kong focused on the cities' respective responses to the 2022 Omicron outbreak, using the regulation of mobility to compare the moral geographies of the two cities. Since the 2020 pandemic, cross-border drivers have had to comply with 'one line and three points' (一线三点; 'one–three') protocols to prevent transmission between the cities. One–three protocols limit drivers' movements to three points on their routes—an assigned dormitory, their pickup site, and the border—preventing cross-border drivers from mingling in either Shenzhen or Hong Kong. As the pandemic progressed, many Hong Kong–based drivers quit because they wanted to be with their families. In contrast, most new drivers were hired from the mainland. When their stories circulated on Shenzhen social media in 2022, reports emphasised the drivers' willingness to make personal sacrifices for the greater good. 'If they can live such involuted lives, why can't you?' one commenter asked rhetorically, using the popular online expression 'involuted' (卷), which describes a state of exhaustion due to overwork (Liu 2021). The comment received thousands of likes. Moreover, there was a general sense that Hong Kong people were indifferent to how their convenience was built on the suffering of cross-border drivers, who were wearing themselves out to bring supplies and food to the city, as well as commodities to the Port of Hong Kong.

However, even after the Covid-19 refugee problem was publicly resolved through measures that included installing more barbed wire and searchlights along both the land and the maritime Shen–Kong borders, Shangsha continued to produce the most positive test results in the city. On 12 March 2022, Shenzhen began a seven-day citywide shutdown. To force people into compliance, the city implemented door-to-door sweeps of buildings in Covid hotspots, especially in Shangsha, to force holdouts to comply with mandatory testing. Shangsha also shut off water and electricity to noncompliant households—a tactic that has been used throughout the past decade to force 'nail homeowners' (钉子户) into signing contracts to allow the demolition of their houses. Eventually, the decision was taken to automatically turn yellow QR codes red regardless of a person's health status, conflating noncompliance with a positive test.

The coordination of the police and health departments to enforce the zero-Covid policy, as well as the decision to force testing, rather than allowing people to remain in their homes for the duration of the shutdown, made salient the political importance of achieving zero-Covid. This was not simply a public health program, but also a test of Shenzhen's ability to manage and ultimately control the status of bodies inside its borders. Thus, the city's response to Futian District's inability to manage and Shatou Subdistrict's failure to control the Shangsha outbreak was to remove eight cadres from office, including district, subdistrict, and community-level police officers and public health officials for 'poor performance' (履职不力). This news was publicised on both traditional and social media, locally and nationally. This instance of downward mobility was met with satisfaction. Clearly, those cadres were unworthy of their 'place' (岗位). When the announcement of political removals began circulating on WeChat groups, there were even those who piously commented on these posts, 'trust the party and the government'.

Even after Shenzhen reopened at midnight on 21 March 2022, questions remained about the status of Shatou Subdistrict's urban villages. The trian-

gular territory south of Binhai Road and between Hongling and Huaqiang East Road (the southern sections of Shatou, Futian, and Fubao subdistricts) remained locked down. A viral meme described the situation as a case of 'the entire city is giving everything it has to clean its "bikini briefs"' (举全市之力正在清理这条'三角内裤'). The scatological humour is in keeping with the common phrase 'to wipe someone's ass' (擦某某的屁股), graphically describing what it feels like to clean up someone else's mess—too intimate, too embarrassing, and too contagious (so to speak). This 'dirty laundry' rhetoric is also of a piece with videos that were leaked from door-to-door sweeps for holdouts. In the videos I have seen, the holdouts are overwhelmingly male, wearing only their underwear. In contrast, the police and local cadres wear head-to-toe in hazmat suits. The contrast between these scenes of cold discipline (staged between a uniformed force and a half-naked man) and the warmth of answering a petition (the well-dressed Shuguang Party Secretary and antsmoving sharing a fruit basket) graphically illustrated the relative stakes of noncompliance with and submission to the party and its government representatives.

Viral Mobilities: Hong Kong, World Events, and Shenzhen's Evolving Moral Geography

Shenzhen's status as a 'City of Migrants' (移民城市) has been variously deployed to explain the city's vitality. Locally, the ebb and flow of millions of people, the openness of the Shen–Kong border, and the presence of foreigners have been viewed as assets. Despite a larger national context in which the connotations of mobility have been neutral at best and often negative, Shenzhen has not only celebrated mobility, but also encouraged people to get up and move. In fact, one of the city's founding values was 'path-breaking' (闯), and those who have shown willingness to transgress established boundaries and make 'breakthroughs' (突破) have been lauded as heroes. The metaphors themselves indicate how culturally salient mobility has been as a trope for understanding Shenzhen's history. However, since the mid 2000s, when Shenzhen began top-down deindustrialisation, the city has worked to replace 'dirty, chaotic, and substandard' (脏乱差) urban villages with 'prosperous and stable' (繁荣稳定) settlements, shifting its rethoric from mobility to stability. In addition, while the city's physical integration with Hong Kong has continued, its formerly unquestioned appreciation for Hong Kong as a city, its cultural milieu, and its international forms has been weakening since the 2014 Umbrella Movement and subsequent Occupy Movement (2019–20).

During the 2022 Covid lockdown, local Shenzhen discussions on WeChat suggest an evolving, but increasingly vexed, moral geography. Moreover, the connection between the health of the physical body and its place in and permitted mobilities within and beyond Chinese borders begs more questions than can be answered in the absence of empirical research. A series of hypotheses suddenly emerge. How does the (seemingly) widespread acceptance of and compliance with health-related immobility correlate with social willingness to end wife-trafficking? Does support for the Russian invasion of Ukraine reflect political beliefs or, rather, frustration with perceived Hong Kong recalcitrance to zero-Covid? How much of the grid management system was developed in and exported from current policies in Xinjiang? Or, perhaps this question should be specified: is grid management (potentially) the surveillance system for first-tier and Han-Chinese cities, while more brutal regimes are deployed in ethnic and rural areas?

The first non-Covid event to capture the attention of Shenzhen social media, for example, was the story of a Xuzhou wife who was apparently sold twice and forced to bear eight children. She was discovered chained in an outdoor shed, wearing insufficient clothing against the cold. Her story catalysed other stories about wife-trafficking in rural China and the complicity of low-level government officials who have overlooked obvious violations of Chinese law. Stories about so-called Vietnamese brides (越南新娘) who have been trafficked via Yunnan for decades also highlighted the paths by which women were captured, transferred

to, and then imprisoned in new homes. In these cases, discussions highlighted the illicit mobility of a woman into a man's household. Traditionally, Chinese women have 'married out' (嫁出去) of their homes—a gendered form of mobility that is the foundation of Chinese home life. Indeed, the journey from a woman's mother's home (娘家) to her husband's was often the only time a woman would travel (Lavely 1991). Online, there was consensus that no-one—especially in 2022—had the right to coerce a woman into marriage. Nevertheless, the lack of support for anti-trafficking legislation during the Two Meetings (两会) of 2022, as well as the continued use of kinship terminology to describe trafficked women, begs the question of whether, offline, many people either support or are indifferent to forced marriage.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine was the second non-Covid event that erupted on Shenzhen social media during the 2022 Omicron outbreak. In this case, the righteous mobility of an army was at stake. Much like police officers and health workers forcing their way into urban village buildings, this movement was deemed necessary to secure a greater stability. Support for the invasion hinged on ideas about Russian President Vladimir Putin as a man's man, as well as anti-American sentiment, and, while it was still permitted, Shenzhen social media avidly followed the Russian advance through Ukraine. Supporters appreciated Putin's decisiveness and willingness to act despite general disapproval. In fact, it often seemed that becoming more resolved in the face of international condemnation made Putin even more popular. The idea of manly resolution resonated with local understandings of what it took to get ahead in Shenzhen. Indeed, clips of young men brazenly escaping control areas circulated alongside appreciation of Putin on social media, as did arguments between holdouts and zero-Covid enforcers and gatherings near control gates. The expectation that young men must break through social expectations to succeed has continued to inform behaviour, so that while antsmoving's petition might have secured opportunities for him and his family, it did so at the expense of his masculinity.

Obviously, Shenzhen's response to the Omicron outbreak was not equivalent to either wife-trafficking or a military invasion. However, as producer/journalist with *Chinamerica Radio* Sice Wu pointed out in a personal communication, comparing the incomparable is an important feature of mainland social media, allowing otherwise banal events to become more interesting. Moreover, people active on Shenzhen's social media were aware that showing support for or condemning Putin, the Xuzhou mother, Hong Kong refugees, and Shangsha holdouts—all were public expressions of the moral person. Consequently, they curated their posts to Weibo accounts, WeChat moments, and smaller chat groups, showing solidarity with unofficial positions only in particular contexts. Thus, the mobile moralities of grid management allowed two otherwise spatially disparate events to make sense on Shenzhen's social media during the 2022 lockdown. Moreover, as with most social discussions, this language engendered human behaviour. Indeed, it is not surprising that key exemplars of steadfast mobility were male, while the faces of suffering caused by illicit mobility were female. The personal and social challenges that coalesced around mobility in Shenzhen had visceral meaning in the face of the increasingly strict disciplining of both the Futian and Shatou cadres and Shangsha residents. Who dared take action (like Putin)? Who was being unfairly locked up (like the Xuzhou wife)? Who was illicitly crossing control boundaries (like Hong Kong refugees)? These metaphorical resonances flickered across mobile phone screens, revealing the evolving contours of Shenzhen's moral geography.

Lessons from Shenzhen, 2022: The Costs of Immobility in an Interconnected World

On its own terms, Shenzhen's grid management succeeded. However, even as the city partially reopened and officials from other Chinese cities began to visit Shenzhen to learn about grid management, a posting of a black strip with white

characters indicating the economic costs of physical immobility and ideological steadfastness went viral (see Image 4):

Shenzhen stopped for a week at a loss of more than 600 *yi* (9.43 billion USD) to find 643 positives (Third Hospital statistics: asymptomatic carriers 21%, light symptoms 72%, regular cases 7%, serious cases 0%, deaths 0). The average cost per case was 1 *yi* (15.72 million USD).

深圳停摆一周损失600多亿找到了643个 (三院数据：无症状21%，轻症72%，普通型7%，重症0、死亡0) 阳性，平均一个成本一个亿

Image 4: Unverified social media post that began circulating after Shenzhen reopened at midnight on 21 March 2022.

This was the first indication that there might be resistance to zero-Covid protocols within the medical system itself, begging the question: did someone leak or fabricate theses statistics? Regardless, they were soon widely accepted and, to my knowledge, never directly refuted.

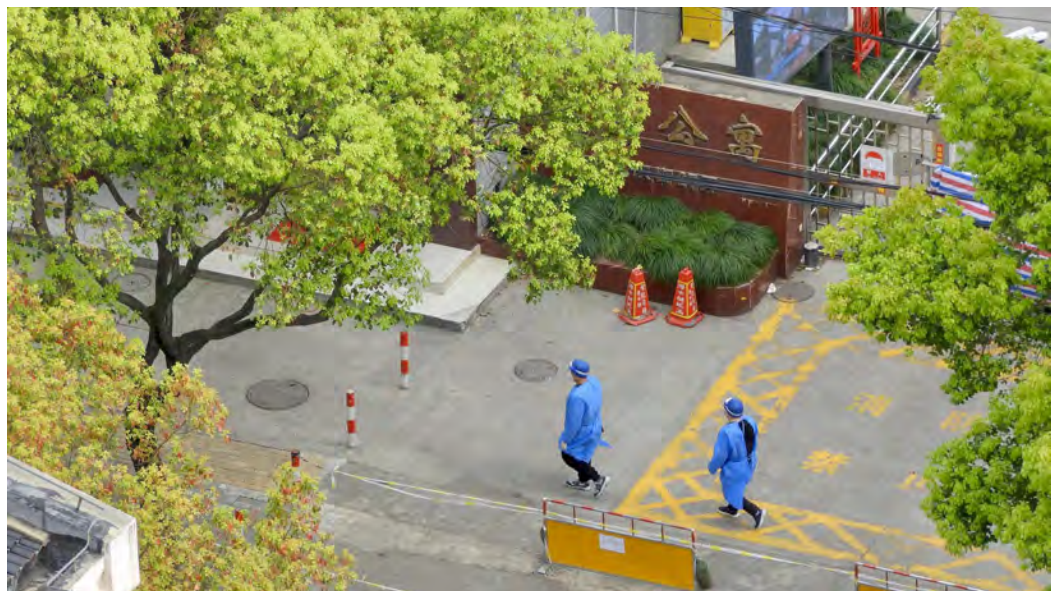
Since the city officially reopened, anxieties about mobility have continued to permeate everyday interactions for at least three interconnected reasons. First, the city's so-called new normal requires green QR codes to cross zero-Covid cordons and, depending on one's residence, a green QR code can only be maintained through 24-hour test results. Less-restricted areas may require only 72-hour codes, but many buildings and public services, such as the metro system, have split the procedural difference and require 48-hour codes. Thus, in practice, most residents are still lining up for Covid testing every other day in order to keep their 'horses' viable. In addition, some communities and companies now require a third vaccine dose to cross cordons. This information is included on the health passport next to one's testing status. Resistance to getting a third vaccine shot, especially as it is not legally mandatory, has brought attention to how enforcement of zero-Covid is often arbitrary, depending less on national and city laws and more on the determination of local gatekeepers to achieve policy goals. In turn, this means the authoritarianism of the zero-Covid policy has a latent, but unpredictable geography, unexpectedly erupting as individuals attempt to move through the city.

Anxieties about what combination of test and vaccination status will permit an individual to cross a cordon makes salient a second source of everyday anxiety: uncertainty about when and if these protocols will be lifted, especially as cordon infrastructures not only remain in place but also have become more permanent. These uncertainties have been expressed through the 'ding dong chicken' (叮咚鸡, *ding dong ji*) meme, which puns the expression 'wait for [further] notification' because every official post remains provisional. Although notices include official data and the city's response to the situation at the time of posting, they also include an open-ended statement that there will be further notification when and if the situation changes. Many communications from institutions, groups, and individuals now humorously include a chicken or the expression '*ding dong ji*' precisely because it is difficult to plan beyond the day, let alone the following week or month. Nevertheless, workers are still expected to work according to a plan, which may or may not be implemented, depending on where a positive test pops up. In practice, the structural uncertainty of whether work can ever be completed, coupled with injunctions to keep working to recuperate Covid-related economic losses, has made the city even more 'involuted'. Under these conditions of potential futility, proper expressions of ideological steadfastness require increasingly extreme forms of exploitation.

Third, as it remains difficult to maintain Shenzhen's zero-Covid status—after all, cases keep popping up—people are re-evaluating the social and individual consequences of the policy as well as its moral predicates. The crisis in Shanghai has brought these doubts to the fore because it makes salient that there is political disagreement over how Covid is being handled. Some of those online have interpreted the crisis as a stand-off between Beijing and Shanghai, where the city's medical experts are said to support 'living with

Covid' instead of zero-Covid. On this reading, Shanghai's management strategy forced Beijing's hand, initiating a cascade of urban system failures, including lack of food, disruption of public services, and, increasingly, use of force to ensure compliance with zero-Covid.

The crisis in Shanghai—as well as stories of social breakdown due to the enforcement of zero-Covid elsewhere in the country—has also caused some Shenzheners to re-evaluate their city's policy and its concomitant moral geography. Many worry that the CCP and government are using excessive force to achieve zero-Covid, some are questioning arbitrary requirements for third jabs, and there are those who quietly despair that there may be no path back to the pre-Covid normal. In a city that has flourished through movement across established boundaries and borders, the transvaluation of mobility under zero-Covid is potentially transformative, unsettling taken-for-granted assumptions about how lives can and ought to be lived. These movements have included physical migration, cross-border smuggling, international logistics, and intraurban crossings from urban villages into the city proper and back again. Indeed, over the past four decades, these movements catalysed social breakthroughs that have been celebrated both nationally and abroad. Thus, the transvaluation of mobility in the city poses an existential question: just how reliable is Shenzhen's moral geography as a map for future action? ■



Guards on Duty, Shanghai. PC: Leicat, Flickr.com.

The Shanghai Lockdown as a Chronotope

The Biopolitics of Zero Covid, Auto-Immunisation, and the Security Discourse

L. G.

Reading the Shanghai lockdown as a chronotope, this essay explores the biopolitical process of immunisation through an analysis of the Zero Covid policy in the context of the security discourse that has taken root in the People's Republic of China over the past decade. By reviewing the voices of those who have expressed dissatisfaction with the governance strategies in the 'war' on Covid-19, it argues that, in the name of securing life, the deployment of the Zero Covid policy indicates a larger process to reduce and discipline social heterogeneity. The unity of our society is threatened by troublesome and restless minorities.

Disinfectants, a smell of security.

—A neighbour, 6 May 2022

I don't know when this nightmare will end, but for me, it has destroyed my entire sense of security and I am doomed for the rest of my life.

—Miss Ma, 8 June 2022

As of April 2022, one-quarter of the Chinese population spread among at least 45 cities across the country was living under full or partial lockdowns (Feng 2022). In Shanghai alone, the lives of more than 25 million people were affected. And, indeed, although several cities near international borders were under brutal and prolonged lockdowns for months (for instance, Ruili in Yunnan Province; see Carter 2022), it was the Shanghai lockdown that attracted the most

attention both domestically and internationally. This was partly due to the sheer size of Shanghai—the largest Chinese city to be locked down—but also to a more immaterial issue: how could a city this wealthy and cosmopolitan find itself in such a dire predicament? In just a few weeks, perceptions of Shanghai shifted from those of the city as a role model to seeing it as a failure in containing of the virus, with both discourses portraying Shanghai as an exception (Haishangcao 2022). This essay takes a step back and argues that, rather than considering Shanghai and its lockdown as an exceptional case, it can be read as a chronotope—a term originally developed by Russian literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin (1981) to refer to a peculiar connection between time and space where power relations become visible—which exemplifies the normalisation of a state of emergency sustained by the biopolitics of auto-immunisation.

Italian philosopher Roberto Esposito (2008, 2011, 2013, 2022) has provided significant insights into the mechanisms of immunisation in modern biopolitics. In particular, he has formulated the concept of immunisation to articulate the seemingly contradictory process of biopolitics studied by Foucault—that is, the assertion that *bios* has marginalised the traditional sovereign power (that of death), with politics having now come to dominate life for the sake of life itself, reaching the paradoxical extent of excluding and confining or even taking life in the name of life itself. The relationship between *bios* and politics is thus investigated through the process of immunisation, which is conceived of as a form of negative protection of community. The function of politics is to protect the community, but when immunity crosses a certain threshold, it can become auto-immunisation. 'The immunisation paradigm' (Esposito 2008) functions either with negative policies (for example, the desocialisation imposed by quarantines) or with positive policies (for example, with vaccination). The 'immunopolitics' that Esposito (2022) investigates makes it clear how the medical and biological sides of immunisation are part of a larger process of the 'medicalisation of society', the control of individuals and populations, the deployment of the pastoral power of governments, and the generalisation of immunisation devices. Thus, Esposito states that immunisation is the secret name of civilisation.

Indebted to Esposito's conceptualisations of processes of biopolitical immunisation, this essay argues that the Covid-19 pandemic, and particularly the Zero Covid policy employed by the Chinese Government, highlights how the immunisation paradigm and its various dispositives are produced through a security discourse that blocks and confines the heterogeneity and complexity of society. Considering the Shanghai lockdown as a chronotope allows us to articulate the relationship between biopower and security, prefiguring an attempted political reduction of the human and its heterogeneity. More specifically, the politics of Zero Covid (清零) destroys the virus by zeroing out and desocialising human life; Zero Covid pursued in the name of security and life redefines acceptable forms of living, and reclaims and adapts humans to the rhythms of the digital flows that pass through, and partially even produce, them. The lockdown reduces society to elementary data about population and territory, composes a kind of dialectic between statistics and risk analysis, and eliminates—albeit temporarily—the increasing complexity of Chinese society, which finds its best (and worst) representation precisely in the Shanghai metropolis. At the same time, the disciplinary grip of biopower tends to regulate and prescribe individual behaviour in the restricted space of the enclosed house, limited mobility, and 'sanitised' daily practices. The Shanghai chronotope, like a novel, simplifies social reality so much that it ends up looking like a black-and-white photo or slow-motion video. Yet, again like a novel, it successfully expresses and better defines the contours of power relations that find visibility in the chronotope itself.

This essay comprises four sections. The first borrows from Mikhail Bakhtin's conceptualisation of the chronotope to explore why even narrating the Shanghai lockdown is challenging compared with other similar situations, such as the earlier lockdown in Wuhan, where diaries played an important role in 'making sense' of the unfolding reality. The second analyses the biopolitical logic of the Zero Covid policy in relation to the security

discourse that has prevailed in China since 2013. The third investigates how warlike metaphors in official Chinese discourse shape social reality, demand the extraction of affect, and create a security–insecurity complex among citizens. The final section focuses on the nexus between immunisation and mobility.

Shanghai as a Chronotope

To understand the spatiotemporal complexity of the Shanghai lockdown, we draw from Bakhtin's notion of 'chronotope'—a term that in its original conception refers to a category of literature in which the fusion of time and space constitutes literary genres. According to Bakhtin, chronotope 'determines to a significant degree the image of man in literature' (1981: 85). Shifting the analysis from artistic representation to the social dimension, the Shanghai lockdown as a chronotope makes visible a series of historically determined power relations. Through this lens, the time of these power relations acquires a spatial dimension, it 'thickens, takes on body', and its space 'becomes charged with the movement of their time' (Bakhtin 1981: 84). As 'the place where the knots of narrative are tied and untied' (Bakhtin 1981: 250), the Shanghai lockdown as a chronotope sets the stage for a tight knot between biological life and political life that defines the modern and especially the current global society, as we will discuss in more detail in the following sections.

When trying to make sense of a chronotopic event experienced by millions (and still being experienced by many at the time of writing in June 2022), the first problem is the lack of a genre capable of narrating the event. If in Wuhan in early 2020 the diary was the dominant narrative genre that gave form and meaning to the tragic events, in Shanghai, such a genre was lacking, and only a digital 'humoral' murmur of anger dispersed and circulated on social media throughout the spring of 2022. Michel Foucault (1978: 143) reminded us that 'it is not that life has been totally integrated into techniques that govern and administer it; it constantly escapes them'; yet, in Shanghai, life

'To Do a Good Job in Epidemic Prevention and Hygiene Work Is Real Patriotic Behaviour in the Battle to Smash American Imperialist Germ Warfare!' Propaganda poster, 1952. PC: Chineseposters.net.

has been resisted mostly through digital whispers, which grew loudest during the social media relay of the videos 'Voices of April' (四月之声) and 'Late Spring in Shanghai' (上海晚春) in mid-April 2022 (Wang, J. 2022; Wade 2022; China Digital Times 2022).

These murmurs helped reveal the surreal aspects of lockdown management and their impacts on the bodies of citizens—perhaps prompting better logistical management of supplies and making bureaucratic control less despotic. However, these feeble voices have not questioned, or even touched, the biopolitical matrix of the chronotope—namely, the security discourse and its actualisation through the immunisation process. The lack of an adequate genre for the lockdown chronotope leads us to

write this essay in a style that might be viewed as erratic and disorganised. This confusion also results from the fact that we are writing from Shanghai *in medias res* and are unable to perceive the end of lockdown as liberation. On the contrary, the temporary 'liberation' from biopolitical imprisonment as the restrictions are finally being lifted illustrates the transformations that have taken place in the outside world. One example is the emergence of a point-to-point disciplined society: the policy of *dianshi fugong* (点式复工) deployed in May 2022 allowing workers to resume work only on a point-to-point basis—that is, after applying to the relevant authorities, one could leave home and return to one's workplace only by taking safe transportation provided by one's employer.

The noticeable silence among writers and scholars also partially contributes to the lack of a narrative genre for the Shanghai lockdown. As Shanghai-based feminist writer Chen Yaya (2022) has pointed out, institutionally recognised intellectuals and writers based in the city were voiceless during the lockdown. This was because they realised the political stakes involved in speaking out and, to avoid taking risks, remained silent, refusing to give form and force to the existing digital murmurs. Those few who raised their voices either missed the point or shifted the focus to essentialist or secondary elements. The former dynamic is exemplified by the only public comment made by Jin Yucheng, a well-known novelist famous for his 'Shanghaiese' writing style. When one night he and his neighbours were woken at 1 am and ordered to take coronavirus antigen tests, he thought they were treated this way because the local state lacked 'civility' (文明). In a WeChat post that circulated widely, he wrote:

> The pandemic has been going on for more than two months, and I found that the contradictions between the street office, the neighbourhood committee, and the residents are partly due to the overall uncivilised and unregulated quality [素质] of the staff. Since you [the local government] hired the staff, you should carefully train and educate them about the basic code of conduct of civilised urban citizens, rather than simply teaching them how to send boxed meals. It matters because those who knocked on citizens' doors represent you. (Jiangye 2022)

Jin did not question the lockdown itself. Instead, he made clear it was necessary to improve the low quality of the grassroots officials and volunteers to reduce the contradictions taking place during the lockdown, as he believed them to represent the advanced civilisation of Shanghai.

An example of the second dynamic involves well-known Shanghai intellectual Wang Xiaoming, a scholar who for the past two decades has devoted himself to analysis of Chinese urbanisation and intellectual debates at his Centre of Contemporary Cultural Studies at Shanghai University. In a monthly seminar with his faculty members and students in April 2022, Wang explained why the grassroots level of the local government had entered a state of paralysis (瘫痪) during the lockdown. According to him, 'Shanghai's officials are the best in all of China' (Wang, X. 2022). Yet, he expressed the belief that skilled and capable officials preferred to work in significant departments related to economic development, while those less skilled were more likely to work at the grassroots level, such as the street offices and neighbourhood committees. Thus, Wang concluded, Shanghai did not function well during lockdown because 'it was always the less skilled officials at the grassroots level who handled a huge amount of challenging work'. He maintains: 'Even if the policy is correct, if it was executed by these officials of the neighbourhood committees and the street offices, the city would still function poorly.'

Both Jin Yucheng and Wang Xiaoming suggest that if Shanghai had 'educated' and 'trained' officials and staff at the grassroots level, there would have been no paralysis. Focusing on the efficiency or otherwise of the local state, they offered essentialist or technocratic analyses in the face of the momentous crisis brought about by the lockdown. In this sense, the paralysis of the city seems to reflect the paralysis of the intellectuals themselves, who were unable to provide a genre, narrative, analysis, or discussion capable of addressing the situation.

‘Determined to Win the Battle for Greater Shanghai; I Am a CCP Member and I Will Take the Lead in the Battle’. Source: Songjiang Government webpage.

From our point of view, the efficiency of the administration is secondary to the politics of Zero Covid. What was at stake with the Shanghai lockdown was a new form of life imposed by the biopolitics of the Party-State and the risk of a process of auto-immunisation that limits, blocks, and stifles life in the name of protecting life. Further, to explain the lack of a genre to address the desocialisation process that translates, creatively, into the neologism ‘the societal Zero Covid’ (社会面清零), we can consider what has happened since the city officially ‘reopened’ on 1 June 2022. The reopening does not account for the vulnerability and trauma suffered by its citizens; it does not contemplate a collective reflection on the psychic influence the lockdown has had on its citizens; in fact, the terms ‘lockdown’ (封城) and ‘lifting lockdown’ (解封) are discouraged, if not outright censored (Davidson 2022). Denying language undermines the possibility of reflection and elaboration. The city under lockdown heralded a mass trauma, as the Zero Covid policy that it was claimed would safeguard people’s security and their lives blew away all the normal routines underlying people’s ontological security (Giddens 1990 92). It is a psychic and collective trauma, but also an economic and spatial one; equally important is the fact that it is a trauma that obviously affects the weakest. Pandemic biopolitics intersects with and exacerbates the unbalanced power relations of class and gender.

Put Politics in Command over *Bios* in the Name of Security

What makes the Shanghai lockdown chronotope, in Bakhtin’s (1981: 250) terms, ‘palpable and visible’? To what events does it give ‘flesh’, causing ‘blood to flow in its veins’? As many have noted since early 2020, the pandemic has strengthened and accelerated many existing processes in our globalised society. The People’s Republic of China (PRC) is no exception. The Shanghai lockdown chronotope not only condenses the transformations that have

taken place since 2020 but also takes us back to the time-space of the PRC of the past decade. Ten years ago, President Xi Jinping's new leadership began to imprint its political and social conceptions in a systematic and profound manner, breaking from the previous two political generations in many ways, while also using certain existing policy tools and ideological formulations. The concept underlying the Covid containment and zeroing out policies has its roots in the formulation of a 'holistic' (总体) securitisation vision that has been developed and deployed since 2013 and the momentum of which is steadily increasing. Security is the key to biopolitics; in fact, biopower legitimises itself and deploys its governing techniques in the name of defending the security of life against external threats. An immunisation process is a form of safeguarding security of life. Through this process of immunisation, biopower guarantees life to the community. In this sense, immunisation is not just a medical condition but is also a social one. But is a fully auto-immunised community possible? What is the price paid by a community for the war against an external enemy in which all political resources are mobilised in the name of salvation?

To understand the handling of the pandemic, we need to place it in this historical process, particularly the concept of security that Xi's leadership has placed at the core of all its work. The security discourse as a dominant ideology and political tool was established, as is well known, after 9/11 and the onset of the Global War on Terror (GWOT, 2001–13) (Lubin 2021; Duffy 2015; Shafir et al. 2013). In the name of security, a state of emergency has become the norm through blatant violations of human rights, be it through post-humanitarian wars and preemptive strikes, extrajudicial detentions, or hyper-technologised forms of surveillance and 'preventive' practices of social control. The security paradigm formulated since the GWOT has resulted in growing insecurity all over the world. The hunt for 'the enemy' has become a form of immunising the community against the possible infection brought by, in this case, the Muslim Other.

In the context of the PRC, the security paradigm was first put forward under Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao's conception of maintaining the stability of the 'harmonious society' (和谐社会). China's global exposure between the 2008 Beijing Olympics and the 2010 Shanghai Expo was accompanied by the implementation of control practices, particularly in urban areas, with ubiquitous security cameras and checkpoints in all subway stations as the most visible aspect of the process. When Xi came to power in 2013, he developed more systematic theories on security. In November 2013, he established and headed the National Security Commission (中央国家安全员会) with the goal of building a 'centralised, integrated, highly efficient, and authoritative' national security system (Xi 2014). While few details about this commission and its activities have been released, Xi elaborated on his theory in a speech entitled 'A Holistic View of National Security' (总体国家安全观), delivered in 2014. In it, he said:

> We must maintain a holistic view of national security, take the people's security as our ultimate goal, achieve political security as our fundamental task, regard economic security as our foundation, with military, cultural and public security as means of guarantee, and promote international security so as to establish a national security system with Chinese characteristics … *We must follow the principle of people first, insist that everything done for national security is for the sake of the people, should rely on the people, and gain the support of the people*. (Xi 2014; emphasis added)

Xi's holistic view includes 11 broad security areas: political, homeland, military, economic, cultural, social, science and technology, information, ecological, resource, and nuclear. This means the national security system coordinates both internal and external affairs. In addition, on 1 July 2015, the Chinese legislature passed the National Security Law of the PRC and designated 15 April each year as National Security Education Day (国家安全教育日). On 15 April 2022, Chen Wenqing (2022), Minister for State Security of the PRC, added five more areas of concern for national security: data and artificial intelligence, biological, space, deep sea, and polar. Chen explained the expansion by suggesting the holistic view was

'constantly and dynamically adjusted to the development of society'. As such, almost every domain of social life is now being articulated through the prism of security.

In the name of security, several 'wars' (战争) and 'struggles' (斗争) have been launched since 2013. The first was the anticorruption war initiated on the eve of Xi's ascent to power in 2013, targeting both 'tigers' and 'flies'—high-ranking leaders and lower-ranking officials of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) (Branigan 2013; Wang, Z. 2016). To celebrate Xi's 'historic and groundbreaking achievements' (Zheng 2022), this war was featured in a five-part series entitled *Zero Tolerance* (零容忍) that aired on state television in January 2022 (CCTV 2022). Following the anticorruption war, the CCP launched another nationwide campaign, in 2018, under the slogan 'Sweeping Away Black and Eliminating Evil' (扫黑除恶), which was aimed 'at rooting out the mafias and criminal organizations as well as grassroots officials who collude with them' (Ong 2021). According to a joint statement by the CCP Central Committee and the State Council, this campaign is 'pivotal in securing the stability of the country, bolstering the party's legitimacy and restoring public confidence' (Shi 2018; Xinhua 2018). Between the two campaigns, in 2014, the CCP declared a 'People's War on Terror' (反恐人民战争), which eventually resulted in the mass detention of Uyghurs, Kazakhs, and other predominantly Muslim ethnic groups in the Xinjiang region (Ramzy and Buckley 2019; Byler et al. 2022). In the same year, a document published by the State Council claimed 'comprehensive jurisdiction' over Hong Kong, which 'marked the opening of a contest for control in the city, culminating in the sweeping' National Security Law that was passed on 30 June 2020 (Buckley et al. 2021). In President Xi's words, 'the absolutely no mercy' showed in the 'struggle against terrorism, infiltration and separatism' (Ramzy and Buckley 2019), especially in the territories of Xinjiang and Hong Kong, demonstrated the Party's determination to secure the sovereignty of the nation-state.

It is against this broad background that Zero Covid has been elevated to the level of the national ideological discourse on biosecurity. Since the outbreak of Covid-19 in early 2020, the Party-State has incorporated public health as a key part of the security discourse, stating that the 'people's safety is the cornerstone of national security' (Zhong 2020). In February 2020, when Wuhan was the epicentre of China's coronavirus outbreak, President Xi declared a 'people's war' on Covid-19—a struggle in which he assumed the role of commander in the name of 'protecting people's life and health'. In a white paper entitled *Fighting Covid-19: China in Action* released in June 2020, the State Council claimed that '[u]nder the leadership of the [CCP], the whole nation has followed the general principle of "remaining confident, coming together in solidarity, adopting a science-based approach, and taking targeted measures", and waged an all-out people's war on the virus' (State Council 2020). The 'people's war' casts the CCP in the role of the protector safeguarding people's lives. The containment of the Wuhan outbreak in late March 2020 became a demonstration of the effectiveness of the CCP's leadership in the fight against the virus, as opposed to the shortcomings of the many other countries that were still struggling to manage their Covid-19 outbreaks at the time. Shortly after the CCP declared its victory in the battle to defend Wuhan and Hubei, Zhong Nanshan (2020), a renowned health adviser to the Beijing authorities, claimed that 'putting people first and giving top priority to people's lives has been the distinctive feature of China's fight against the pandemic'. Similar to what Sorace (2017; 2021: 39) found in his analysis of the post–Wenchuan earthquake reconstruction, the Wuhan outbreak has become a 'showcase of state capacity, benevolence and international reputation'.

Since then, the Zero Covid strategy has come to embody the CCP's philosophy of 'people first, life first' (人民至上, 生命至上) in the people's war against the virus. In early 2022, as some segments of the Chinese public began criticising the stringent Zero Covid strategy in the wake of the new hard and long lockdowns, Ma Xiaowei, Party Secretary of the National Health Commission, reemphasised 'unswerving adherence to the general policy of Zero Covid', stating that 'China's epidemic prevention and control policy is determined by the nature and mission of the [CCP]' (Ma 2022). In an

article published in *Qiushi* (求是) in May 2022, Ma explained the rationale behind China's Zero Covid strategy in these terms:

> The Party has always put the interests of the people first, and the safety and health of our people is the priority while formulating disease control policies and evaluating outcomes. That also explains the fundamental reason for our [the Party's] decision to take a different approach to tackle the virus from that of some Western countries … The practice has demonstrated that China's Zero Covid policy can protect people's life and health to the greatest extent … and fully reflects the political advantage of the Party's leadership and the remarkable advantage of socialism with Chinese characteristics. (Ma 2022)

In other words, Zero Covid has now been elevated to an unquestionable, unchallengeable policy in which the political legitimacy of the CCP is entrenched. Ma's article clearly shows the politicisation of public health and the shift from security to immunisation or, more precisely, auto-immunisation.

The politics of Zero Covid is framed in relative terms by representing Western countries' handling of the pandemic as a failure. Curiously, when the CCP's Zero Covid strategy was challenged—first in Hong Kong in early 2022, and then in Shanghai in April 2022—Chinese state media began criticising the approach of coexistence with the virus (often referring to 'Western countries') as a *tangping* (躺平) strategy that put human life at risk. As a buzzword that came to the fore in China in 2021, *tangping* (literally, 'lying flat') originally referred to a movement launched by young people who chose to lie flat and withdraw from the rat race to protest the overwork culture prevalent especially in China's tech industries (Lin and Gullotta 2022). Despite the aleatory nature of this 'movement', as early as February 2022, when the fifth wave of Covid was wreaking havoc in Hong Kong, Chinese officials and state media began to twist the meaning of *tangping*, associating it with their Covid strategies. Since early April, with Shanghai's outbreak and the emergence of public rumblings about the costs of Zero Covid (Yan 2022), state media has repeatedly criticised *tangping* by associating it with the idea of 'coexisting' (共存) with the virus and 'spreading negative energy' (负能量), and instead encouraged people to stick to Zero Covid (People's Daily 2022). As Ma Xiaowei (2022) reminded the public: 'We must fully understand that "*tangping*" and "coexistence with the virus" will inevitably lead to huge losses in terms of public health and economic and social development.'

Living in Endless War

The official discourse in China thus promotes a binary narrative that portrays *tangping* as a compromised and incorrect strategy deployed by Western countries that do only the bare minimum to tackle the virus, at the cost of an endlessly rising death toll and surging numbers of infections, versus the Zero Covid policy undertaken by the CCP, which is said to put the interests of the people first by protecting and securing life. In this discursive context, 'wars', 'battles', 'victories', and 'enemies' are all terms that have come to feature prominently in the PRC's official statements, social media, and society over the past few years. These terms must be understood in the context of security and immunisation of the community.

Since the process of immunisation goes far beyond the boundaries of the medical domain and extends across the entire social space, the warlike immunisation metaphor has real social consequences. This is particularly evident in policy enforcement. As Elizabeth Perry points out in relation to campaign-style governance:

> [T]he inherently coercive and disruptive nature of mass campaigns led Deng Xiaoping to declare an end to them soon after Mao's death; in fact, however, campaign-style governance (in a somewhat modified form) remained a distinguishing feature of policy implementation in the PRC. (Perry 2021: 391; see also Perry 2011)

Left: 'Everybody Must Get to Work to Eliminate the Mosquitoes.' Propaganda poster, 1956. PC: Chineseposters.net. Right: A frontline worker in a white suit is disinfecting a residential compound in Shanghai in 2022. PC: Sh.chinanews.com.cn.

The declaration of the people's war on Covid-19 in 2020 has turned cities into battlegrounds. Like Xi's 'absolutely no mercy' shown to Uyghur and other Muslim ethnic minorities and Hong Kong protestors, the virus is treated as an external enemy that cannot be tolerated and must be completely eradicated. To win the war against the virus, people have been asked to persevere and firmly adhere to the Zero Covid policy under the CCP's leadership (Xinhua 2022). The past two years of 'war' have witnessed repeated lockdowns in multiple cities across China, including Wuhan, Xi'an, Ruili, Shenzhen, Dandong, Shanghai, and Beijing.

Far from empty metaphors, this language has reverberations across all levels of government and society. The unity of a nation at war requires mass mobilisations not only at the ideological level (calls for national belonging and patriotism) but also at the governmental level, with local authorities called on to build a network of control and governance across the entire territory, all the way to the doorsteps and even inside the homes of individual citizens. Security associated with health has succeeded in uniting different sectors and levels of government by temporarily creating the myth of an effective, technologically advanced Chinese Government capable of coping with a momentous crisis. As early as the beginning of February 2020, the highest authorities of the PRC called for a biopolitical mobilisation of various state and Party grassroots organisations. Grid management (网格化治理), street offices (街道办社区), and neighbourhood committees (居委会) have played a role linking the state, the family, and the individual. 'Street offices and residential communities are divided into grids [网格] according to their

geographical and administrative boundaries, with each grid being assigned government personnel for all three levels (district, street offices, and residential communities)' (Tang 2020: 44). The integration of the state and the family/household (家国一体) is realised through the control of public health by the state apparatus at the grassroots. As Xu and He (2022: 3) have argued, 'grid governance forms part of the strategy aimed at achieving the Chinese party-state's broad goal of stability maintenance'.

Grid governance was created to maintain social stability after the dismantling of the *danwei* system in the 1990s and, over the past decade, local governments have widely used it to monitor minorities and to 'collect first-hand intelligence on social instability in an attempt to [prevent] it from escalating' (Xu and He 2022). The grid management system has become fully effective during the Covid-19 pandemic through public health policy (see, for instance, Pei 2021; Tang 2020). The system is now deeply incorporated into everyday life: it collects information from point to point, maps and monitors all households within a territory, filters the movements of each person in and out of the community and their front door, takes charge of basic services such as the distribution of food and essential goods (物资发放), and monitors daily Covid testing procedures, among other things. During the pandemic, this system saw the previously separate functions of governance converge: bureaucratic, police, medical, propaganda, and mass mobilisation.

As well as restructuring governance and society, the warlike campaigns impact on the deeply personal emotional sphere, in that they demand affective responses from the people. As Christian Sorace (2019; 2021: 32) has argued, the CCP demands 'affective sovereignty', with 'the Party's legitimacy [depending] on the "extraction of affective energy" from different groups in society to serve its political needs'. If the battles against the virus are won—as in Wuhan—citizens are asked to express gratitude to the Party. Gratitude involves a structured position of indebtedness in which the protected are indebted to the ruling party for the life it offers them (Yang 2015), and those who do not express gratitude become failed citizens (Sorace 2021). If the war is endless, citizens are told that 'perseverance is victory' (Xinhua 2022). To win the battle, citizens are asked to 'stay confident and stand united' and told they must 'resolutely overcome the ideas of contempt, indifference, and self-righteousness', 'resolutely struggle against all words and deeds that distort, doubt, and deny our epidemic prevention policies', and 'never let our hard-won accomplishments in pandemic control be lost' (Ma 2022). That is, citizens, as beneficiaries of the benevolence of the Party-State, must be grateful to their protector and avoid any doubt or criticism.

The people's war against the virus also serves to discipline citizens, who are trained to live in constant uncertainty and submit to emergency powers. For instance, when some residents of a gated community in Shanghai went on to their balconies to sing and protest the lack of supplies during the lockdown, a drone suddenly appeared in the sky above, with a loudspeaker message: 'Please comply with covid restrictions. Control your soul's desire for freedom. Do not open the window or sing' (Jiliang in Shanghai 2022). The slogan 'control your soul's desire for freedom' (控制灵魂对自由的渴望) was initially coined in 2020 by Xie Bin, Party Secretary of the Shanghai Mental Health Centre, at a time when Wuhan was the epicentre of the Covid-19 outbreak, but it did not become widely known and used until Shanghai's lockdown of April 2022 (Qian 2022). The popularisation of the slogan during the Shanghai lockdown indicates a change in the unwritten pact between the government and citizens. Before the pandemic, individuals generally had the freedom to become rich (发财) and consume if they avoided involvement in political activities. At the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic and its auto-immunising policies, the state strengthened its presence in households and even in the subjectivity of the individual citizen through new, diffused practices of governance. The Shanghai lockdown is an escalation of this dynamic in that it is a political imposition that reaches into the souls of citizens. It is a direct attempt to change one's desires according to the needs of the biopower.

Another example of such disciplining is the transformation of university campuses during the lockdowns. In Shanghai, universities were subject to two management systems: closed loop (闭环管理) and grid. The former turned each campus into a bubble-like environment in which workers, students, and teachers were forced to eat, sleep, study, work, undertake Covid tests, and 'remain static' (保持原地相对静止). Any direct physical contact or interactions with the outside world were forbidden, including receiving deliveries. This turned campuses into something like a camp. Each closed loop was under grid management: the campus was divided into several zones, each of which was segregated by metal fences that restricted mobility and were controlled by volunteers comprising CCP and faculty members and students. Self-organisation was not allowed; everything had to be mediated by the volunteers, who were dressed in either white or blue protective suits (see, for instance, Xu 2022; Luo 2022). Except for the volunteers, everyone had to stay in their dormitories. Students could either volunteer and contribute to the existing top-down system (although in most cases only students who were CCP members could become volunteers) or wait to be fed in their dormitories. Food rations and other daily necessities were allocated and sent to each student's dormitory door at a specific time each day. Taking showers was not allowed for days in a row—in some cases, for as long as a month. When students were allowed to shower, they had to book a time in advance and it was not unusual for students to have to leave their online classes for their turn to shower. Even to go to the toilet, one was required to make a report (报备) in advance and take a number; at a university in Changchun, students were even asked to scan a code, fill in their names and phone numbers, take a number, and wait until their number was called (Yunqijiaxintan 2022). Even though all these measures were explained as necessary to cut off transmission of the Omicron variant within the campus, the result was that, within the closed loop, time and space were no longer one's own but managed by a top-down power structure.

The warlike mass campaign and strict controls made citizens feel like they were living in a war zone. In fact, there was a widespread belief among certain social groups that this wave of mass lockdowns was for the sake of defending the country's sovereignty, especially in the context of Russia's war on Ukraine. In both Chinese state media and social media, Russia's decision to attack its neighbour was rationalised as a necessary step to resist Western aggression, particularly from the United States (Repnikova and Zhou 2022). In daily life, it was believed that the relationship between China and Russia was like that of 'lips and teeth': if the lips are lost, the teeth will be cold (唇亡齿寒)—that is, if Russia loses its war, the West will come for China next. Thus, the large-scale lockdown in Shanghai was considered an act of preparation for a potential future war. From this perspective, lockdowns became 'understandable' and 'acceptable' if citizens had sufficient access to food, medicine, and other daily necessities.

Given the transmissibility of the virus, any living thing can be viewed as a potential threat to security in this war, and any such threat becomes an enemy that must be desocialised and dehumanised. When someone tested positive, they would be called *xiao yangren* (小阳人; 'little positive person'), 'sheep' (the pronunciation of 'Covid-positive' is the same as 'sheep' in Mandarin), or simply referred to using the emoji '🐑'. Infected women were called *muyang* (meaning 'ewe'), while infected men were called *gongyang* ('ram'). Identifying positive cases was called 'catching sheep' (抓羊). Parents were separated from their infected children (The Guardian 2022) and pets belonging to infected owners were killed (Yeung 2022). To maintain 'societal Zero Covid', a person who tested positive was not allowed to stay in their residential compound but would be isolated and expelled from society and admitted to a quarantine centre under surveillance. In addition, those infected had to keep their homes open to teams dressed in white protective suits who would spray disinfectants everywhere (Chen, Yixin 2022).

When emergency powers reach every corner, the measures to protect people's safety create widespread insecurity. The more one secures society, the greater is the sense of insecurity, and

A frontline worker with protective suit decorated with the characters for 'catching sheep'(捉羊) and images of Heibai Wuchang, literally 'Black and White Impermanence', the two deities escorting the dead to the underworld. PC: Weibo user @ Queeni_.

the further authorities will go with their process of top-down politicisation and mass mobilisation to eliminate spaces in society. Taking the grid management system as an example, the academic literature on which centres mainly on assessing its effectiveness as a tool for social control: some studies have noted how grid management in everyday reality becomes alienated from the goals it is supposed to achieve (Xu and He 2022), and its effectiveness depends on the resources of the local state (Pei 2021). Other commentators, who focus on praising the efficiency of the Party-State (Bernot and Siqueira 2022) or enhancing the existing propaganda discourse (Wei et al. 2021), note how grid management is one of the main elements that has enabled the state to cope successfully with the pandemic. However, if we look at the system from the perspective of the chronotope of the Shanghai lockdown, the issue of efficiency fades into the background. Instead, what stands out is the sense of insecurity that has emerged through the murmurs of citizens on social media during more than two months of confinement. Grid governance has produced a sense of insecurity because citizens have been deprived of control over their own bodies, their own homes, and their own social spaces; it has produced insecurity because the top-down system collects information but does not provide transparent and verifiable information to citizens, increasing the perception of being at the mercy of impersonal bureaucratic and police structures. In times of crisis, communities self-organise to cope with risk, as was seen in both Shanghai and Wuhan. Nevertheless, residents' self-organising activities are entangled in and harnessed by grid governance. For instance, the community group-buying (团购) coordinators are asked to register in the system and shoulder relevant legal responsibilities (Sohu.com 2022). In the end, the grid management system, which is designed to ensure security, produces insecurity when it becomes a tool for auto-immunisation.

Furthermore, the people in the white protective suits (大白), who are supposed to represent security and protection, can also become symbols of insecurity. Some netizens have mocked these ever-present figures, comparing them to the 'white terror' (白色恐怖)—an allusion to the period of 'white terror' in Taiwan. The frontline workers in the white suits become anonymous. The white suit is a symbol that merges the different actors of the system—the bureaucrats, police officers, propagandists, and health workers. Health officials, community wardens, security guards, or anyone in a white protective suit have the power to drag anyone who tests positive into quarantine for any period, at any time. Without needing to provide notification or proof, those in the white protective suits can fence off a community, block a unit, or enter a household in the name of eliminating Covid-19. Perhaps, the figure of the *dabai* is the best representation of the auto-immunisation process the security discourse has constructed during the pandemic in China. It embodies the security–insecurity dialectic that the Shanghai chronotope has deployed for more than two months.

For the working class, the measures claiming to protect and secure their lives have made their livelihoods increasingly insecure and precarious. Lockdowns have left millions of migrant workers without income for months (Chung 2022). Workers who keep a city running during lockdown, such as delivery riders, were reportedly lacking food and had to sleep on the streets or under bridges (Pollard 2022). In Shanghai, one of the few low-skilled jobs available during the lockdown was that of security guard. At least 300,000 such guards (almost all of them male) were recruited in that period (163.com 2022); dressed in the white suits, they guarded residential communities and quarantine centres, transferred food and other goods, and sprayed disinfectant. Although, when necessary, they were part of the state's outsourcing of violence, their own working conditions were relatively poor, including long hours, no contracts, sleeping outdoors, and standing guard 24 hours a day outside buildings where positive cases were reported to prevent residents inside from leaving (Shanghai Observer 2022; Geng 2022).

In this context, home—a symbol of middle-class life in China—suddenly became an insecure place. In a post published on Weibo, a netizen nicknamed Yu Xuan (2022) wrote:

> Recently I have completely given up my thought of purchasing a property in Shanghai … I used to think that my house represented the end of my life, a place where the world was settled, a fortress of absolute security and that once the door was closed, the world had nothing to do with me.

Yet, after she had witnessed the practice of homes being disinfected (上门消杀), she wrote:

> I cannot accept it. But so what? Am I in a position to talk about unacceptable? I can only 'be compliant'. I have to be grateful as people who disinfect homes do their work and contribute to the fight against the epidemic … [T]he sense of home as the harbour was completely lost in my mind. I feel like I have nowhere to hide. (Yu Xuan, 8 May 2022)

As Yu Xuan pointed out, even if one was well protected and hid in their own home, they would not be safe enough; if one of your neighbours tested positive, you would be taken to a quarantine centre and your house would be opened to strangers for disinfection.

Even after the city government announced the resumption of 'normalcy' on 1 June and declared victory in the 'Great Battle to Defend Shanghai' (大上海保卫战) on 25 June, the sense of insecurity and fear has persisted. A netizen nicknamed Miss Ma wrote a short piece describing her feelings about the reopening of Shanghai on her WeChat account, which deserves to be quoted at length here:

> There is no way to say more. I don't know how many times my relationship with the world I live in, my family, my lovers, my friends, my neighbours, and my community, has collapsed. To this day I am still afraid to go more than one kilometre outside my neighbourhood. Yes, in principle, I can take public transport now, I can walk around, but what if? I can't afford to be sealed off at the mall or just pulled away. Even this one kilometre may not be safe. If one positive case is found in the neighbourhood, just one, be it false positive or not, this 'freedom' will be taken away in an instant. I don't know when this nightmare will end, but for me, it has destroyed my entire sense of security and I am doomed for the rest of my life. (Ma, 8 June 2022)

Sentinels of Immunopolitics

In his latest book, Esposito (2022) warns of the need for global governance, or *communitas*—the only reality that can and should regulate immunisation processes, as in the case of the Covid-19 pandemic. Yet the situation today is the exact opposite of a global community: on the medical side, for example, there is an unreasonable lack of vaccines in many parts of the world (and a lack of vaccine patent waivers, which can be interpreted as a form of vaccine apartheid or thanatopolitical immunisation operated by the capitalist medical

An image listing the functions of 'digital sentinels', including data like: health code, ID, travel code, rapid antigen test results, Covid test results, vaccination certificate, facial recognition, and infrared thermometer. PC: It-times.com.cn.

system); on the political side, the pandemic has exacerbated nationalistic tensions between China and the West, and the war in Ukraine has raised the spectre of a new global war. In short, we are witnessing processes of auto-immunisation that are destroying or blocking societies, rather than the global structural changes that were hoped for during the first months of the pandemic in 2020. In the case of China, this process of immunisation is carried out in the name of security: biological security is only possible in the context of national security, which can only be guaranteed by the state and thus the Party. The politicisation of life has never been clearer than in China's Covid-19 management.

Societal Zero Covid is a true political model, extremely pervasive, and at the same time simple: in the face of variety and indeterminacy (of disease, as of society), no exceptions are allowed, and the model acts for everyone in the same way. Using Giorgio Agamben's (2003) concept of the 'state of exception' to interpret the pandemic has obscured what is becoming evident in China: the normalisation of a state of emergency, where the very existence of *bios* (mobility, socialisation, etcetera) is grounds for policies of repressive and prescriptive control. Having raised the biological threshold of risk within the paradigm of security, we are now in a situation of progressive auto-immunisation. Immunisation is sustained by

the appeal to national belonging and by narrating the Chinese political model as successful and unique.

The sparse protests sparked by the Shanghai lockdown highlight the complex nature of consent. On the one hand, we can say the Shanghai protests and their digital murmurs have challenged the myth of the efficiency and effectiveness of the Chinese model and two years of military-style victories flaunted by the government and the media; on the other hand, the chronotope of the Shanghai lockdown showcases the pervasiveness of the ideology of security, which most citizens have introjected into the practices of daily life. A new form of life emerges from this chronotope, and it is characterised by a continuous appeal to a paradoxical form of denial or reduction of social life in the name of fear of contagion and the formulation of new norms of life that do not counteract but rather increase the anxiety and distrust spreading among the citizenry. Of the four types of 'adaptation reaction to risk' formulated by Anthony Giddens (1990: 134–37), we can say that 'pragmatic acceptance' has been the dominant one, along with 'sustained optimism' in the face of the victories claimed by the Chinese Government from the second half of 2020 until early 2022. These then shifted to 'cynical pessimism', especially during the Shanghai lockdown. The impossibility of developing 'radical forms of engagement' has its parallel in the proliferation of governmental practices that literally enter citizens' private households, shape their behaviours, and change their expectations of the future and their living (and death) spaces.

Just as we need to ask what a virus can do and leave to scientists the investigation of what a virus is, we also must ask what a boundary does, rather than seeing it only as a place of separation. Confinement, quarantine, and biopolitical lockdown are practices that govern mobility; they are forms of selective inclusion and exclusion, a disciplining of how we traverse physical and symbolic spaces. It is no exaggeration to say that in the Shanghai lockdown chronotope we are witnessing the production of new forms of life and a new definition and production of humans through the reticular governance of borders. Among many examples, perhaps the 'digital sentinel' can best represent the ongoing transformations. As Frédérick Keck (2020: 203), the author of *Avian Reservoirs*, says in an interview with Mara Benadusi and Andrea Enrico Pia:

> Sentinels can be defined as devices to perceive early warning signals of an upcoming disaster … The sentinel perceives the threat before it can be measured, it makes visible the invisible signs of danger, it is attentive to the weak noises announcing a disaster. Non-human animals have been configured as sentinels … But we can conceive that robots or plants could be used as sentinels as well. In *Avian Reservoirs*, I argue that sentinel devices are cynegetic techniques—i.e. related to hunting—because they allow human experts to communicate with birds through images of viruses or numbers of species extinction … By contrast with pastoral power, which is organised from above to decide which animal in the flock can be saved and which must be sacrificed, cynegetic power is horizontal and reversible: it starts from a shared vulnerability to environmental disasters, but also from a prey–predator relationship in a common habitat … [S]entinel devices are used to control the spread of the virus, for instance by detecting its prevalence in the sewerage system or training dogs to smell SARS-Cov2 in human tissues. (Benadusi et al. 2020)

The Shanghai Government has now installed devices throughout the city called 'digital sentinels' (数字哨兵), which track the mobile phones or ID cards of those passing by and collect information about their health status and movements. This is a further implementation of the digital health codes (健康码) all citizens are already required to have on their mobile phones and that report their status with respect to the virus and their social contacts. The digital sentinels combine the military and biological spheres, realising immunisation through the transformation of the body. The body becomes a mobile boundary that produces data processed by the digital sentinel: horizontal cynegetic tech-

nology ‘successfully’ meets pastoral technology from above, seemingly without resistance. This is what biopower is reclaiming; this is the kind of adaptation, subjugation, and regulation for which it aims. Quarantine is only the extreme example of a larger process constructed by an auto-immunising state in which desocialising techniques of governance proliferate. ■

Lockdown Sound Diaries

Podcasting and Affective Listening in the Shanghai Lockdown

Jing WANG

In the spring of 2022, Shanghai came under a new Covid-19 lockdown. In that period, the city was filled with desperate cries from ordinary citizens and digitised loudspeaker noises. Paying attention to the everyday soundscape, this essay focuses on what I call 'lockdown sound diaries'. By examining 49 podcast episodes released between 27 March and 16 April 2022, it highlights women's voices and food as a medium to reconnect people, arguing that lockdown sound diaries serve as defiant gestures to record ordinary voices and make fun out of bitterness in a time of uncertainty.

(Previous Page) PC: VuHoang (CC) and UnWomen (CC), Flickr.com.

In the spring of 2022, two years after the Wuhan lockdown of 2020, the megacity of Shanghai—an urban agglomeration that is home to more than 26 million people—came under lockdown. Once acclaimed by officials and experts as one of China's best-managed cities during the Covid-19 pandemic, Shanghai shocked the world with its tough lockdown policies. Logistics flows were cut; food prices skyrocketed. Many migrant workers were kicked out of their rented apartments and became homeless. At the time of writing, in mid April 2022, depending on where one lives in Shanghai, some people have not been able to step outside their buildings for more than six weeks, except to take nucleic acid PCR tests. Many still have with no inkling of exactly when they will be 'released' from their home. Elderly people with little or no knowledge of online shopping have starved alone in their apartments. Infants and children with positive PCR test results have been forcefully separated from their parents—unless their parent(s) also test positive and can therefore accompany them to a quarantine facility. People with chronic conditions such as cancer and diabetes have been unable to receive their life-sustaining treatments. Lists of people who died during lockdown—rather than from the virus itself—started circulating on social media but were quickly censored. Shanghai—once proud of being a 'magical metropolis' (魔都)—has been experiencing one of the most surreal, tragic moments in its history.

The city's soundscape has been filled with desperate cries from ordinary citizens. In a viral six-minute video titled 'The Sound of Spring' (四月之声), the grey, monochrome urban landscape serves as a stark contrast to soundwaves from all walks of life. As a bird's-eye view of the ghostly city slowly moves along, you start hearing voices filling the empty space: exhausted doctors, trapped truck drivers, elderly citizens helping out neighbours, desperate mothers begging for medicine for sick children, crying neighbourhood committee officials, hungry young migrant workers, an angry crowd demanding food … The sound collage, on its initial release on social media around 20 April by an anonymous internet user going by the pseudonym 'Cary', was widely shared and, unsurprisingly, quickly censored. Similar to the relaying of

Figures 1 and 2: On 29 March 2022, a headless robotic dog with a loudspeaker walked through a residential compound in Shanghai. Screen captures from Weibo by the author, 16 April 2022.

the story of the 'Whistle-giver' (发哨子的人) Dr Ai Fen during the Wuhan lockdown (Yang 2022), netizens started relaying, sharing, and reposting both the video and the audio clips of 'The Sound of Spring' across different media platforms, hoping the world would hear those voices.

As well as the people's cries, the soundscape in Shanghai has also been marked by electronic loudspeakers carried by robotic dogs and drones. On 29 March 2022, a headless robotic dog, carrying an electronic loudspeaker on its back that broadcast a pre-recorded message, walked along an empty, sunny street inside a residential compound in Shanghai (Figures 1 and 2). The loudspeaker's female voice repeated: 'Wearing masks, frequently washing hands, measuring temperature, frequently disinfecting, less gathering, frequently ventilating, scientifically preventing pandemic.' On the evening of 5 April 2022, ominously alternating red and white lights appeared in the dark sky, circling above a residential compound in Shanghai. It was a drone carrying a loudspeaker broadcasting a digitised female voice warning residents to 'strictly obey the government's anti-pandemic regulations, control the soul's yearning for freedom' (控制灵魂对自由的渴望), and 'not to open your windows to sing' (Figures 3 and 4). Both scenes were captured

Figures 3 and 4: On 5 April 2022, a drone with a loudspeaker circled above a residential compound in Shanghai. The white and red lights can be barely seen against the dark sky. Screen captures from Weibo by the author, 16 April 2022.

in short videos and have been widely watched, commented on, and shared by netizens on social media platforms such as Weibo and WeChat.

As an anthropologist who lived and worked in Shanghai in a residential building from 2019 to 2020 during nationwide lockdowns, these voices have been haunting me. In the spring of 2022, my friends and family in Shanghai have been constantly on the lookout for the loudspeakers calling them to take PCR tests. Had I not left Shanghai in early 2021, I would have been one of those subjected to the intrusion of loudspeaker noises, day and night. As sociologist Guobin Yang writes in *The Wuhan Lockdown* (2022: 44), one of the key features of China's campaign against Covid-19 is 'its warlike character—its loudness … The loudest noise came from loudspeakers'. Yang traces the role of loudspeakers and loud noises in public spaces during the pandemic in China back to the Mao Zedong era when they were an integral part of political mobilisation and mass discipline. Since the 2010s, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has revived the use of loudspeakers in rural and urban spaces through a 'new digitalized loudspeaker infrastructure' (Yang 2022: 44). During the 2020 Wuhan lockdown, this sound infrastructure was mobilised by village and municipal officials in various settings and styles as part

of the anti-Covid campaign (Guo and Hao 2021; Li and Zhang 2020; Zhang and Chow 2021). Two years later, during the 2022 Shanghai lockdowns, the loudspeakers coupled with the use of robotic dogs and drones are both a continuation of the CCP's ongoing efforts to mobilise loudspeakers for political campaigns in the digital era and evidence of a further alienation of human bodies detached from digitised monotone voices.

Lockdown Sound Diaries and Affective Listening

These eerie, almost apocalyptic noises do not constitute the whole soundscape of the Shanghai lockdown. While haunted by loud, machine-generated noises, people have also been comforted by soft sounds—voices describing everyday scenes inside domestic spaces; voices expressing feelings of anxiety, anger, hope, and a fleeting sense of shared joy; the sounds of children, birds, the wind, and rain outside one's windows. In March and April 2022, at the height of the Shanghai lockdown, I listened to these sounds on a daily basis through podcasts on the popular podcast app Xiaoyuzhou (小宇宙, or XYZ). Officially launched in March 2020 during the Wuhan lockdown by a Shanghai-based tech company, the XYZ app has been growing rapidly in terms of the numbers of podcasts and listeners. The app specialises in promoting podcasts (播客) and fostering podcast communities, distinguishing itself from other audio apps such as Ximalaya.FM, which feature a wide variety of audio programs such as audio books, music, comic dialogues, and news briefs (McHugh 2022: 223–25; Xu and Morris 2021). Between 27 March and 16 April 2022, I listened to 49 podcast episodes with topics directly related to the Shanghai lockdown (Table 1). The full titles of podcasts and the names of the podcasters cited in this essay are modified to protect the identities of the people involved, and I mostly use acronyms to refer to specific podcasts (for more details, see Podcast Entries in the appendix to the essay).

Days	21 (27 March to 16 April 2022)
Podcasts	40
Episodes	49
Total subscribers	392,918
Total listeners	110,910
Total comments	2,031
	2,680 mins
	Longest: 172 mins
Length	Shortest: 12 mins
Podcast hosts & speakers	151
	51 men
Gender	100 women
	7 monologues
	5 couple dialogues
Relationship	37 friends (two or more)

Table 1: Compiled by the author on 17 April 2022; all original data are stored in the author's archive.

Inspired both by Yang's analysis of lockdown diaries and by one of the original titles of those episodes, 'Epidemic Diary' 疫情日记 by SJSW, I approach these podcasts as 'lockdown sound diaries'. There are some basic similarities between a written diary and a sound-based diary: both record everyday life experiences and emotions; both can be posted and shared on digital platforms such as XYZ, Weibo, and WeChat; both reach readers within and beyond China. But there are also some significant differences. First, and most obviously, unlike written diaries, which are accessed by reading, one listens to a sound diary. When one reads a written diary entry, it is hard to pay attention to other things at the same time, but when one listens to a podcast, it is possible to multitask and use the sound as a form of company (陪伴) or background (背景). Second, a written diary is often updated daily while a sound diary is updated less frequently due to the editing process. The podcast creators and speakers nonetheless document their daily experiences via sound. Third, a written diary usually has a single author while sound diaries can have more than one speaker. Of the podcasts to which I listened, as well as seven monologues and five dialogues between married couples, 37 episodes were conversations or sound collages with more than one speaker (see Table 1). In a sense, the lockdown sound diaries can be considered as both a monologue and a collaborative form of sharing one's life, emotions, and observations through dialogues among multiple speakers. Finally, a sound diary contains many elements that are hard to communicate in a written form, such as changes in pitch and volume, laughter, background music, ambient sounds, and even equipment noises from phones or recorders—all of which are open to the aural and affective perceptions of podcasters and listeners.

To observe, experience, and analyse these lockdown sound diaries, I listened to podcasts, read listeners' comments, joined in by commenting myself, and took listening notes (akin to the classic notion of field notes). I view my methodological as well as analytical approach as being what Jing Wang (王婧), an anthropologist of sound studies from Zhejiang University, calls 'affective listening'. Inspired by the art and philosophy of sound, Wang writes:

> Affective listening suggests exactly such a relation: feeling into the energy of one's sonic surrounding, to be affected by intensities, forces, and flows of sounds. In Chinese medicine, the ear is connected to all parts of the body. The ear is the body. Affective listening is a sonic way of being with/in a sonorous poetic space infused with its creators' intelligence and sensations. (Wang 2016: 124–25)

This embodied act of affective listening propels listeners to understand the soundscape not as an aural-informational space but as a mediated ecology abundant in meanings and emotions. When listening, I immersed myself in the sounds and sensations, as many listeners would do in everyday life. I laughed at podcasters' jokes, cried when hearing a sad story, felt angry when people talked about their sense of helplessness, and from time to time, even talked back to the voices. In a sense, affective listening allows a listener to immerse themselves in the scenes, stories, emotions, and atmospheres created through podcasts and digital mediation of everyday life settings. This approach also enables me, as a listening ethnographer, to move constantly between a text-based and an audio-based analysis of digitally produced content to better grasp its affective impacts on the listening public.

While many topics emerged from the podcasts to which I listened, the following sections focus on two aspects of the lockdown sound diaries: women's voices and food. The ubiquitous mentions of food in all 49 podcasts forced me to 'hear' food as a medium through which people in Shanghai connect to one another. Although women played a crucial role as food preparers, group-buying coordinators, and frontline workers during the Shanghai lockdown, it was noticeable that their voices were constantly downplayed or overlooked in the CCP's official media reports.

Women's Voices

In contrast to the digitalised, war-like tone of the female voices being broadcast through loudspeakers, the podcasts made by or featuring women have emerged as a significant part of the lockdown sound diaries. Women constitute 66.2 per cent and men 33.8 per cent of the 151 podcasters/speakers in my sample of 49 podcasts. This trend correlates with a survey conducted by VoiceFirst (2021), a podcast company based in southern China, which found female podcasters made up 58 per cent of 257 respondents. Yet, these statistics might conceal more than they reveal about women's long overlooked sound-making practices in modern China.[1] Here, specifically during the Shanghai lockdown in 2022, we need to read beyond the numbers and technologies to understand what narratives and emotions they have been sharing with affective communities who also speak back to them via written comments.[2]

Among the 151 podcast hosts and speakers, at least 11 people shared their detailed experiences as neighbourhood group-buying coordinators. Significantly, they were all women. This is not to deny the role of men as coordinators, logistics workers, technical supporters, and so on as part of mutual aid groups during various lockdowns across China. Rather, as Guobin Yang notes in *The Wuhan Lockdown* (2022), this highlights how women's ubiquitous role as civic organisers and labourers has often been overlooked or downplayed both online and offline. During the 2020 Wuhan lockdown, feminist hashtag campaigns such as #StandByHer and #MakeWomenLaborersVisible were widely circulated on social media to raise awareness of women's contributions during the pandemic, and were also documented in the lockdown diaries of ordinary citizens (Yang 2022: 117–23). In the 2022 Shanghai lockdown sound diaries, the female speakers are of diverse backgrounds—including: migrant workers, white-collar workers, community workers, entrepreneurs, college students, medical staff and doctors, and mothers. Most speak about their own and/or their friends' experiences of civic organisation without resorting to feminist hashtags.

Some podcasters resorted to humour in praising coordinators without directly mentioning the role of women. In the podcast *Busy Friends* (JZMM), the two female hosts, named Jin and Jia, sound as though they are having a regular phone chat. They had been trapped at home since 12 March and 1 April, respectively, and had both become active group-buying coordinators in their neighbourhoods. Besides talking about their experiences of buying food for themselves and their neighbours in the episode they dedicated to the lockdown (12 April 2022), they also shared their experiences on other social media platforms such as Weibo. On 7 April 2022, Jia posted a poster from a TV drama called *My Chief, My Regiment* (我的团长我的团) to her Weibo account and described the figure it showed as 'the most respected person in every residential community in Shanghai now'. The show was a popular Chinese TV series released in 2009, about a Chinese logistics worker who pretended to be an army chief (团长) and led his regiment to fight against the Imperial Japanese Army in 1942. This image ironically resonated with the temporary logistics role of group-buying coordinator (also called 团长) taken on by many women during the war-like conditions of Shanghai under lockdown. By 17 April, this post had garnered 300 likes and was reposted by 115 users. In their sound recording, Jin and Jia laughed at this sarcastic reference to a nationalist TV drama as a subtle subversion of a stereotypical image of a patriotic, male logistics worker in times of emergency.

Some podcasters combined a sense of humour with a more direct reflection on their identities as women. *Ms M's Lounge* (MJKT), a podcast born during the 2022 Shanghai lockdown, features three women living under the same roof. With a round of hand-clapping and cheers, the host, Ms M, opened the first episode (6 April 2022) by introducing herself as a former media worker and current small business owner; the other hosts, Fei and Airu, are her roommates. Their laughter had the effect of transporting listeners to a college student dorm room. They cheerfully exchanged what it felt like to live as a woman-only mini-collective, with everyone taking responsibility to buy and cook food. In their second episode (9 April 2022), Ms M invited Fei and another friend, Jiao, to discuss

how they had become group-buying coordinators for a variety of daily necessities—rice, flour, milk, eggs, and cooking oil—in the neighbourhood. As well as assisting the elderly, they also helped some foreign expats join a group-buying relay (团购接龙) on WeChat. As so many people were constantly on the lookout for food and texting many messages in a short period, it was difficult for expats with limited or no Chinese-language skills to catch the relay information. 'How can you explain this to an expat if their Chinese-language skill is limited?' Ms M asked, raising the pitch of her voice. 'Yes, it's hard,' Jiao responded with a Chinglish accent, 'So I said, "You see the [Chinese characters] 接龙, you order!"' They went on to discuss whether 'women hold up over half the sky' (妇女能顶大半边天) and 'why most of the coordinators are women' (为什么团长里大多数是女生). Jiao observed that in many groups the most active buyers and coordinators were women, while men tended to do more physical or technical labour.[3] Ms M added: 'I'm not intentionally bringing up the topic of feminism … But I also know quite a number of gay friends who are coordinators. In a critical moment like this, we need to rely on our sisters.' While Ms M was speaking, the other two speakers shouted in the background: 'Sisters, stand up!' Many of the 35 listeners who left comments expressed their appreciation of these discussions. One listener, LLJC, wrote: 'Men do not participate enough in family life while women basically take care of all chores and have to buy living necessities and food items' (12 April 2022). By critiquing the gendered division of labour and extending a sense of sisterhood to the LGBTQ community in Shanghai, Ms M and her friends made their listeners feel heard as well.

Food as a Medium

Food has become a primary source of anxiety and a daily preoccupation during the Shanghai lockdown. Stuck at home, residents have been struggling to buy food due to large-scale logistics failures. Food delivery platforms have failed to take online orders from anxious and even desperate buyers. Residential staff have delivered government-organised food packages sporadically in the form of 'blind boxes' (盲盒). These sanitised bags and boxes sometimes contain vegetables with pieces missing or starting to rot. To convey this sense of food insecurity, JJ and her co-host from the podcast *Room403* (403S) opened one of their episodes (10 April 2022) with a segment of a lockdown song titled 'Let's Grab Food Together' (大家一起抢菜). Sung in the local Shanghai dialect in a rap style, the lyrics captured the collective mood of panic, anxiety, sarcasm, and helplessness. On the one hand, lockdown policies, rather than the virus itself, have ironically led both the poor and the rich in this megacity to scramble for food (Wang and Lindtner 2022). On the other hand, the tough lockdown policies have pushed the have-nots further into the abyss of destitution, forcing them to expend precious resources to buy meagre amounts of food at inflated prices. It is thus perhaps not surprising that all 49 podcasts I analysed addressed the question of food in one way or another.

Tomorrow (MRZL), a podcast started by a group of young volunteers during the Wuhan lockdown in 2020, released three episodes on food between 27 March and 14 April 2022. As a group dedicated to 'sustainable living' (可持续生活) in the 'age of climate and environmental crises', they have in the past two years been promoting various issues related to food and sustainable lifestyles. In their first episode during the Shanghai lockdown (27 March 2022), one of the organisers collected from her eight friends in Shanghai responses to the following prompts: 1) How is life now? 2) How do you feed yourself every day? 3) Do you share self-made food? 4) Share everyday details of life during the lockdown. 5) What do you want to do most after the pandemic? Respondents remained mostly positive in tone as they were hoping this lockdown phase would soon pass. In the second episode (12 April 2022), three women who lived alone in Shanghai shared their personal food experiences. One, Taro Monster, was a migrant worker, who, during the first wave in 2020, was trapped in her hometown in Hubei and now found herself trapped again, in Shanghai in 2022, in an apartment without a refrigerator or cooking utensils. 'Both [experiences] have been chaotic,' she said, 'but this time I'm lucky to have good neighbours.'

Figures 5 and 6: Two photo collages Na and Grey shared in their show's notes. Residents in Na's neighbourhood used vegetables to make patterns or pictures, took photos of them, and shared the images in WeChat groups. PC: Images from ZDJD show notes.

Her residential compound was officially locked down on 31 March supposedly for four days. Her food supplies would only last those four days. Her neighbours not only shared several WeChat groups for purchasing food together, but also helped cook for her. The experiences of these women resonated with listeners. One listener, YJ, commented: 'I got to know many neighbours during this lockdown. People help each other in the same building, which is the most precious warmth and love I've felt during the pandemic' (13 April 2022).

While MRZL mostly focuses on food and lifestyle in its programming, accounts of mutual aid and food-sharing among neighbours are ubiquitous in all the lockdown sound diaries. Like MRZL, other podcasters shared either their own food experiences or asked what others thought about group-buying and food procurement as everyday survival strategies. The longest episode sharing daily routines and strategies—such as stocking up on food, prepping an emergency kit in case one tested positive, and taking care of oneself psychologically—went for an epic 172 minutes (FHLP, episode of 10 April 2022). Like the comment by YJ in MRZL's second episode, other listeners across different episodes often commented on food-related issues. Some complained about the government-organised food packages they received. Some craved junk food, such as fried chicken and chips. Others shared their experiences of effectively

stocking up on non-perishable food or buying food from different WeChat mutual aid groups. Yet others reflected on their parents' and grandparents' habit of stocking up on food and started to understand what it meant to live through an era of scarcity. For both podcasters and listeners, talking about food binds them together.

Among all these sound diaries, Grey, the host of the podcast *Confession* (ZDJD), theorised about food as a 'medium' (媒介). 'During the pandemic, food reconnects us,' Grey said. 'Food is like a medium which spreads warmth, love, and care among everyone' (3 April 2022). He then interviewed Na, a young woman from Fujian and a fervent food market lover, to share her experience of being one of the group-buying coordinators during lockdown. In the show's notes, Na shared photo collages of pictures made from the vegetables from government-organised food packages taken by her neighbours and friends and published in WeChat groups (Figures 5 and 6). After 51 minutes of talking about food, food buying, and food sharing, this episode ended with a background song titled 'I Don't Want You to Face This Chaotic World When You Are Lonely' by Taiwanese band COM'Z. One listener, LDY, left a lengthy comment praising the production of this episode as 'soothing one's heart' (安抚人心) and agreed with Grey's message on 'human connection' (人和人的连接) through food and the importance of 're-establishing neighbourhood social networks' (重新建立附近的社交网络) during lockdown (7 April 2022).

In times of human-made disasters and material scarcity, the constitutive and codependent relationships between life-worlds and digital technology become ever more salient. As communication scholar Peter Zhang (2013: 177) points out, 'food as a "medium" (as McLuhan understands the term) is primarily the discursive formation about food that not only fashions a people's beliefs, values, and practices but also constitutes their taste'. In other words, we are not only what we eat or what we do not eat; we are also what we talk about when we discuss food, how we get food, and what meaning we make out of food. While the topic of food is mediated through sonic technology, food becomes a social medium through which sounds are made, human connection strengthened, and a sense of auditory publics forged in digital spaces during the Shanghai lockdown.

Beyond Political Depression

During the 2022 Shanghai lockdown, sound can be oppressive as well as soothing, cathartic, and liberating, even if just momentarily. Food becomes a medium—physical, social, and political—that binds and divides friends, couples, and neighbours in both online and offline spaces. Amid a pervasive sense of 'political depression' (政治性抑郁, as discussed in the episode of 10 April 2022 of the YYDHOC podcast), making fun out of bitterness is a survival strategy. In the podcast *Nothing to Talk* (WSKT), three women managed to physically get together for a recording on 31 March 2022, one day before the Shanghai district of Puxi came under official lockdown. In their sound diary, I hear bags zipping, items being exchanged, cars passing by, birds chirping, and food being chewed as they talk and laugh together. They left their apartments to stock up on food, to exchange daily necessities as gifts, and to record their conversation in the open air in a small park along a riverbank. Listening to their laughter in the riverbank park, I cannot help but recall what feminist scholar Sara Ahmed (2018) says in her *Feministkilljoys* blog: '[S]urvival for some requires crafting a life from shattering experiences, the kind of experiences that might leave you fragile, close to the edge, "at the shoreline".' The ambient sound constantly reminds me of the temporal and spatial contingencies under which these women lived along the edge of anxiety, fear, anger, and joy. 'We just want to make fun out of bitterness [苦中作乐].' They laugh: 'Can't we? Aren't we allowed to be happy?' (WSKT, 1 April 2022). In contrast to the loudspeaker voices circling in the sky and crawling through the residential compounds, the women's laughter strikes me as a defiant gesture to create their own voices and happiness—however small or fleeting—in a time of uttermost uncertainty.

Postscript: A Tare's Hope for Spring

In a time of crisis, poetry brings hope and redemption. George Herbert, a Welsh priest and poet born at the tail end of the 1592–93 London plague, which took at least 15,000 lives, wrote a poem titled 'Redemption'. It describes a man's arduous journey to find the divine and, thus, the ability to start a new life. Herbert might not have had direct experience of the plague while growing up; yet, as a priest and a poet, he probably had witnessed much suffering in life and constantly pondered the question of hope. His message of redemption through poetic composition pierces time into the Covid-19 pandemic of the twenty-first century. Worldwide, ordinary people perhaps need—more than ever—a sense of recovery and redemption, both physically and spiritually.

For me, the poetry of Yu Xiuhua (余秀华) holds such redemptive power. Born in 1976 in a small village in Hubei Province, Yu has been wrestling with cerebral palsy that has caused speech and mobility difficulties. Nevertheless, she keeps writing poems—thousands of them. In 2014, poems such as 'I Crossed Half of China to Sleep with You' (穿过大半个中国去睡你) and 'I Love You' (我爱你) were widely shared on WeChat and became highly acclaimed among literary critics and ordinary readers. When I listened again to a recording of her reading 'I Love You' in the spring of 2022, I heard hope. This poem starts with mundane details of everyday life: 'Fetch water, cook, and take medicine on time, everyday.' But the poet goes beyond 'managing to live' and takes the reader through 'sunny' days, through the 'snow in my heart', and across the 'courtyard' into a field of 'rice and tares'. Like her, we 'ain't fit for broken grief'. Like the tare, we hold both fear and hope for spring. The English translation and mistakes are mine, but the poetic beauty is all hers.

巴巴地活着，每天打水，煮饭，按时吃药
阳光好的时候就把自己放进去，像放一块陈皮
茶叶轮换着喝：菊花，茉莉，玫瑰，柠檬
这些美好的事物仿佛把我往春天的路上带
所以我一次次按住内心的雪
它们过于洁白过于接近春天

在干净的院子里读你的诗歌。这人间情事
恍惚如突然飞过的麻雀儿
而光阴皎洁。我不适宜肝肠寸断
如果给你寄一本书，我不会寄给你诗歌
我要给你一本关于植物，关于庄稼的
告诉你稻子和稗子的区别

告诉你一棵稗子提心吊胆的
春天

余秀华，《我爱你》，2014年1月13日

Managing to live, fetch water, cook, and
take medicine on time, everyday
When it's sunny, I'll put myself in, just like a
piece of dried tangerine peel
Tea leaves take their turns: chrysanthemum,
jasmine, rose, lemon
These beautiful things seem to lead me to
spring
Hence, I press down the snow in my heart,
again and again
It is too pure and white, too close to spring

In a clean courtyard I read your poetry. These
love affairs in the human world

Faintly like a flitting squirrel
Yet, day and night, bright and clean. I ain't
fit for broken grief
If I were sending you a book, I won't send
poetry
I will send you a book of plants, of crops
Telling you about the differences between
rice and tares
Telling you about the fear a tare holds
For spring

— Yu Xiuhua, 'I Love You', 13 January 2014, translated by Jing Wang in April 2022 ■

1 In my broader research project, 'From Radio to Podcast: Women and Sound-Making in Modern China', I situate the contemporary emergence of Chinese women's podcasts within an understudied history of women's sound-making practices through various media technologies such as the gramophone, film dubbing, radio, and loudspeakers since the early twentieth century.

2 In a collaborative research project with Simona, a podcast host, feminist, and data engineer, we use both qualitative and quantitative methods to examine the crucial role played by Chinese women podcasters in the country's rapidly changing podcasting ecology. Our preliminary data suggest that although more women have entered the field of podcasting since the #MeToo movement in China, sound-making practices have been dominated by male voices until very recently. We observe there has been a highly gendered (and sometimes sexualised) pattern to what women talk about, how they talk, and how listeners perceive their voices. As the Chinese state has been tightening its censorship of feminist voices online with the change of the One-Child Policy, some feminist podcasters I interviewed between December 2021 and April 2022 expressed strong concern about a potential recession of feminist voices in China's digital spaces.

3 On the question of gendered labour, thanks to feedback from Yige Dong. It is also important to note that based on social media evidence, when men buy, they tend to focus on purchasing things like cigarettes and beer, while women are buying for the entire family.

Outsourcing Repression: Everyday State Power in Contemporary China, Oxford University Press (2022).

Outsourcing Repression

A Conversation with Lynette Ong

Hong ZHANG

Outsourcing Repression: Everyday State Power in Contemporary China, Lynette Ong's new book with Oxford University Press, provides an original and realistic analysis of the Chinese state's control over society beyond the usual focus of the study of authoritarian states, such as on outright coercion or censorship. Her concept of 'everyday state power' sheds light on how the state's control is typically experienced by ordinary citizens and illuminates the state's repertoire for inducing citizens' compliance with its top-down, sometimes drastic, policies. The 'thugs-for-hire' are an expedient extension of the state's formal coercive capacity, while the political, social, and economic brokers constitute the state's penetrative 'infrastructural power'. While grounded in the study of China's state-driven urbanisation, this book also opens new space for us to understand the sources of the Chinese state's power more broadly, especially how it manages to mobilise the masses in the implementation of radical policies that are often highly intrusive and disruptive. As such, the book can also inform our understanding of the zero-Covid policy currently being enforced in Shanghai and other Chinese cities: besides outright coercion, the state also deploys 'brokers' with intimate knowledge of communities to 'persuade' the masses into compliance, often on an emotional basis. The book calls

for greater attention to the complexity of the interface between the state and society to decipher both the state's capacity to govern and society's capacity for resistance.

Hong Zhang: I am curious about your process of discovery. It seems you started with the realisation that the 'thugs-for-hire' had a distinct role to play, and later you also accounted for the less-violent actors—namely, the brokers who have been facilitating the state's control over society. Could you share how you came to conceptualise these different groups, especially the thugs-for-hire, which is such an innovative idea as it somewhat challenges the conventional view of the state as having the legitimate monopoly on violence?

Lynette Ong: This book is a culmination of a decade of field research. On my first field trip in Anhui Province in 2011, I started trying to understand the political economy of urbanisation—a continuation of the theme from my last book, *Prosper or Perish: Credit and Fiscal Systems in Rural China* [Cornell University Press, 2012]. However, as I spoke to ordinary folks who were undergoing or had undergone land-grabbing and housing demolition, they were eager to share with me tales of harassment by local thugs and hoodlums. I felt compelled to learn more about it, and then switched the focus of my academic inquiry to repression or social control, from the original political economy focus. By outsourcing violence, the state has voluntarily ceded its legitimate monopoly of violence. This usually comes with severe consequences, such as excessive and undisciplined use of violence, and de-legitimisation of state authority. My book is a social science inquiry into how de-monopolising state control of violence can be done effectively, and how it helps the state to achieve what it wants without facing the worst of the consequences.

HZ: You argue that one of the major benefits for the state in hiring thugs is its plausible deniability. However, it seems obvious enough that these thugs are sent by local authorities to do the 'dirty jobs', and your interviewees also appear to have no doubt about who is behind the thugs. In this case, hiring thugs is highly risky for the state, as the illegitimate nature of the thuggish behaviour discredits the state. In fact, I wonder whether the principal–agent problem is not just between the state and the thugs-for-hire, but first and foremost also between the state and the local authorities: it is the anticipated lucrativeness of land redevelopment that incentivises local authorities to outsource violence and bypass formal procedures, despite the potential detriment to the state. In this sense, the root cause of such thug-hiring might be less about the fiscal deficit of the local governments, as you pointed to, and more about the lack of effective institutions to control the state's local agents?

LO: If you were to trace the principal–agent chain to its starting point, yes, it goes back to the central government that delegates revenue collection and land and property development to local governments, and then local governments outsourcing repression to the thugs-for-hire and brokers I discuss in the book. However,

the nature of the first principal–agent relationship is quite distinct from the second. The first is about unfunded mandates (the central government mandating local authorities to do a lot more than their resources allow for), and the central government encouraging local officials to promote economic growth to the exclusion of almost everything else, even if they infringe on citizens' rights and create governance problems. In essence, my book exposes the core of the problems with the 'China Model of Development'—that is, that the state has been pursuing growth (in this case, urbanisation-driven growth) at the expense of citizens' rights.

HZ: It became clear in recent years that a lot of collusion was taking place between local authorities and criminal groups, to the extent that President Xi Jinping had to launch the *Saohei* (扫黑, literally 'Sweeping the Black') campaign to purge them, which demonstrates the existence of the thugs-for-hire phenomenon you describe in the book. But is this campaign addressing the core of the problem?

LO: In some ways, Xi Jinping's *Saohei* campaign vindicates my argument about the prevalence of thugs-for-hire in China [see Ong 2021]. When I first told Western scholars (and even Chinese scholars) about it, they would look at me in disbelief, suggesting I was out of my mind. 'This is China after all, how could the strong Chinese Communist Party-State allow this to happen', was the common reaction I received. A decade on, some of these thugs-for-hire or low-level violent actors had become more sophisticated and transformed into organised mafias. The *Saohei* campaign was aimed at rooting out all the 'black society' (黑社会) who collude with local officials and the police. Thugs-for-hire sit at the very bottom of those being targeted by the campaign because of the low level of violence they deploy, and their lack of organisation, and general impermanence.

However, I am sceptical about whether the *Saohei* campaign, despite the high degree of political prominence attached to it, will successfully root out the 'black society'. As empirical evidence from historical China and elsewhere such as Taiwan has suggested, gangsters and mafias often seek shelter by turning themselves into legitimate private companies when times are bad. But they will stage a comeback when the environment becomes conducive for them to thrive again. In Taiwan, this transformation is quipped as 'bleaching' (漂白).

HZ: You identified three types of brokers: political, social, and economic. Political brokers, such as the cadres of urban residents' committees (居委会) or 'grid workers' (网格员), are probably the most visible ones and therefore they receive the most attention from scholars and journalists. However, I find the social brokers most fascinating. According to your conceptualisation, social brokers are those who leverage their social capital derived from long-term community service or simply by virtue of their familiarity with the community

to persuade citizens on behalf of the state. These brokers include those who are not in any official position but are involved in community governance with the belief they are contributing to the public good. The most iconic image of social brokers may be the elders wearing red armbands patrolling communities. You implied a certain level of voluntarism among the social brokers, and yet you also pointed out that some of them were motivated by material rewards or by the desire for power and relevance. So, the question is: How are the social brokers usually activated? What is the institutional infrastructure for this type of 'infrastructural power'?

LO: Volunteerism has historical roots in China. In the Maoist years, the state mobilised volunteers—or more commonly known as 'activists' (积极分子) at that time—with Maoist ideology. Maoism and its propagandised belief of 'serving the people' (为人民服务) were sufficient to mobilise volunteers to conduct a range of activities, including investing hard labour in paddy fields, and mobilising the communities to devote themselves to Maoist pursuits. Volunteerism in pursuit of perceived public interests still has some, but a lesser, degree of traction in Chinese society today. Local authorities still regularly mobilise volunteers, such as 'Chaoyang Aunties' (朝阳大妈), to patrol alleyways to sniff out thieves and suspicious people. But, in the context of housing demolition, where families' most important asset—housing—is at stake, the state would need to give 'carrots' to incentivise the volunteers to get them to mobilise the masses. Ideology on its own is no longer sufficient. In Chapter Six, I gave the example of the Self-Reform Committees (自改委) pioneered by the Chengdu Government that decentralise demolition work to the community itself. Some selected families were given carrots in the form of early bird bonuses to sign consent papers. Once they successfully persuaded other families in the community to sign on, they would be rewarded further. These families were motivated by material rewards as well as volunteerism to the extent they believed the demolition and refurbishment of old neighbourhoods were good for the community.

HZ: The economic brokers, on the other hand, exploit the information asymmetry between the state and society. Examples of this group include professional demolition brokers, lawyers, and former court officials who know how to navigate the space and secure support from key officials, which they provide as a 'service' to citizens without such access. It seems their roles are quite ambivalent—not only can they be used to help the state 'buy out' recalcitrant citizens, but also they may assist with bribing officials to reap undue benefits for citizens. Is Xi Jinping's anticorruption campaign reducing the space for economic brokers?

LO: The functions of economic brokers are facilitated by the suite of 'services' they offer, such as fake marriage certificates, to increase the entitlements for their clients. For instance, couples may get a divorce because two single individuals may end up getting higher compensation than a couple does. This is a well-known phenom-

enon; as I have been told, districts undergoing demolition typically see higher divorce rates than other neighbourhoods. Production of the certification will have to involve collusion with officials from different government agencies. In Chapter Six, I detailed how an economic broker—the so-called *huangniu* (黄牛)—had to secure the cooperation of at least six different parties or government agencies to pull off the scheme. Xi Jinping's anticorruption campaign has no doubt made it more challenging for sophisticated corruption schemes to take place because each party involved is taking on increased risks of being caught and punished by the government.

HZ: You develop an interesting concept of persuasion, or emotional mobilisation, which is rooted in the Maoist tradition. A related debate has surrounded how we should understand the seemingly high support among Chinese citizens of the Party-State; are they 'brainwashed' (which implies that citizens' minds could be changed if they were given different information) or do they fundamentally identify with the political system? With your insight on persuasion, how would you respond to that debate?

LO: I argue that persuasion works rather well in the empirical context I studied because it is underpinned by morality and lubricated by social capital. Social brokers invoke principles of morality—such as filial piety, sacrificing oneself for the family, and considering the interests of the larger community—to persuade the recalcitrant to give in. They also draw on their 'thick relationship' or years of neighbourly relations or friendship with the subjects to get them to consent to government demands. Thus, the recalcitrant in my studies were persuaded not necessarily because they believed in the state (though that's how persuasion traditionally worked in the Maoist context). Rather, they bought into the moral obligations and were bounded by social capital with the community members with whom they share the common fate of demolition and relocation.

HZ: You make it clear in the book that the use of thugs-for-hire and various brokers is not limited to authoritarian regimes. Democracies similarly outsource violence, as seen in the US Government's contracting with private security companies in counterterrorism and post-authoritarian South Korea's hiring of professional eviction services. It can also be expected that democratic states employ political, social, and economic brokers in their interactions with citizens. It seems, ultimately, the distinction of regime type matters less for state behaviour, because they all try to do similar things—which sometimes becomes grounds for 'whataboutist' arguments—but you also show that the key difference is how much capacity civil society is allowed to grow as a counterbalance to the state. What are your thoughts on how we should understand such phenomena across regime types?

LO: Several factors are at work here. Even though democracies also outsource violence to nonstate actors to get 'dirty jobs' done, they will have to regularly face a free (or freer) media and civil society that

act as checks-and-balances against abusive behaviour that infringes citizens' rights. The other important factor for thugs-for-hire to work effectively is state capacity. The state that hires thugs must be able to render the agents under tight control. Otherwise, agency problems, such as undisciplined use of violence, will become prevalent, with excessive violence resulting in severe casualties. When these problems happen, thugs-for-hire can backfire, denying the hiring authority plausible deniability. Worse still, it can create backlash. In Chapter Four, I present a few case studies from Zhengzhou and Kunming that demonstrate exactly this. In these rare instances, local leaders were punished by the party by being removed from their positions, usually in the name of taking bribes, but really for the excessive violence in demolition projects that were committed by violent agents they hired to get the job done.

I do not believe my arguments are a case of whataboutism. An analogy is all governments—democracies and nondemocracies alike—are guilty of human rights violations, but infringement of rights happens to *varying* degrees in different polities. And just because they also happen in a democracy, it does not make it right or justifiable. When the abuses of Abu Ghraib's prisoners were exposed several years ago, the George W. Bush administration was under severe pressure to be made accountable for what they had done.

Meanwhile, for social brokers to function effectively, they should believe that what they do is contributing to society's greater good. That is more culture-specific, though not necessarily exclusive to the Confucian traditions. It is also increasingly common that social brokers are mobilised by material incentives, in which case the fundamental belief of 'serving the people' becomes less relevant.

HZ: In the book, you briefly touch on how these mechanisms have been employed in China's counter-Covid measures. When you were writing the book, it appeared that China was largely successful in its pandemic control, which your analysis of how brokers strengthen the state's capacity in mass mobilisation helps to explain. Looking at the extreme lockdown measures and chaos in Shanghai and other Chinese cities from the vantage point of the northern spring of 2022, do you have any updates regarding how we should understand the strength or weakness of China's state capacity?

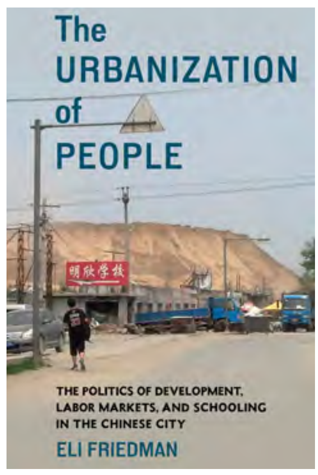
LO: China's Covid policies have been rather successful until the recent Shanghai lockdown, which is partly attributable to the high transmissibility of the Omicron variant that seemingly renders lockdown futile. Since the onset of the pandemic, social brokers or volunteers have played an outsized role in making the government's lockdown policies work. Residents' committees (which I include among the 'political brokers' mentioned above) with their limited manpower simply lack the capacity to cope with all the community's needs like food delivery, Covid testing, caring for the elderly, etcetera. A range of volunteers have risen to the challenge. Those

who draw on their social capital—whom I call 'social brokers' in the book—to help their housing blocks bulk-buy food and other essential items have been keeping most of the Shanghainese fed over the past month of lockdown. Meanwhile, the brokers who are mobilised by the government to implement government policies have faced pushback. As I have argued, among all the different broker types, social brokers are the most effective at gaining compliance from the society. Shanghai's lockdown experience has shown that social brokers or volunteers who exist in their purest form—that is, societal actors who are autonomous of the state—are really the ones helping the people fend off the worst of the crisis.

HZ: Your book draws on a decade of rich ethnographic research in China, and you end it on a sombre note, reflecting on the increasing difficulty of conducting fieldwork in China. Given this situation, do you have any advice to younger researchers looking to study Chinese politics?

LO: I believe China studies is undergoing a structural shift under Xi Jinping's rule. Our primary data source—that is, the field—has been closed off, more or less. Covid has also exacerbated the lack of access to the field. Media in China and Hong Kong (which used to be a beacon of human rights studies in China) is increasingly censored. Robust research ultimately must rely on accurate data; if we don't have data, how do we produce good research? Some scholars are increasingly reliant on open-sourced data. I think they remain open-sourced for a reason. In other words, we might be introducing systematic bias into our research in ways we are not aware of. It is a big question China scholars must grapple with—and a conversation for another occasion. ■

CONVERSATIONS



The Urbanization of People: The Politics of Development, Labor Markets, and Schooling in the Chinese City (Columbia University Press, 2022)

The Urbanisation of People

A Conversation with Eli Friedman

Ivan FRANCESCHINI and Eli FRIEDMAN

In his new book, *The Urbanization of People: The Politics of Development, Labor Markets, and Schooling in the Chinese City* (Columbia University Press, 2022), Eli Friedman offers a novel take on China's handling of internal migration through the perspective of migrant workers' children. Through ethnographic research and hundreds of in-depth interviews, he shows how the Chinese authorities in urban areas have been providing quality public education to the children of those nonlocals who already have high levels of economic and cultural capital, while leaving those considered 'useless' to fend for themselves in precarious, substandard private schools that are occasionally subject to forced demolition. In this conversation, he discusses the implications of his research for our understanding of the development trajectory of China and its workers.

Ivan Franceschini: Like many other scholars in Chinese labour studies, in your previous work, you mostly researched the manufacturing sector. In this book, you instead focus on schools for migrant children. Can you tell us a bit about these schools and why you chose this topic?

Eli Friedman: My interest in migrant schools grew organically out of my earlier research on labour politics. In my interviews with rural-to-urban migrants about their experiences in the workplace, I found that they were often greatly concerned with their children's education in the city. This was becoming an increasingly important issue in the late 2000s as the workforce began ageing and more migrants were refusing to go back to the countryside, as had been the norm in years prior.

While I understood that migrant schools were a sociologically and politically important site for understanding working-class life, I initially was thinking of this project as squarely within labour studies. The first research I did focused on working conditions for teachers in the schools (this empirical work is now one of the book's chapters). But I continually found that the kinds of problems teachers in migrant schools faced could not be explained simply within a labour – capital framework. As reproductive workers, it was impossible for me to separate teachers' experiences from the social situation of their students. All the dislocations and stresses

that students faced as the children of working-class migrants were immediately reflected in the classroom. The thing that really brought this home for me was that an almost universal workplace grievance for teachers was the *uneven abilities* of their students. Parents' extreme precarity in both labour and housing markets led to this perpetual churn of children in and out of the schools and establishing any kind of stability was nearly impossible for the teachers. This made me realise that I needed to have an analysis of what was happening with the broader urbanisation process to account for teachers' experiences.

As for the schools, I was pretty taken aback at how bad the conditions were when I first visited. By the early 2010s, Beijing had many of the hallmarks of a big city in a developed country. But out on the periphery, these decrepit and severely under-resourced schools were a reminder of the poverty and exploitation that undergird the capital city's fabulous wealth. Nonlocals coming into Beijing are not categorically excluded from the public schools, and anyone who can send their children there will do so. But the systems of evaluation that public schools use in granting admission favour the wealthiest and best-educated migrants. The consequence of this is that migrant schools are left to serve the poor and working-class students. Since the schools do not receive public subsidies—and in Beijing most of them are completely unlicensed—they are dependent on charging for tuition. This means that the schools are on shoestring budgets, with very poor infrastructure and extremely low wages for their staff. In the book, I dive into some of the diversity, and there are some schools that have been able to secure funding from foundations. Migrant schools in Beijing are, overall, significantly worse than in other megacities like Shanghai and Guangzhou, where the state provides some subsidies. But across the board it is apparent that the privatised migrant schools are way behind their public counterparts. This is not to denigrate the often-heroic efforts of teachers and parents, but the institutional support is simply not there to deliver quality education.

IF: In the summer of 2011, just weeks before the beginning of the school year, it was widely reported that the municipal government in Beijing had launched an offensive against migrant workers and their children by ordering the demolition of at least two dozen migrant schools. Safety was the excuse the authorities adopted at the time. Towards the end of 2017, Beijing used a fire in a building inhabited by migrants as a pretext to launch a mass eviction on the grounds that migrant dwellings were not safe. What was the real rationale behind these actions? Can Beijing be considered representative of broader trends in China when it comes to its treatment of its migrant population?

EF: Certainly, the explanation that the demolitions were to ensure safety does not hold up to scrutiny, as the people impacted by the mass demolitions generally ended up in similarly poorly constructed

buildings. And the 2017 evictions exposed tens of thousands of people to extreme vulnerability, as they were rendered homeless amid the cold of November in Beijing.

We can consider two more plausible explanations. One is an 'accumulation by dispossession' argument that the state wanted to redevelop the land and put it to more profitable uses. The other possibility is that it is a nativist desire to expel populations deemed undesirable. In fact, my argument is that *both* the economic and the political pressures were pushing in the same direction, and increasingly so, in the 2010s. Economically, this is a period when real estate comes to play an increasingly important role in the city's economy. The outward expansion of the city creates opportunities for officials to cash in by removing relatively unprofitable activities such as migrant schools and informal housing and building high-rise apartments, malls, etcetera. So, we see an ongoing spatial peripheralisation of 'low-end' economic activity including recycling, warehousing, and labour-intensive manufacturing, all of which employ migrants.

At the same time, however, the municipal government came under incredible pressure from the central government to reduce population growth. The state has long been fearful that overpopulation would lead to social and political chaos, and this anxiety is particularly pronounced in Beijing. The government began to advocate moving 'non-capital functions' to Hebei—an impulse that got Xi Jinping's imprimatur with the Beijing–Tianjin–Hebei integration plan. In 2014, the central government said that megacities like Beijing had to 'strictly control' population growth, while in 2017 they set a population 'red line' of 23 million. Street-level officials received quotas for population reduction and migrants were the easiest targets for ejection. And all of this was in fact quite effective; the city's population began to shrink in 2017.

Beijing is definitely not representative in terms of its treatment of migrants. Particularly places like Guangzhou and Shenzhen that are relatively dependent on labour-intensive industries have taken a more lenient attitude. This is not to say migrants receive adequate schooling and housing, but rather that the government is more willing to let them stay and figure out their social reproduction via market mechanisms. It is important to understand the situation for migrants in Beijing not just comparatively but relationally as well. The 2014 national urbanisation plan makes it very clear that they want a redistribution of population away from the megacities and into small and medium-sized cities. It is indeed easier for rural migrants to get household registration (户口, *hukou*) and establish permanent residence in these smaller cities, but that is also because the basket of publicly provided goods is far inferior to what you get in the megacities. So, folks might be allowed to settle down in these places, but the kinds of schools and hospitals they can access will be a far cry from what the citizens of Beijing have. A somewhat

oversimplified but more or less accurate way to think about this is that they want 'high-end people' (高端人口) in high-end cities and 'low-end people' (低端人口) in low-end places. It's important to understand Beijing as occupying the apex of this socio-spatial hierarchy, and the state wants to ensure that only a select few are admitted to that apex.

IF: In the book, you engage with scholarship not only in labour studies but also, more importantly, in urbanisation studies. In the process, you coin a new concept: 'just-in-time urbanisation'. Can you please explain what you mean by this term, how it applies to the Chinese context, and its global implications?

EF: The central question in the book is to understand how megacities manage flows of people. The title is a subtle reference to and inversion of David Harvey's *The Urbanization of Capital* (1985). Rather than departing from the perspective of capital, I wanted to understand how people—not simply as workers, but as full social beings—are urbanised, in which spaces, and to what effect. The phenomenon of Chinese cities allowing migrant workers in but denying them access to social reproduction, especially education, is in my view the central social contradiction in China's urbanisation process.

To study this empirically, I analysed policies in Beijing and other cities to try to understand how they were regulating both access to *hukou* as well as admission to public schools for nonlocal *hukou*-holders. I was struck by how precise these plans are in trying to extend social services only to those people whom city officials imagine will assist in achieving developmental objectives. The clearest example is the point-based *hukou* admissions (积分入户), which grant more points to applicants for having higher levels of education, for paying more into the local tax base, and for purchasing property locally. In some cities, they make a list each year of the kinds of job skills that are in high demand and people with these skills can accumulate more points. In essence, I was seeing that the wealthy megacities were not concerned with excluding migrants in general, but rather they were using these administrative arrangements to try to pull in very specific kinds of workers. And cities could dangle the carrot of access to schooling and other social services to appeal to these so-called human talents (人才).

In reading through these documents and then talking to migrant workers about their efforts to enrol their children in public schools, it struck me how the state was treating them as these depersonalised bearers of labour power, as if they were just any other factor of production and their movement could be rationally coordinated as such. Drawing on my background in labour studies, this evoked some of the dynamics associated with 'just-in-time' production, but instead of auto parts, I was looking at labour.

According to Taiichi Ohno, the person most responsible for developing just-in-time principles at Toyota, the essence of just-in-time is to deliver parts in just the right quantities and qualities and at just the right time, all to reduce *waste*. A key reasoning of this approach is to let market demand 'pull' items through the production process to avoid overproduction, while allowing assembly plants to cut down on warehousing, which wastes space and labour. The concept is a bit more complex than this, but these key elements captured the essence of what I was seeing in the megacities' efforts to regulate human movement. The array of evaluative metrics obstructing working-class migrants' access to schooling and other social services are aimed at allowing only certain kinds of workers to settle down in the city. These metrics can (and do) change regularly to reflect the aspirations of the urban state, allowing them to regulate human movement in a dynamic and technocratic manner. Everyone who is deemed superfluous to local labour market demands is denied access to nominally public goods, and then subjected to expulsionary pressures. Finally, 'warehousing' here refers to those moments when workers are not productive for the economy, including during childhood and retirement, as well as when they might be sick or disabled. The city is not on the hook for maintaining life during any of these 'waste moments'; they can pull in labour from the hinterland 'just-in-time' for it to be deployed at maximum efficacy and discard it when no longer needed.

It's worth noting that this vision is utopian, in that it can never actually be achieved as people constantly move to places where they aren't supposed to be. And in fact, if these cities' very elite-oriented labour market policies were realised, they would deprive themselves of all the highly exploited labour that actually makes the cities run. Most of my ethnographic and interview research is focused on understanding the experiences of these populations living out of place.

Although I've developed this concept for thinking specifically about China's megacities, it has applicability in different national settings and at different scales. Canada innovated point-based evaluations for immigrants, and the effect is quite similar. The United States and most other Western countries also have visas for immigrants with certain kinds of labour market skills. So, the basic idea that a polity will try to pull in some specific types of workers and only in limited quantities in response to perceived needs in the labour market is by no means unique to China.

When we turn to the question of scale, however, China is somewhat unique in that these kinds of just-in-time labour market approaches are deployed at the level of the city. The Chinese state has a much greater capacity to control the internal movement of its citizenry than is true for just about any other country, and the key mechanism they have for achieving this is fixing provision of state-subsidised social reproduction to specific locales. Just as

Canada or the United States might pull exceptional workers from Latin America, Africa, and Asia, Chinese megacities pull from the domestic hinterland. In other words, the operation of just-in-time principles can be observed at the urban, regional, national, and transnational scales. And indeed, I think of the regulatory mechanisms and expulsions of migrants in Chinese cities as very much in line with the kinds of bordering practices we see in Euro-America deployed against international migrants.

IF: Several years ago, some scholars compared the household registration system (*hukou*) in China to the apartheid regime in South Africa. Since then, the media has frequently reported on *hukou* reforms, sometimes even going as far as to triumphantly hail the end of the system (at least in certain areas). What is your assessment of these policy changes? And how have they affected migrant children?

EF: There have been real changes in terms of how *hukou* operates and it is indeed less restrictive than in the 1990s, when you had police in cities detaining and deporting rural migrants. Many places have relaxed restrictions on transferring to urban *hukou*, so there is some reason for optimism.

If we dig a little deeper though, there are ongoing problems. Over the past generation, we've seen that growing market-based forms of inequality in China in fact are predicated on and continue to interact with *hukou*-based forms of inequality. Much as with arguments about racial capitalism in other contexts, we see that capital has seized upon pre-capitalist forms of social hierarchy—that is, *hukou*—and that this relatively disposable portion of the population can then be subjected to forms of super-exploitation and dispossession that would be unacceptable for elites. A simplified way to think about this is that in China it is space rather than race that is the key social division undergirding capitalist exploitation.

If we view *hukou* and class as co-constitutive then there is not much cause for optimism. Because what we've seen with all the *hukou* reforms of recent years is that there is a relaxation in transferring rural to urban residency but only in the small and medium-sized cities. Often people are unwilling to transfer to urban *hukou* because it means giving up their land while receiving access to a thin set of social goods in these smaller cities. The regional fiscal disparities in China are quite shocking and the largest cities continue to monopolise the best schools, hospitals, and social services. The state is telling peasants and their children they can become urban citizens, but only in places with subpar welfare. When we situate the relative diminution of *hukou* within the country's wildly unequal economic geography and class structure, there is little reason to hope this marginal relaxation in the citizenship regime will accomplish much with respect to reducing class and social inequalities. In fact, given that the best public schools in places like Beijing and Shanghai are

reserved for those people with already high levels of education and wealth, there is a good possibility that the reform process will only enhance class inequality.

IF: What lies in store for migrant children's education in China? Will the kind of schools you discuss continue to play a role or will these children be integrated into the public education system?

EF: The central government's stated aim for the past 20 years has been for migrant children to be primarily enrolled in public schools and for the associated expenses to be primarily borne by receiving areas. In Beijing and other cities, official numbers have reflected an increasing share of the nonlocal population being enrolled in public schools. We shouldn't take official statistics at face value, as it is those people in the most informal situations who are also least likely to be counted. Nonetheless, it's safe to assume that a larger share of migrant children in Beijing and elsewhere will be enrolled in public schools.

But we need to interrogate that general trend to fully understand what's happening with respect to educational inequality. The first thing to note is that this shift toward more public-school enrolment in Beijing comes after years of expelling hundreds of thousands of children and their parents from the city and sending them back to the drastically underfunded rural education system.

The second point is that we see large cities moving toward a system where access to quality education is increasingly mediated by the real estate market. Public schools have had to adopt catchment-based enrolment, which in turn has resulted in rapidly increasing real estate prices in the areas around elite public schools (and many schools will only admit children of households that own rather than rent housing). This enhanced effect for class, however, still interacts with the state's socialist forms of social hierarchy, as nonlocal *hukou*-holders are largely excluded from obtaining mortgages. And we see elite public schools requiring not only housing within their catchment areas, but also establishing their own residency requirements.

Finally, outside Beijing, many cities (especially those in Guangdong) have been much more relaxed about licensing migrant schools and leaving the question of education up to the market. The term 'migrant school' (打工子弟学校) evokes a working-class student body, but in fact, many such schools have evolved to serve a high-income, nonlocal clientele. So, migrant children in these cities aren't subjected to the coercive ejection we saw in Beijing, but their ability to secure education increasingly maps on to their parents' financial resources.

While *hukou* is not going away, the bases of educational and other forms of inequality are shifting as the old socio-spatial hierarchy is interacting with and solidifying new class hierarchies. It's become increasingly clear that abolishing *hukou* would, at this point, only result in people being released into a market with wildly unequal resources. If Chinese society is not going to continue to ossify into rigid forms of inequality and domination then we'll need to see radical interventions targeted at both *hukou* and wealth distribution. ■

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China Labour Bulletin was established in 1994 in Hong Kong to promote and defend workers' rights in China. CLB recognises that in the continuing struggle for decent pay, decent work, dignity, and rights, China's workers need a union that can represent and defend their interests in collective bargaining with their employer. CLB seeks to hold the All-China Federation of Trade Unions accountable to its members, empower workers to meaningfully participate in the union and make it their own, and thereby transform the union to a genuinely democratic and worker-centred institution.

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Lockdown Sound Diaries: Podcasting and Affective Listening in the Shanghai Lockdown (JING WANG)

Podcast Entries

The podcasts are listed in the order of their appearance in this article. Audio files, show notes, and other relevant information are stored in the author's archive.

SJSW. 'Pandemic Diary 1: Bird Singing Has Never Been So Clear, I Think Humanity Is Doomed.' 1:19:29, 3 April 2022.

403S. 'Frontline Volunteers Teared Up to Tell the Disruption and Reconstruction of Everyday Life Norm during the Pandemic.' 0:52:27, 10 April 2022.

MRZL. 'How Do We Feed Ourselves during the Pandemic.' 0:48:40, 27 March 2022.

MRZL. 'During the Pandemic, How Do Three Single Young People Feed Themselves.' 0:35:42, 12 April 2022.

FHLP. 'During One Month of Pandemic in Shanghai, What Have We Experienced So Far.' 1:53:09, 3 April 2022.

ZDJD. 'Lockdown Day 22, Food Makes Us Reconnect.' 0:51:43, 3 April 2022.

JZMM. 'During Shanghai Lockdown, Both of Us Were in Hot Search.' 1:05:20, 12 April 2022.

MJKT. 'You Can Only Understand How Wonderful [*Wasai*] It Is to Live Together in a Rented Apartment with Three Women.' 0:41:45, 6 April 2022.

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