A Revolution Domesticated:

Negotiating Family Life in Urban China, 1959-1984

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Abstract

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Based on newfound family letters, factory archives, oral history, and official publications in Shanghai and other Chinese cities, this dissertation examines how urban Chinese families weathered the economic aftermath of the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution by negotiating with the austerity measures, official ideology, and street-level bureaucracy. Such multivalent negotiations gave rise to *xiaokang*, a "Confucianized" doctrine of depoliticized economic development, providing a durable basis for socialist China's integration with the capitalist world order. A Shanghai-focused history of urban household economy and grassroots ideology in socialist China, this dissertation explains how urban families shaped modern China's state-society dynamics and charted China's unique transition away from Communism.

Urban families' experiences in the 1960s and 1970s China were profoundly shaped by "revolutionary austerity", characterized by ideological mobilization of urban families to bear the costs of Mao's continuous revolution. By separating millions of teenagers from their families, the send-down youths movement (1968-1980) marked the austerity's apex. Instead of continuing the revolution, the send-down youths movement and other revolutionary austerity measures transformed urban families into smaller, more efficient, and depoliticized economic units. Once the ideologically disillusioned and economically strained sent-down youths negotiated the difficult bureaucratic terrain to achieve family reunion, they reinvested the virtue of sacrifice to the "possessive vision" of family life and the cultivation of their single child. By examining eight

collections of Mao-era family letters in the context of larger historical processes, this dissertation demonstrates a significant shift in the late Maoist household economy and grassroots sentiments undergirding China's *xiaokang* ideology.

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Introduction

Between the Great Leap Forward and the Deng Xiaoping reform, urban China experienced a gradual decline in the average wage, a stagnant supply of new jobs, and a system of drastic population control. Moreover, most urban families in the big cities endured a forced family separation, as the state sent millions of youths to the countryside between 1968 and 1979. During these extraordinary years of austerity, families weathered the crisis partly by negotiating with the economic hardship, partly by substituting the official ideology with a new vision for the future. By the late 1970s, these multivalent negotiations had brought about a conservative turn in grassroots ideology, a widespread urge for improved living standards, and a pattern of family-state relations different from the radical politicization of Eastern European societies.[1]

The new vision for the future is known as *xiaokang*. In December 1979, Deng Xiaoping officially announced to the world that the goal of the Chinese Communist Party for the millennium was no longer Communism but the Confucian-coded ideal of *xiaokang* (literally, "small comfort"), which connotes "family welfare." As a contemporary political buzzword, *xiaokang* harks back to the Confucian classics of the Warring States, but ordinary Chinese need little interpretation to understand it as a depoliticized, family-centered social order. By evoking "*xiaokang zhijia*" (a family of comfortable means), Deng echoes a predominant sentiment among the urban residents who had endured two decades of economic hardship under the banner of revolutionary mobilization. The rise of *xiaokang* marked a turn away from the egalitarian world *datong* (literally,

[1] Zsombor Rajkai, "Introduction," in Zsombor Rajkai ed., *Family and Social Change in Socialist and Post-socialist Societies: Change and Continuity in Eastern Europe and East Asia*, Leiden: Brill, 2014, pp. 16-18

"grand harmony") as an unpractical utopia. The grand vision of a Communist world which Chairman Mao had once inspired finally wounded down and gave away to a million small dreams of domestic happiness.

In urban China, the *xiaokang* vision was a bottom-up response to two decades of economic hardship and political mobilization culminated in the sent-down youths movement. Along with other draconian measures to reduce state financial burdens in the late Maoist[2] period, the sent-down youths movement epitomized an unsustainable sacrifice of urban families for the state's ideological and strategic interests. By separating millions of teenagers from their families, the decade-long mobilization inadvertently transformed urban families into smaller, economically more viable, and politically disenchanted social units. As the politically disillusioned and financially strained revolutionary youths returned to the city and started their own families, they moved away from Communist ideology and idealized family life. The shift of urban sentiment compelled the Party-state to abandon Communist goals and build a conservative political order centered on economic development. The new family-based political order paves the way for China's neoliberal transition after the death of Mao.

The transformations in Chinese family-state relations in late Maoist China contributed to a global trend in which similar developments worldwide heralded in a conservative, neoliberal shift in economic and political life across the globe. Propagated by Asia's elites in the last years of the Cold War, the so-called Asian Values with the family as the core championed the family as the

[2] I borrow here Chris Bramall's periodization of late Maoism (1963-1978) based on the nature of China's political economic system. I will use a slightly adapted version of "late Maoism" to refer to the period after the Great Leap Forward and the *de facto* end of the sent-down movement (1962-1979). C.f. Chris Bramall, *Chinese Economic Development*, London: Taylor & Francis, 2008, p. 25

foundation of a well-governed, developmental society.[3] In a striking distant parallel to post-revolutionary China, the New Conservatives in the United States reinvented family responsibility in the Poor Law tradition and stalled welfare state reforms in the aftermath of the stagflation in the 1970s. The family became an alternative to the post-war welfare state, while household debt became the foundation of a new socioeconomic order.[4] In comparison, the uniqueness of the *xiaokang* lies in its revolutionary rather than conservative origins. The family-state dynamics that helped to end the Communist Revolution resided at the very core of the revolutionary experience.

Revolutionary Austerity and the Decline of Communism

A key theme of this dissertation is the end of Communism. As an exploration into the decline of Chinese Communism in the late Maoist years, this dissertation seeks to transcend the existing historical narratives on the end of Communist China through the experience of ordinary urban residents in the 1960s and 1970s by conceptualizing the post-Great Leap Forward political economy as "revolutionary austerity." Building on new sources and literature on late Mao China, this dissertation focuses on the implementation, impacts, and subversion of the Yan'an tradition of politicized austerity as it unfolded in late Maoist Shanghai.

In modern Chinese history, the decline of Chinese Communism in the late 1970s has usually been framed as the failure of the Cultural Revolution and China's changing strategies in the Cold War. The two dominant approaches to contemporary Chinese history, focused on the Cultural Revolution and the Cold War respectively, both root China's post-Mao transformations in the

[3] Jonathan Rigg, *Challenging Southeast Asian Development: The Shadows of Success,* London: Routledge, pp. 129-138.

[4] Melinda Cooper, *Family Values: Between Neoliberalism and the New Social Conservative*, Princeton, N.J.: Zone Books, pp. 311-316

structures and policies of the Maoist state, especially critical political events and processes in the mid-1960s.

The first approach centers on the politics of the Cultural Revolution and its aftermath. Most authors focus on the Cultural Revolution. Maurice Meisner's inquiry into contemporary Chinese history politics finds that the greatest failure of the Cultural Revolution was its failure to develop bottom-up, democratic political institutions for the working mass.[5]. In Wu Yiching's definitive work on the radical possibilities of the Cultural Revolution and its long-term aftermath, the Dengist restoration marked the ultimate failure of Mao's continuous revolution against revisionism within and institutionalizing the bureaucratic new class at the commanding height of the Communist Party-state. [6] More recently, Xu Xiaohong argues that China's experience since the 1970s represented a Polanyian "Great Separation" when Mao decided to crack down on the Shanghai worker's rebellion for "economism" in the name of the revolution in 1967. Since the crackdown on economism, bottom-up mass politics such as strikes were no longer viable as a legitimate means to achieve economic purposes. In contrast, the de-politicalized economic forces represented by the mythic free-market gained political recognition among the increasingly managerial elites. [7]

Some authors consider the Cultural Revolution from the longer perspective of Chinese Communism. Dirlik Alif conceptualized the Communist Party's turn to the economy as "post-socialism." Socialism became ossified when the Party leadership abandoned class struggles

[5] Maurice Meisner, *Mao's China and After: A History of People's Republic*, New York: Free Press, 2001, pp. 375-376.

[6] Yiching Wu*, The Cultural Revolution at the Margins*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014, pp. 223-225.

[7] Xu Xiaohong, "The Great Separation: The Cultural Revolution and the Political Origins of Contemporary Chinese Capitalism," Unpublished Discussion Paper, University of Michigan, October 2020, pp. 29-30.

favoring depoliticized economic development but retained the socialist state machinery to develop capitalism.[8] Weighing the hefty social and economic costs of Mao's development strategy with its achievements, Andrew Walder's recent history of the Maoist era contextualized the Dengist reform in the socioeconomic crisis of late Maoism. This narrative defined the transition as a response to the challenge of systemic failures in maintaining economic growth and creating social equality. [9] There are also scholars who see Maoist policies during the Cultural Revolution not as a failure but broadly successful attempts of modernization, whose fruits were taken over by the reformers without sufficient acknowledgement.[10]

While scholarship in this field offers a theoretically informed and empirically rich account of the Cultural Revolution, the focus was still on the elites and political movements in its heydays in the 1960s rather than the nitty-gritty of everyday life experience under the revolutionary order in the 1970s. A social history of Shanghai during the Cultural Revolution period, Jin Dalu's history of Shanghai social life shows surprising continuities and perseverance of the "normal" in urban Chinese social life despite political upheavals. While rich and colorful in detail, Jin Dalu's work has not advanced an explicit argument on the everyday life dynamics of the Cultural Revolution.[11] A notable exception is Michel Bonnin's panoramic narrative of the sent-down youths movement. Diverse in sources and broad in scope, *The Lost Generation* weaves the warp of political history

[8] Dirlik Alif*,* "Post-socialism? Reflections on "Socialism with Chinese Characteristics," *Critical Asian Studies,* January 1989, 21(1): pp. 33-44

[9] Andrew Walder, *China under Mao: A Revolution Derailed*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015.

[10] Chris Bramall, *Chinese Economic Development*, London: Taylor & Francis, 2008.

[11] Jin Dalu, *Feichang yu zhengchang: Shanghai wenge shiqi de shehui shenghuo* (Abnormality and Normality: Social Life of Cultural Revolution in Shanghai), Shanghai: Shanghai Lexicography Publishing House, 2011.

with the weft of sent-down youths' experience. However, the narrative still centers on the top-down movement rather than the bottom-up dynamics of social and political changes.[12] Felix Wemheuser's recent survey of Maoist social history likewise successfully weaved a large array of individual actions and motives with the larger political history of late Maoist China to articulate a multivalent narrative of historical agency through the framework of "conflict and change".[13]

The second approach portrays the Cold War as a critical framework to understand the end of Chinese Communism. As Mao mobilized massive resources and human resources to build infrastructure projects given potential military confrontation with the superpowers, urban China in the 1960s and 1970s served as a Cold War home front. This role of urban China as the home front was never subject to close examination since the scholarly interests of Cold War China focused mainly on the interrelations between China's geopolitics and domestic politics, such as the beginning and end of the Cultural Revolution. In the rich and growing literature on the Chinese experience of the Cold War, China features mainly as a pivotal state in the major struggles like the Korean War, the Sino-Soviet conflicts, and the Indochina War. Chinese domestic politics and international strategies were interrelated in a global battle with the Soviet Union and the United States.[14] Most recent works in Cold War China have found exceptional areas in China's Cold War

[12] Michel Bonnin, *Génération perdue. Le Mouvement d'envoi des Jeunes instruits à la Campagne en Chine, 1968-1980,* Paris, Éditions de l'École des Hautes études en Sciences Sociales, 2004.

[13] Felix Wemheuser, *A Social History of Maoist China: Conflict and Change, 1949-1976*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2019.

[14] The classic studies in this rank include Chen Jian. *Mao's China and the Cold War*, Chapel Hill, N.C.: The North Carolina University Press, 2001; Zhang Shu Guang, *Beijing's Economic Statecraft during the Cold War, 1949-1991*, Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 2014; Lorenz M. Lüthi, *The Sino-Soviet Split: Cold War in the Communist World*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2008.

policies, such as Beijing's pragmatic trade policies towards the capitalist world,[15] and local politics in the liminal spaces like Shenzhen[16] as the springboard for China's economic reform and opening.

Scholars of Cold War China have only started to examine how Cold War dynamics reached far beyond state and local politics to the everyday life of urban and even rural families in China, such as Elaine May. Focused on American family life under the Cold War, her work provides a comprehensive assessment of the Cold War on American family life and values.[17]. Among the pioneering works is Michael Szonyi's ethnography of Quemoy and Covell Meyskens' recent work on China's Cold War militarization. As both pieces have demonstrated, the Cold War military standoff fundamentally shaped everyday life in Chinese societies, either on the island society of Quemoi or the inland mountainous steel town of Panzhihua.[18] However, we have yet to study how the militarization and ideological mobilizations of the Cold War impacted the fate of Chinese Communism in the 1970s through the grassroots experience.

Potentially heralding a third approach to the end of Communism, the recent work by Karl Gerth on consumerism in Mao's China examines the post-Mao return of capitalism through the lens of political economy. By unpacking Chinese socialism into various practices of state capitalism, such as state management of consumption and desire for industrialization, Gerth argues

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[15] Jason M. Kelly, *Market Maoism: The Communist Origins of China's Capitalist Ascent,* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2021.

[16] Taomo Zhou, "Leveraging Liminality: The Border Town of Bao'an (Shenzhen) and the Origins of China's Reform and Opening," *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 80, No.2, pp. 337-361.

[17] May Elaine Tyler. *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era*, New York: Basics Books, 2008.

[18] Michael Szonyi, *Cold War Island: Quemoy on the Frontline*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008; Covell Meyskens, *Mao's Third Front: Cold War China's Militarization*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2020.

that the Communist political economy contributes to a resurgence of capitalism in China.[19] Gerth breaks new ground by transcending the "rhetoric" of socialism to focus on economic policies and their outcomes. However, in Mao's China, ideology went well beyond official propaganda and penetrated deeply into the household economy, especially during the austerity years of the 1960s and 1970s. In urban China, the household economy is subject to state consumption management and the ideology of "bourgeois rights," which justifies the freezes and eventual abolishment of wages, the mainstay of urban household income, as a bourgeois institution.

Gerth's analysis focuses on the pre-Cultural Revolution political economy, but the consumer durables boom paradoxically took off during a decade when the dominant ideology championed sacrifice and frugality as both household and public virtues. Indeed, the period between 1968 and 1975 saw both drastic measures like the Send-down Youths Movement and the fastest growth in the sale of the consumer durables nationwide.[20] How can we reconcile these paradoxical trends? To account for the nature of late Maoism and post-Mao transition, we need to bring the ideological dynamics of the Cultural Revolution and the Cold War to bear on the interrelated transformations of the late Maoist political economy and household economy.

While the Cultural Revolution and the Cold War have profoundly shaped family-state relations through politics and ideology, the family-state dynamics in the late Maoist years also need to be understood in a longer historical context of Chinese Communism. In the history of the Chinese Communist Party (the CCP), extreme austerity first became the hallmark economic policy during the Great Production Movement in 1940s Yan'an, when the Party-state faced a dire

[19] Karl Gerth, *Unending Capitalism: How Consumerism Negated China's Communist Revolution*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2020, pp. 229-231.

[20] "Shanghai diyi shangyeju diaochazu diaocha" (Investigations of Shanghai First Commerce Bureau's Investigation Team), January 1976, B123-8-1542, p. 31.

economic and political crisis due to the encirclement of KMT and the Japanese. In response to the extreme conditions, the nascent the CCP fiscal-military state cut down fiscal spending, shrank its budget, and mobilized cadres to work in the rural area. At the same time, Mao also launched the Yan'an Rectification to subject all Party members under political surveillance and ideological purification to oust all political opponents and secure supreme leadership of the Party. The outcome was a firmly established power structure in the Communist Party centered on Mao and his loyalists, which lasted from the crowning moment of Yan'an till his death in 1976.[21]

In the 1960s and 1970s, Mao's bid for a continuous revolution at home and abroad likewise imposed a prolonged austerity on the urban household sector. Faced with domestic economic deprivation and a hostile foreign environment, Mao and his colleagues had a ready-made model from Yan'an days. Drawing on their experiences of the Great Production Movement (1939-1945), revolutionary austerity employed revolutionary rhetoric, role models, disciplines, and rituals to inspire volunteerism and exact economic sacrifice from the urban working class so that the state could implement austerity measures such as lay-off, reduced rations, and production campaigns while accumulating the fund for China's strategic projects, such as Third Front construction. The key difference between the 1940s and 1970s was the scale and the target audience: whereas the Yan'an austerity only extended to a small border region and counted on the volunteerism of the revolutionary youths, its adaptation covered all urban China. It relied on the grassroots support of "educated youths" and their families.

The Yan'an model of politicized austerity reappeared as a *modus operandi* in the 1960s, when a similar constellation of geopolitical, political, and political economy circumstances created

[21] Gao Hua, Guo Jian and Stacey Mosher (trans), *How the Red Sun Rose: The Origin and Development of Yan'an Rectification Campaign*, Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2018, pp. 661-704.

a leadership crisis at the central leadership of the CCP. The failure of the Great Leap Forward and amid the unfolding Sino-Soviet Split in the 1960s, the Chinese posed grave challenges to the Chinese political economy and domestic stability. In response to the multifaceted crisis, the Party revived the Yan'an spirit by calling forth urban residents and educated youths to revive the "Great Production" spirit of self-sacrifice, rustication, and frugal lifestyle.[22]

From the early 1960s to the late 1970s, Chinese cities like Shanghai experienced reduced job offers, frozen wages, forced rustication, and family planning.[23] In the 1960s, these austerity policies were still moderate enough to make room for limited free market and family plots in rural China and guaranteed employment and livelihood in urban China. After the initial chaos of the Cultural Revolution, when violent political struggles brought the radical revolutionaries to the fore, Beijing completely abandoned the practical measures and subjected the household economy to a more rigorous implementation of austerity and egalitarian ideology. China's Cold War with the Soviet Union supplied the ideological and fiscal motivation for the prolonged austerity. While Cultural Revolution and the Cold War remain important as backdrops in the story, the new narratives highlight the need to address China's Communism in a longer historical span and a more bottom-up perspective.

The revolutionary austerity in the 1960s and 1970s made a significant impact on the family. Whereas women born from 1931 to 1933 had 3.2 children, women born between 1950 and 1955 had only 1.1 children. By the late 1970s, when the sent-down youths began to return home in their late twentieth and even early thirtieth, they naturally accepted family planning as a new norm.[24]

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[22] Zhou Haiyan, *Jiyi de zhengzhi* (Politics of Memory), Beijing: Fazhan chubanshe, 2013, pp. 255-294.

[23] See Chapter Two for a systemic description of these policies and their impacts.

[24] Hu Huanyong ed, *Zhongguo Renkou: Shanghai fence* (Chinese Population: Shanghai Volume), Beijing: Zhongguo jing chubanshe, 1987, p.92.

The radical reduction in fertility in the 1960s and 1970s, initially in response to the austerity and inchoate family planning, developed into a trend by 1979, when One Child Policy was formally institutionalized.[25] As a result of the rapid fertility transition, average size of the Shanghai family declined rapidly from the regular size of 4.7 in 1968 to 3.8 in 1978 and 3.0 in 1991.[26]

With fewer children, a lower dependency rate, and higher disposable incomes, Shanghai served as a primary example of China's demographic dividend and population aging in the late 1970s. Urban families could save up for consumer durables and human capital development beyond bare subsistence and reproduction. In the meanwhile, the unsustainable sacrifice for revolutionary austerity led to mass disillusionment among the revolutionary youths by the mid-1970s. Compared with their parents' generation, the youths who came of age in the 1970s were more cynical and less susceptible to revolutionary sacrifice. The revolutionary austerity has made the new urban families to a depoliticized, self-centered pursuit of material comfort and the competitive cultivation of a single child. This new breed of the politically disenchanted but economically agile nuclear family later becomes contemporary China's first-generation middle-class family. The household economic changes in China thus carried much more conservative political consequences than the post-war fertility transition typical to all modern society and especially post-war East Asia.[27]. Whereas other East Asian fertility transitions accompanied both

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[25] For an excellent discussion of family planning as a political economy measure in the context of the austerity policies after the Great Leap Forward, see Tyrene White, *China's Longest Campaign: Birth Planning in the People's Republic of China*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009, pp. 42-68. For a summary of Shanghai's demographic trend in the 1960s and 1970s, refer to Appendix D.

[26] Shanghai Bureau of Statistics and National Bureau of Statistics, Shanghai General Investigative Team, *Shanghai Lishi Tongji ziliao huibian, 1949-2009* (Collected Materials on Shanghai Statistics, 1949-2009), Beijing: Zhongguo Tongji chubanshe, 2009, p.25.

[27] Japan, Taiwan, South Korea, and Singapore experienced a similarly rapid decline in fertility rates and a subsequent demographic dividend from the 1960s to the early 1980s while witnessing democratization rather than the conservative turn of Shanghai and other major Chinese cities. Tomoko Kinugasa,

economic growth and political liberalization, Chinese societies since the 1970s followed a path of economic growth amid radical de-politicization.

Building on both private and government sources, this dissertation studies how urban families accepted, negotiated, and diffused the costs of the revolutionary austerity of the 1960s and 1970s. By highlighting ordinary urban families' everyday experiences and strategies, this dissertation argues that the the long-term revolutionary austerity made the urban households economically active but politically conservative. The changes made the Communist Revolution an unsustainable enterprise but paved the new avenue of authoritarian developmentalism. While the Cultural Revolution failed its promise to challenge the "norm" of power relations, it profoundly transformed the political and economic base of the Communist rule. Through the experience of Shanghai families during the revolutionary austerity, this dissertation identifies an intrinsic connection between changing family life, political economy, and the fate of Chinese Communism.

Rethinking the Family in Modern Chinese History

As a family-centered history of Maoist China, this dissertation is centrally concerned with the socialist transformation of the family. After the Communist takeover of China, the Communist state immediately set out to alienate individual citizens and especially youths from their families so that they can be socialized and mobilized into the idealist project to build a prosperous and egalitarian society through class struggles. According to the socialist formulation, a happy socialist family must be based on "a larger socialist family", namely, a powerful socialist state, which in turn guaranteed better material well-being and more equalized family relations. In the long-term, it will fade away with the final transition to Communism.[28]

"Demographic Dividends," Zhongwei Zhao, Adrian Hayes, ed. *Routledge Handbook of Asian Demography*, London: Routledge, 2018, pp. 456-466.

[28] Wei Keming, *Lun Jiating* (On Families), Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1959, pp. 20-26.

While the Communist Revolution did transform the family in significant ways, it evidently failed to achieve the promised well-being and "the larger socialist family" by the end of Maoist era. Instead of fading away, families have become more attractive and even idolized at least for youths in urban China. What had happened to the ambitious project to transform the family? How did the family figure so prominent in the post-Mao ideological transition? The answers to these critical questions need to start with the historical sources and evolution of family reforms.

In modern Chinese history, the family has demonstrated remarkable resourcefulness and adaptability as a basic social unit during political and economic crises. In her study of the Zhang family of Changzhou, Susan Mann demonstrates how the cultural elites responded with resilience and resourcefulness to reproduce their cultural capital during political tumult and family misfortunes in the nineteenth century.[29] Madeleine Zelin shows that the local entrepreneurial families demonstrated remarkable organizational creativity to meet new economic opportunities afforded by political changes by incorporating non-kin talents and professional managers into the family enterprise.[30] A recent biographical study of an elite Chinese family again vindicates this favorable view of Chinese clans. Focused on the Ye family of Tianjin, Joseph Esherick's family history shows that, while the Ye family members have undergone a multifaceted transformation in their life and career patterns, they managed to reproduce their cultural capital through education from late Qing post-Mao China. [31]

[29] Susan Mann, *The Talented Women of the Zhang Family*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 2007, pp. 188-190.

[30] Madeleine Zelin, *The Merchants of Zigong: Industrial Entrepreneurship in Early Modern China*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2005, pp. 195-201

[31] Joseph Esherick, *Ancestral Leaves: A Family Journey through Chinese History*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, C.A: University of California Press, 2011, pp. 315-317.

Whereas the elite families could rely on their actual or symbolic capital to reproduce their family culturally, low-income families have found their strategies for survival by capitalizing on the informal economy and social networks. Drawing on legal case files and official documents, China historians working on the grassroots identify a transactional nature of family life at the bottom of society. The flexible structures enabled the poor to survive the economic hardship in late Qing and Republican China.[32]. Even during wartime, poor women in Beijing found means to ensure their survival by subverting the rules of the patrilineal family and building flexible intimacy via informal economy and networks. [33] Although such informal, semi-legal tactics hardly reproduced a consistent family tradition, they constituted another face of the Chinese families as transactional and flexible arrangements capable of surviving harsh economic conditions. In contrast to the stereotypical view of Chinese families as "Confucian", the grassroots approaches demonstrate that grassroots Chinese families were like family experience all over the world whose precarious living conditions were defined by capitalist exploitations and failed state[34].

In contrast to family-centered narratives, the literature on the state-led transformation of the families foregrounds the decisive role of intellectual elites and the modern state. Zhao Yanjie's intellectual lineage of anti-traditionalist thoughts among Confucian and modernizing elites in late Qing and early Republican China documented a significant shift in the Chinese intellectual elites'

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[32] C.f. Matthew Sommer, *Polyandry and Wife-selling in Qing Dynasty China*, Oakland, C.A.: University of California Press, 2015, pp. 376-379; Johanna S. Ransmeier, *Sold People: Traffickers and Family Life in North China*, Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press, 2018, pp. 319-321.

[33] Zhao Ma, *Runaway Wives, Urban Crimes, and Survival Tactics in Wartime China*, 1937-1949, Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press, 2015, pp. 319-320.

[34] Human trafficking, sometimes involving voluntary and involuntary participation of family members, has always been rampant in many parts of the world and lately gained a global prominence in the age of globalization, especially in Southeast Asia and Eastern Europe. Louise Shelley, *Human Trafficking: A Global Perspective*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010, pp. 15-22.

vision of the ideal family bent to build a modern state. [35] Susan Glasser traces the origins of the small family (*xiao jiating*) to a group of nationalist reformers who wanted to modernize the Chinese state by restructuring the stereotypical traditional corporate lineage family[36] into the "modern" nuclear family[37]. The Communists merely took over this reformist project and institutionalized the state domination over the individuals through the smaller conjugal family. In the latest contribution to this strain of scholarship, Mara Yue Du highlights in her forthcoming book that the Chinese state had always regarded the legal regulation of family relations as the foundation of state power. Making a powerful Chinese state rested on the legal reconfiguration of filial sons and daughters into patriotic citizens and thus created an equal legal status between the parents and the children.[38]

Scholars of contemporary China have found that, while the Party-state fundamentally shaped family life after its radical vision, they have never achieved an egalitarian society, not to mention a Communist society without the family. As a powerful force of social transformation, the Communist revolutionaries surpassed the ambitions of previous modernizing elites by calling for

[35] Zhao Yanjie, *Jiating Geming: Qingmo Minchu dushuren de chongjing* (Family Revolution: The Visions of the Scholarly Elites in Late Qing and Early Republican China), Beijing: Social Science Academy Press, 2020.

[36] In fact, the stereotypical Confucian family, the large multigenerational corporate family, was a rarity even in late imperial China. They were the prime targets of the reform-minded intellectual elites, since the elites came predominantly from such families. In Qing China, the dominant types of household were stem and nuclear families. Based on various gazetteers, the average size was around five persons. See Feng Erkang, *Qingdai Zongzu Shilun* (A Historical Essay on Qing Lineages), Tianjin: Nankai University Press, 2019, p. 15.

[37] Susan Glosser, *Chinese Visions of Family and State, 1915-1953*, Los Angeles and Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003.

[38] Mara Yue Du, *State and Family in China: Filial Piety and Its Modern Reform,* New York: Cambridge University Press, 2022 (forthcoming).

the complete collectivization of family life.[39] At the outset, the revolution did transform rural life in significant ways. As Yan Yunxiang finds in his study of a rural North China village, the post-1949 generation of youths asserted individual choice, challenged patriarchal norms, and built new solidarity around the nuclear family. However, the unintended consequences of their nationwide mobilization had arguably more significant and enduring impacts than its revolutionary agenda.[40] Neil J. Diamant similarly finds the socialist Marriage Laws empowered women to exercise their choice to pursue more equitable and family life without making family less stable or vital for individual well-being.[41] The Maoist political movements were also unsuccessful in shifting the loyalty of youths from the family to the revolutionary state. In rural China, the household economy survived the Communes, subverted Maoist excesses, and flourished in the era of market reforms.[42] Behaviorally, urban Chinese family life fell far short of the socialist goals and maintained a high level of solidarity like Chinese societies in Hong Kong, Singapore, and Taiwan. [43] Instead of

[39] Although Mao's published works during the Great Leap Forward never explicitly stated "abolishing the family," he frequently envisioned it in a smaller audience of high-rank cadres and secretaries, according to Li Rui, who briefly served as his secretary. Furthermore, aggressive collectivization policies mounted to transferring most economic functions of the family to the collectives. Also, it was the national mood that a society without family is achievable within a generation, as the first chapter will discuss. See, Li Rui, *Li Rui Wangshi Zayi* (Li Rui's Miscellaneous Recollections), Nanjing: Jiangsu Renmin chubanshe, p. 332

[40] Yan Yunxiang, *Private Life under Socialism: Love, Intimacy, and Family Change in a Chinese Village, 1949-1999*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003, pp. 217-220

[41] Neil J. Diamant, *Revolutionizing the Family: Politics, Love, and Divorce in Urban and Rural China, 1949-1968*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, C.A: University of California Press, 2000, pp. 314-315

[42] Dali Yang, *Calamity and Reform in China: State, Rural Society, and Institutional Change since the Great Leap Famine*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996.

[43] Martin Whyte and William Parish attribute such stability and solidary to Chinese cultural norms and the need for the family's collective effort to cope with the Maoist system. The study drew on refugees from the mainland, who likely represented a minority of urban residents firmly opposed to the Communist state and its ideology. This account underplays changing household economy and grassroots sentiments, which played a decisive role in ordinary urban families' interaction with the state. See Martin King Whyte and

embracing Communist ideals of abandoning the class-bounded family for the membership in the egalitarian communist society, the revolutionary generation of youths under Communist rule rejected “The New Men" for more individualistic values.[44]

Why did the Maoist revolution program fail to gear urban family life to a socialist agenda, even with such forceful measures as the sent-down policy? Two recent works on urban Chinese families in Mao’s China provide additional answers by examining Maoist state’s urban to rural migration. Drawing on both official and private sources in Tianjin, Jeremy Brown’s work finds that the Communist state erected insurmountable hurdles for rural to urban migration, in which family ties loomed large as the key to individual survival.[45] Focused on the sent-down youths movement as an effort to reduce the rural-urban divide, Emily Honig and Xiaojian Zhao stresses the agency of urban families in negotiating, sabotaging, and eventually ending the campaign.[46] Both works reached similar conclusions about the state’s inadvertent empowerment of the family through family-based discriminatory and mobilization policies. They also demonstrate the promise of a new approach to Mao’s China by excavating personal voices through grassroots documents and interviews.

Existing literature on modern Chinese families has focused on how the Chinese state and elites transformed Chinese families or how Chinese family life responded to the larger forces of

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William L. Parish, *Urban Life in Contemporary China*, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1984, pp. 192-194.

[44] Chen Yinghong, *Creating the “New Man”: From Enlightenment Ideals to Socialist Realities*, Honolulu, HI: Hawaii University Press, 2008, pp. 214-215.

[45] Jeremy Brown, *City versus Countryside in Mao’s China: Negotiating the Divide*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012, pp. 47-52.

[46] Emily Honig and Xiaojian Zhao, *Across the Great Divide: The Sent-down Youths Movement in Mao’s China, 1968-1980*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2019, pp. 170-171.

economic policies and official ideology. Still, we need a more bottom-up, everyday-based analysis to understand family-state dynamics. After all, families and states were both social categories governing everyday life and organizing experience. The research needs to go beyond state-family interaction to the everyday experience of individuals acting on multiples roles in the state machinery and private family life. Top leaders like Mao Zedong, Liu Shaoqi, and Deng Xiaoping were husbands of Party cadres and fathers of young adults who constantly used their power to benefit and protect their family members. The sent-down youths and their parents were also the rank and file of the Party whose support and sacrifice for the political movements often came at costs of the family. While the Maoist state often determined the basic parameters of urban family life, family roles and politics identities were closely related.[47]. A critical research question for researchers remains how ordinary people's historical and personal experience shaped contemporary China's state-family dynamics when their life intersected with the powerful revolutionary vision of family life.

The Communist state-family dynamics originated in the 1930s when the Communist capital Yan'an attracted hundreds of thousands of educated youths. Under extraordinary circumstances, Party-state imposed strict organizational and ideological control on a hyper-mobilized society consisting of predominantly male, unmarried peasant soldiers and educated youths.[48] At the core of the Yan'an order, the young, aspiring Party cadres were committed to revolutionary self-

[47] For an example of such research, see Li Tian and Yan Yunxiang, "Self-cultivation of the Socialist New Person in Maoist China: Evidence from a Family's Private Letters, 1961-1986", *The China Journal*, Volume 82, pp. 88-110.

[48] Due to wartime conditions and strict marriage requirements, the male-female ratio at Yan'an was as high as 30:1 in 1938. The ratio later decreased to 18:1 and further to 8:1 with the inflow of young female students and loosened marriage rules. See Zhu Hongzhao, *Yan'an richang shenghuo zhong de lishi, 1937-1947* (An Everyday Life History of Yan'an, 1937-1947), Guilin: Guilin Normal University Press, 2007, p. 283

sacrifice and lived on a militarized distribution of necessities. Known as the "state provision system," it had the appearance of an egalitarian order due to the highly simplified hierarchical order. In the rural hinterland, the Party-state championed a family life characterized by strong conjugal ties, productive labor, and loyal service to the revolutionary war. [49] When the Communist army carried the day in the Chinese Civil War, they brought on the idealistic political and moral vision to build a new social order in the cities. [50] Since the takeover, the success or failure of the state-led effort to transform Chinese families depended on how a range of individual actors adapted or modified the new socialist way of life through their performance of family roles. In urban China, these actors included the ideologically committed Communist elites and the overwhelming majority of residents, from the mid-and low-rank cadres to ordinary workers, whose primary loyalty was to the family.

Building on a grassroots approach to Maoist China, my dissertation shows that state ideology and family life experience are mutually constitutive. If many people across class and regional divides came to share a set of bitter experiences, the everyday suffering at the family level could have a profound national political consequence. During the Great Leap Forward to the end of the Mao era, most urban Chinese families, including the Party elites to the urban family of sent-down youths, suffered financial difficulties, political disenchantment, and family separation. By the late 1970s, with the waning of revolutionary ideals, the care for the household economy and the elevated status of the children became leitmotifs for urban life. Two nationwide movements, the mourning for Zhou Enlai and the sent-down youths' fight to return home, foreshadowed the

[49] Yu Zhang, *Going to the Countryside: The Rural in the Modern Chinese Cultural Imagination, 1915-1965*, Ann Arbor, MI: Michigan University Press, 2020, pp. 144-146.

[50] For a study of the cadres in the takeover, James Zheng Gao, *The Communist Takeover of Hangzhou: The Transformation of City and Cadres, 1949-1954*, Honolulu, HI: Hawaii University Press, 2004; refer to Chapter One for a detailed discussion of the social and economic reorganization after the takeover.

coming of a new political order. The returned former cadres like Deng helped crystalize the popular sentiment and their political judgment in *xiaokang* ideology. Through the lens of family life and grassroots documents, this dissertation finds *xiaokang* embedded in Chinese families' collective experience and changing values in the 1970s.

Geographically, my dissertation focuses on Shanghai families in the 1960s and 1970s, when the urban residents resisted further politicization and ushered in a "family turn" in Chinese politics from the mid-1970s to the early 1980s. As the dissertation shows, the grassroots sentiments shifted away from supporting revolutionary mobilization after the initial hope of Shanghai workers for a household economic recovery evaporated during the sent-down youths movement in the mid-1970s. Led by sent-down youths from Shanghai, the mass protests of 50,000 sent-down youths from the military farms in Yunnan were the only successful case of a nationwide mass protest movement. It led to a significant policy change, as they eventually forced the state to grant their return and precipitated the official end of the sent-down policy.[51] By the 1980s, the deeply disenchanted and depoliticized, the silent majority of working-class Shanghai residents resisted bottom-up politicization and quietly sided with the government's suppression of pro-democratic protests during the critical test of 1989. Since the 1990s, the pragmatist leadership headed by Jiang Zemin, who held Shanghai students' protesters under control, served as the Party Secretary and then the head of the dominant Shanghai Gang in contemporary Chinese politics[52]. In the 1990s and early 2000s, the Shanghai Gang introduced reforms that made Shanghai the exemplar of

[51] Yang, Bin. "We want to go home: The Great Petition of Zhiqing: Xishuangbanna, Yunnan, 1978-1979", *The China Quarterly* 198 (2009), pp. 401-21.

[52] This political group, often named "Shanghai Gang," included influential members such as former Premier Zhu Rongji, People's Congress Chairperson Wu Bangguo, former Vice State President Zeng Qinghong. They were all former colleagues of Jiang Zemin in 1980s Shanghai who ended in the CCP Politburo Standing Committee.

China's economic and social development.[53] While Shanghai endured a brief period of declining significance, Xi Jinping, who once served as the Party Secretary of Shanghai, again affirmed Shanghai's political status in Chinese politics.[54] The post-Mao transitions in Shanghai thus carry a far-reaching significance for urban China today.

The Emotional Dynamics of Ideological Shift

As a bottom-up history of urban family life in Maoist China, this dissertation also draws on family letters and other private and official sources to sketch out the emotional dynamics in urban China's political transition in the 1960s and especially in the 1970s. I shall examine the emotional expressions of diverse sources in the contexts of the Communist political economy and ideological mobilization. Attentive to each family's class status and circumstances, I shall identify the political dynamics of collective emotions across different social and class backgrounds. Through a careful engagement with diverse sources and especially family letters, I shall the gradual replacement with the revolutionary ideology from the perspectives of ordinary urban families.

The new grassroots emotions would not have been possible without the access to new grassroots sources. While historians of contemporary China often face more hurdles accessing state archives than do their late imperial and Republican colleagues, they also enjoy tremendous advantage when it comes to the voice of the ordinary people. Since Michael Schoenhals discovered grassroots sources, such as discarded bureaucratic archives, as a window to Chinese politics and society, China historians have made these materials, from Red Guards newspapers to youth diaries,

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[53] Li Cheng, *Middle-Class Shanghai: Reshaping US-China Engagement*, Washington: Brookings Institution Press, 2021, pp. 147-151.

[54] Damien Ma and Ruihan Huang "Powerful Provinces: How Regional Political and Economic Power Correlate in China", *Marco Polo Research Papers*, August 9, 2021.

as a new source into Maoist Chinese history.[55] One of the most frequently used sources is oral history, which has proved a rich source for scholars who worked on Maoist China from the perspective of individual experiences of marginalized subjects.[56] While this dissertation also taps oral history as a source, the key primary sources here were Maoist-era written documents, which were no less rich and diverse than oral history.

During the Maoist years, as literacy and writing expanded with the penetration of the state power, ordinary people have left millions of letters, diaries, newspapers, work journals, and discarded grassroots archives, such as personal dossiers and various forms created and held by the work units (*danwei*).[57] Thanks to the new document centers built within and outside public universities in China, these sources have become increasingly available to scholars of contemporary China.[58] In *Maoist History from Grassroots*, historians and social scientists who

[55] Schoenhals and MacFarquhar's definitive history of the Cultural Revolution demonstrates the first systematic use of such sources. See Roderick Macfaquhar and Michael Schoenhals, *Mao's Last Revolution*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008.

[56] For a thoughtful reflection on oral interviews as a method to study the Maoist past, see Gail Herschatter, *Gender of Memory: Rural Women and China's Collective Past*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2014, pp.1-12.

[57] The work units were organizations where urban workers were employed, received a monthly wage, and enjoyed a variety of welfare benefits. In socialist and contemporary China, there were broadly three types of work units, the enterprises (such as manufacturing factories and commercial services), the professional service providers (such as schools and hospitals), and government units. Most working population were employed by the enterprises.

[58] Michael Schoenhals, "Sinology and Historical Research on Mao's China: Some Personal Observations." A Paper presented at Focus on Asia: Challenges in Politics and Research, National Network of Universities for East and Southeast Asian Studies, University of Helsinki, January 23, 2004, pp. 7-10; Jeremy Brown and Matthew D. Johnson, "Introduction," in *Maoist at the Grassroots: Everyday Life in China's Era of High Socialism*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015, pp. 4-6; Yan Yunxiang, Li Tian and Yanjie Huang, "Grassroots Archive Collection at the Center for Data and Research on Contemporary Social Life" (CDRCSL), *Qualitative Inquiry*, 2021, Vol. 27 (8-9), pp. 1010-1016.

worked on various aspects of Maoist China have challenged the view of Chinese socialism from above by focusing on the grassroots life of ordinary students, cadres, and workers.[59]

While historians on grassroots Maoism have yielded rich insights into the working of Maoism on the life and mind of ordinary people, some crucial dimensions of everyday life history remain unexplored. Most notably, we have yet to explore the emotional world of ordinary Chinese. While we have accumulated deep insights into the political elites and elite intellectuals, we know relatively little about how average workers, peasants, cadres, and ordinary intellectuals form their attitudes, articulate their feelings, and develop their ideas about government policies and official ideology. Since the unprecedented availability of grassroots sources could supply a systemic view into the grassroots voice, we have the chance to write a grassroots emotional history of Chinese politics is narrative on contemporary Chinese history.

Since Huizinga's explorations into emotions and sensibilities at the end of the Middle Ages, European and American humanistic scholarship have long recognized the importance of emotions and emotional climate in shaping culture, society, and history in the early twentieth century[60]. As the cultural turn set the agenda for historical research in recent decades, historians, social scientists, and literary scholars have re-established emotions as a critical force in historical change. Take the example of the scholarship on the French Revolution. Taking stock of recent histories of the French Revolution, Lynn Hunt underlines a shift from political and institutional history inspired by Marx and Tocqueville to a holistic approach to "experience" of revolution by combining the cognitive

[59] Jeremy Brown and Matthew D. Johnson, *Maoist at the Grassroots: Everyday Life in China's Era of High Socialism*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015.

[60] Johan Huizinga, Rodney J. Payton (trans), *The Autumn of the Middle Ages*, University of Chicago Press, 1996 (1924).

and rational motivations with emotions and feelings.[61] Searching for the emotional dynamics of the French Revolution, William Reddy finds that the culture of sentimentalism centered on the Cult of Rousseau created a powerful resistance to the perceived hypocritical court emotional regime and justified the use of violence in the creation of a "Republic of Virtue" under the revolutionary government.[62]

In recent decades, as sources on popular sentiments have become abundantly available for late Qing and Republican China, scholars have examined the role emotions played in shaping modern Chinese state-society relations. As Eugenia Lean demonstrates in her pioneering work on sympathy in Republican China, public emotion could play a vital role in shaping popular opinion and even political actions in modern China.[63] Lee Haiyan's study documented a similar rise of emotion at the levels of both the individual's inner life and society when the ideal of sentiment and romantic love gained currency in the world of late Qing and Republican Chinese minds.[64].

Since the Communist Party came to dominate China's political scene, they brought a modern emotional mobilization and control regime. As Elizabeth Perry shows in a synoptic review of the Communist state's mobilization strategies, emotion was often the critical dynamics of the Communist Party's various political campaigns.[65] Most recently, Huang Daoxuan's "spiritual

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[61] Lynn Hunt, "The Experience of Revolution", *French Historical Studies*, 2009, 32 (4), 671-678.

[62] William Redding, *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions*, Cambridge University Press, pp. 141-210.

[63] Eugenia Lean, *Public Passions: The Trial of Shi Jinqiao and the Rise of Popular Sympathy in Republican China*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2006.

[64] Lee Haiyan, *The Revolution of Heart: A Genealogy of Love in China, 1900-1950*, Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002.

[65] Elizabeth Perry, Moving the Masses: Emotional Work in the Chinese Revolution, *Mobilization: An International Quarterly 7* (2), pp. pp. 111-128.

history" of the Yan'an Rectification Campaign employs grassroots documents, autobiography, and diaries to explore the inner world of the Communist Revolution. He finds that the Communist Party created a logically coherent "spiritual world" where the principle of self-sacrifice for a revolutionary ideal became fully embedded through techniques of criticism and self-criticism.[66] Liu Yu's article on the roles of guilt and shame testifies to the role of emotion in the political mobilization of the intellectuals from a bottom-up perspective.[67] Daniel Leese's research into the Maoist-era political rituals revealed how the Maoist cult stressed "emotions expediency" as a critical instrument of political mobilization.[68] Denise Ho's work on Maoist exhibitions likewise explores how the Maoist curators used objects, imagines, and stories to elicit the correct emotional response from the audience[69].

While all these works have contributed significantly to our understanding of the ways by which the Maoist state and elites mobilized emotions, the question how ordinary people's emotion played an active role in politics remained unanswered. Did popular sentiments always respond positively to Mao and the Party's call? Did strong popular emotions only arise during the moment of intense political engagement such as rituals and denunciation meeting? We need to shift the focus from the moments of intense mobilization to the larger world of everyday life under the impacts of political mobilizations to better answer these questions.

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[66] Huang Daoxuan, "Zhengfeng Yundong de xinlingshi" (An Emotional History of the Yan'an Rectification Campaign), *Jindaishi Yanjiu*, 2020 (2), pp.1-30.

[67] Liu Yu, "Maoist Discourse and the Mobilization of Emotions in Revolutionary China", *Modern China* 36 (3), pp. 329-333.

[68] Daniel Leese, *Mao Cult: Rhetoric and Ritual in China's Cultural Revolution*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011, pp. 68-72.

[69] Denise Y. Ho, *Curating Revolution: Politics on Display in Mao's China*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018, in passim

A primary objective of this research is to bring an emotional perspective to bear on the grassroots sources to explore everyday bottom-up dynamics of ideological changes in 1970s China. The available ranges of grassroots sources, such as diaries, personal files, and especially family letters, offer a unique site of politics in which emotions, the economy, and ideology remained mutually constituted aspects of everyday life, rather than abstract analytical categories. In the thousand letters and sometimes archival documents that this dissertation studies, ordinary letter-writers rarely discussed the revolutionary state and its policies without reference to their household situations. While the letter writers in Maoist China often use abstract political idioms, such as socialism, class struggles, the Communist New Person, they mere used them to express their feelings towards these grand ideas through their livelihood, health issues, work experience, and economic demands. What matters was the emotional tones that letter writers employed when they engaged with the ideological terms, ranging from passionate commitment, pragmatic adaptations, apathetic ritualization, dismissive silence, cynical mockery, to painful reflection. It thus becomes possible to gauge the rise and fall of the state ideologies in everyday life by unpacking the emotional dynamics behind the popular use of ideological terms.

Two episodes of such intense collective emotions defined the initial embrace and eventual eclipse of the Communist vision in urban China.[70] The first moment was the early 1950s. After two decades of social instability, total war, and hyperinflation, the return to peace under Communist leadership transformed urban life. As dissertation chapter one shall discuss, the 1950s

[70] Sociologists have long found that strong and widely shared emotions could energize a community or society into a unified thoughts and action. In Durkheim's sociological theory, such a moment is called "collective effervescence", when a community or society comes together with the same thought and participate in the same action. There were of course no historical cases where the whole society were unified the same thought and action. However, there were moments when a majority of the urban Chinese under a strong emotional drive and act almost simultaneous, often defying state oppression. The classic case was the mourning for Zhou Enlai in 1976. See Emile Durkheim, Mark S. Cladis (trans), *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008 (1915) pp. 163-164.

was an uplifting moment for most working-class in Shanghai, who welcomed the return to economic normalcy and steady rise in living standards. Through the well-tested method of "telling bitterness," the Party-state capitalized on the wartime suffering of workers to target the old elites as class enemies who caused their suffering. In the late 1950s, the state machinery again enlisted the optimism and hope of the ordinary people, who passionately believed in the Party's magic power to transform their lives in the names of a rapid transition to a Communist society during the ill-fated Great Leap Forward.

The second moment was in the late 1970s. In the aftermath of the failed Great Leap, the Communist state stepped up "telling bitterness" to inspire revolutionary zeal among the youths and their families in the face of stagnant wages and joblessness. In particular, the family separation mandated by the sent-down policy further exacerbated the austerity's emotional costs on urban families. As dissertation chapters three, four, and five demonstrate, urban youths and their families acted on their widespread anger and disillusionment to launch a counter-movement against further mobilization for a Communist future. The counter-mobilization reached a climax with the mass mourning of Zhou Enlai, the deceased premier who symbolized the care for people's livelihood rather than political dogmatism. With the pervasive sentiments rallied against the official discourse, the Cultural Revolution reached a definitive end phase. Apart from the dogmatic Maoist factions, rival Party elites enlisted urban families' emotional call for family reunion and welfare in their bids for power. In the end, a coalition of returned old elites and reformers, whose families experienced the political and economic consequences of the Cultural Revolution, won widespread support with the politically astute claim to Zhou Enlai's legacy and the powerful new symbolism of *xiaokang*.

Through a close reading of family letters in the late Maoist years, this dissertation finds that the end of the Communist vision did not mean that the end of revolutionary sentiments for revolutionary youths. Rather, emotional attachment to a utopian communist society was replaced by a more durable vision for better-off family life centered on the unlimited future of the child. In the tumultuous years of the sent-down movement, "rearing children to take care of the old age" （养儿防老） gave way to a principle of intergenerational sacrifice. According to the new imperative, the intensive cultivation of fewer, and eventually a single child, was intended primarily for children's future well-being. As this dissertation shall show, the Communist Revolution thus inadvertently imbued the children with a unique, transcendent value worthy of sacrifice by the 1970s. The focus of fairness in post-Mao China thus shifted from workplace welfare distribution to channels of social mobility, especially the college entrance examination.[71] Already observable Shanghai in the 1970s, this shift echoes the triumph of the emotional over economic values of the child that Viviana Zelizer identifies for the American middle class in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century[72]. Although this vision of family life centered on the single child would only become an economic reality in the mid-1990s, after the urban families gained more independence from the work units, ideological domestication has become the everyday norm in the late 1970s.[73]

Reading Maoist-era Family Letters

[71] Martin Whyte King, *Myth of the Social Volcano: Perceptions of Inequality and Distributive Injustice in Contemporary China*, Stanford, CA, Stanford University Press, pp. 163-180.

[72] Viviana Zelizer, *Pricing the Priceless Child: The Changing Social Values of Children*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994, pp. 215-218.

[73] In Deborah S. Davis and Julia S. Sensenbrenner's analysis of the consumer revolution in Shanghai, the single child emerged as the ideological, if not the expenditure center of the new household economy. See Deborah S. Davis and Julia S. Sensenbrenner, "Commercializing Childhood: Parental Purchases for Shanghai's Only Child", in Deborah S. Davis, ed, *The Consumer Revolution in Urban China*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, C.A.: University of California Press, 2000, pp. 77-78

As an important type of grassroots sources, private letters occupy a unique place in Chinese history. Although letter writing has a long history in China, private letters have not been a significant source of the social history of China until recently. This lack of research is mainly due to their exclusive associations with the literati class. Better known by its alia Chidu (尺牍), traditional Chinese literati letters as a genre accounted for the overwhelming majority of extant letters before the twentieth century. These letters, often written in exquisite classical Chinese prose, have been a fixture of literati collections since Tang dynasty. During the two thousand years of China's epistolary history and especially in late imperial China, when literacy rate rose with urbanization and commercialization, the far the vast majority of the private letters must have come from the non-literati ordinary people, either by themselves or through hired hands, but they have not survived the times without established cultural institutions like the literati collections.[74] It was not until the Maoist era when extensive collections of ordinary people's letters became systematically available in document centers and published collections. For example, the Fudan Center for Data and Research on Contemporary Social Life alone collected close to half a million private letters written by ordinary people in the post-1949 period. [75]

[74] In 1975, Chinese archaeologists unearthed the earliest family letters of ordinary people from a minor Qin official's tomb. These two letters were from two younger brothers who served and presumably died in the Qin army in the last battle against the Chu Kingdom to their elder brother, a local legal Qin specialist. However, most extant letters from Han to Qing were highly educated scholarly class works found in the literati collected works. However, even within the narrow scope, pre-1949 letters demonstrate a substantial diversity of content and styles. For a general review of the Chinese epistolary tradition, see Richter Antje, "Introduction," in Richter Antje ed., *A History of Chinese Letters and Epistolary Culture,* Leiden: Brill, 2015, pp. 1-16.

[75] Zhang Letian, "Research on Chinese Contemporary Social Life," *Qualitative Inquiry*, 2021, vol. 27 (8-9), pp. 1002-1009. Besides the Fudan Center for Research and Document of Contemporary Social Life, the Library of Shanghai Ordinary People's Letters and the Family Letters Museum at the People's University also curates large quantities of letters. Their collections are much less systematically cataloged than the Fudan collections.

By far the largest subgenre of contemporary private letters, family letters in Mao's China were typically the products of major political movements that led to family separation, such as the sent-down youth movement. They thus constitute an indispensable source of family life and social change in a time of dynamic population movement under wars, revolutions, or mass migration in all societies. In the United States, sociologists have begun to use family letters systematically in the early 20th century. In their classic study of the Polish migrants to the United States in the late 19th and early 20th century, William I Thomas and Florian Znaniecki examined Polish migrant communities through six sets of peasant letters. They analyzed the letters through sociological categories such as class, religious attitudes, marriage, economy to build a multidimensional view of the migrant communities and the social problems caused by migration.[76]

In comparison with the classic sociological approach, which highlights similar structures and problems across families experiencing a certain social transformation, social historians tend to focus on the life of a single family in a larger historical context. Martha Hanna's Pireaud family letters carefully situated the wartime correspondence between a French soldier on the frontline and his wife in rural hometown in French social and political history during the First World War.[77] Liu Haiming's study of the Chang family, an American Chinese migrant family, deployed the Chang family letters as a significant source to explore various aspects of their family life, from livelihood to cultural identity, in the context of the overseas Chinese migration.[78]

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[76] William I. Thomas, Florian Znaniecki, *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America*, Boston: The Gorham Press, 1918.

[77] Martha Hanna, *Your Death Would Be Mine: Paul and Marie Pireaud in the Great War*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008.

[78] Haiming Liu, *The Transnational History of a Chinese Family: Immigrant Letters, Family Business, and Reverse Migration*, New Brunswick, N.J., Rutgers University Press, 2005.

This dissertation draws on over 5,000 letters from seven collections at the Fudan Center for Data and Research of Contemporary Social Life (CDRCSL). Forced family separation created a context for a significant share of these family letters during the significant events of the revolutionary austerity, the Great Downsizing, and the Send-down Movement. Like Thomas and Znaniecki's work, this dissertation engages multiple family histories under the impacts of the "revolutionary austerity" by examining collections or series defined by one family network.[79] Like Hanna and Liu's studies, this project's focus is not the structural issues of all urban families but the detailed experience of several families, especially the interaction between their inner world of meanings and the economic conditions.

Except for one published collection of letters, most letters examined in this dissertation were curated at the CDRCSL. I apply a strict set of standards in the selection process. First, the dissertation draws on the most extensive family collections from the CDRCSL's half-million letters since the relative completeness of the collection guarantees the most detailed contexts for reading any letters. All the selected collections span more than a decade, with the most extensive collections covering the entire period of 1959-1986. Second, the corresponding families represent a variety of class backgrounds. For example, the Lu, the Hua, the Liu, and the Zhou families were workers, though Hua's father used to be a small capitalist. The Wus was a typical cadre family since both parents worked as mid-rank cadres in the textile system. The father of the intellectual Zhu family worked as a professional translator, and the sons had strong scholarly inclinations while

[79] These epistolary networks can be ego-network (Hua family), two-person networks (Zhou family), or multipolar networks (all other collections). These networks of communication defined by the letter collection, not the actual communicative patterns of these families.

working in a performance troupe. The Zhang couple each worked as a high school teacher and a doctor respectively.[80]

Maoist-era family letters offer unique insights into family life in Maoist China; they also present severe methodological challenges unique to the period. First and foremost, the historical contexts of Maoist China raise the question of authenticity. To what extent can we trust the words of the letter writers, even if they are just ordinary workers, intellectuals, and cadres with no political consequences? Since Maoist society is easily one of the most politicized and highly surveilled societies in modern history, politics permeates all levels of society. During the tumultuous first three years of the Cultural Revolution, family letters routinely contained many political slogans, tropes, random quotes from the Little Red Book, and politically coded "correct ways" of saying things.

Furthermore, even if the content of the letters is reliable, researchers face a methodological challenge typical of private sources, namely, the scattered and unsystematic nature of the information. Unlike the official archive resources, which systematically organize information, personal letters were notoriously tricky to catalog due to their irregular formats, unique writing styles, and the incompleteness of the collections.[81] No matter how extensive the private collections are, they always lack some basic information regarding the identity and personal particulars of the writers. The writers and readers of private letters shared a wide range of unspoken background knowledge, from important events in family history to the relationship between the members.

[80] Please refer to Appendix A for a descriptive list of this collection (series).

[81] I observed the letters' transcription, indexing, and translation process during my eight-month stay at the CDRCSL. The process was so tedious, time-consuming, and labor-intensive that according to Director Zhang Letian and Dr. Li Tian, the center regularly spent 70% of the operational budgets processing the letters and other grassroots archives.

Unlike research on the letters of famous writers, politicians, and scholars, whose autobiographical and biographical information abound, studies on ordinary people's private writings could find no such recourse. There were often limited sources from which to gather the missing personal information since the authors generally have passed away. Their surviving relatives seldom left traces in the government archive, published books, or other official databases.[82]

Moreover, the presence of surveillance might influence the ways people wrote, transmitted, and preserved letters. There were two types of postal surveillance in Maoist China. The first source was the official postal inspection system responsible for intercepting letters for politically sensitive contents. While this system did exist in Mao's China, we know little about the depth and scale of its operation.[83] The inspection was undoubtedly much less systematic than its Eastern European counterparts, such as the GRU in the Soviet Union and the Stasi in East Germany.[84]

The second source of concern was possible searches by the Red Guards or the government during radical periods, such as the early phase of the Cultural Revolution. Letters were one of the suspicious items as they could carry critical political messages. For example, Shen Congwen's private writings were subject to nine separate raids by the Red Guards between 1966 and 1968.[85]

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[82] The only exception here is the published letter collection. Lu Rong's author provides memoirs, oral history, and other sources to supplement the letters. These supplementary texts prove extremely helpful in filling the information and overcoming methodological limitations.

[83] The dissident writer and editor Xu Xiao is the only writer who confirmed the existence of the postal inspection system. But her experience with the system shows that the system was perfunctory. See Xu Xiao, "Ni Budebu tongqingdali: wo bian minjian shuxinji" (You Must be Compassionate: My Experience Editing the Collected Letters of Ordinary People), Tianya, No.1, pp. 77-79.

[84] Smykerlin, A. S, *Perliustratsia pochtovoi korrespondentsii I pochtovaia voennaia tsenzura v Rossi i SSSR* (Postal and Wartime Postal Censorship in Russia and the Soviet Union), Moscow: Ru-Science Press, 2005; Peter Hellstrom, Die Postkontrolle der Staatssicherheit : aus der Sicht eines Zeitzeugen (The State Security's Post Control: From the Perspective of a Witness), Berlin: Morgana Edition, 2010.

[85] Li Jie, "Writing from Revolution's Debris: Shen Congwen's Family Letters in the Mao Era," in Richter Antje ed., *A History of Chinese Letters and Epistolary Culture,* Leiden: Brill, 2015, p. 598.

This type of intrusive surveillance applied mainly to the elites such as bourgeois intellectuals, the "revisionist" cadres, and former capitalists.

The third and the more relevant concern was social surveillance. For example, when a parent sent a letter to a sent-down youth, there was always a risk that another sent-down youth nearly happened to visit the youth, read the letters, and report the content at their "home".[86] When the sent-down youths wrote back to parents or friends, their workmates could also easily read the draft and report sensitive content. The degree of surveillance was determined by the prevailing everyday political climate and grassroots public opinion. During the height of the Cultural Revolution (1965-1969), most family letters tended to use highly politicized languages, while the letters written since the mid-1970s were often critical of government policy, as weakened social surveillance and widespread disenchantment encouraged people to speak out their feelings in private.[87] In addition, people may simply want to avoid politics in family letters. The sent-down youths' letters, especially in the published formats, were generally more detailed on material deprivations but often silent on political persecutions or misfortunes they suffered at the hands of the local cadres and People's Liberation Army (the PLA) officers.[88]

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[86] Known as the home for the sent-down youths, collective household is a fictive unit where several sent-down youths shared a living quarter and ate the "Big Pot Meal." They sometimes developed an intimate companionship, but sometimes the relationship was not close. See Liu Xiaomeng, *Zhongguo zhiqing shi: dachao, 1968-1980* (The History of Chinese Sent-down Youths: The Main Wave, 1968-1980), Beijing: Dangdai Zhongguo chubanshe, p. 198

[87] Qian Liqun, *Juehuo buxi: wenge minjian sixiang yanjiu biji* (A Taste of Fire: Study Notes on Popular Thoughts in the Cultural Revolution), Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, pp. 515-517.

[88] This could be due to the particular letter writer's caution, the preference of editors for the published collections of letters, or the involvement of the Party's Propaganda Department, whose degree of general surveillance and political sensitivity vary widely across time and circumstances. It is often hard to ascertain the reasons and piece together the missing information. Our lack of precise knowledge about the relationship is an important reason why family letters, especially letters between a pair of correspondents, are sometimes insufficient sources.

Even without the surveillance system, letter writers always selectively report even the most important daily events. This universal epistolary culture of secrecy could arise from various concerns, including the concern over possible emotional impacts the events may have on the readers. For example, Hua Zhongmin reports to his close friend the troubling story that a lecher (*dengtuzi*) once recklessly pursued her daughter Xiuzhen and spread rumors about her chastity when she rebuffed him during the first year of her rustication. The talks were so hurtful in the close-knit rural community that Xiuzhen attempted to commit suicide by drinking bitters and sleeping pills. Since she never wrote these traumatic events in family letters, her parents only learned about it two years later, when she visited home for recuperation after she left the village to work in a local factory.[89] Xiuzhen was evidently trying to minimize the impacts of the events on her family due to the helplessness, apprehension, and guilt it might incite in her parents, who could not possibly protect her from a thousand miles away. While Hua Zhongmin never wrote negative comments on the sent-down movement in the letters to his friend, we can surmise the event's impacts. In the following years, he was increasingly critical of the sent-down youths movement and its underlying fiscal rationale. Stories like this would have remained a family secret if Hua did not recount it in a subsequent letter. Moreover, the horrible event would have been lost to readers if the collection misses the very letter Hua Zhongmin sent to his friend. Fortunately, we could still trace the events by cross-referencing the letters he wrote to different individuals across time, given the sheer size and scope of the collections.

In the knowledge that the letters are inherently imperfect and their use is methodologically challenging, this dissertation developed a systematic approach to maximize the values of private

[89] Hua Zhongmin to Wu Yanxiang, November 16, 1973. I would not list the full document number, since the CDRCSL has not yet to assign unit document umber to the half-cataloged items. See the Appendix A for the details about the Hua family collection.

letters as a source. Before utilizing the letters, I grouped the family letters by the recipients or senders to construct a family history for each set and record the metadata for each letter. Through a close reading of all the letters across time, it is possible to identify the basic information on the family background and central concerns across time. I further categorize the epistolary networks into a network of strong and weak ties, depending on the trust between the correspondents. I will select only the most trustworthy correspondence as my resource.

In the case of the Hua family letters, Hua Zhongmin's correspondence with close friends and affinal relatives usually conveyed more accurate information and authentic feelings than his communications with blood relatives, such as his daughters and siblings. A politically savvy member of the Workers' Propaganda Team in his work unit, Hua must have considered both the nature of personal ties and the information environment of the recipients. In late January 1970, Hua's eldest daughter Xiuzhen fled from rural Jilin to Shanghai during the Spring Festival. In the Spring Festival greeting letters he sent to his relatives and friends, Hua deployed very different narrative strategy following an unspoken rule of confidentiality. In the eight letters that he wrote around Xiuzhen's unexpected return, he only mentioned the event in three letters. In the letter to a friend who he met during a political education program, he briefly mentioned that his sent-down daughter's unexpected return from Jilin costed him 100 yuan and exhausted his meagre monthly income.[90] In the letter he sent to his trusted friend and a former co-worker, he revealed that Xiuzhen had "traveled a thousand miles to return home by committing "anarchistic acts" of training hopping or muddling through with a platform ticket. The letter seemed to underline the

[90] Hua Zhongmin to a friend, February 1, 1970.

family's financial difficulty to solicit some help from the friend.[91] Hua never mentioned Xiuzhen's return, not to mention the details of her travel, in his letters to his brothers and sisters.

Only in a long and detailed letter sent to his brother-in-law, a soldier in the PLA barrack in distant Guangxi, did we get a glimpse of the complete picture. We learn that Xiuzhen traveled with another girl in the same rural settlement because they were the only two left girls during the frigid northeast winter without food and fuel. We also learn that Xiuzhen took a tortuous journey that took eight days and nights to travel through Jilin, Shenyang, Tianjin, and Suzhou before arriving home. In addition, we know that the father thought the journey was so interesting and adventurous that he wanted to commemorate it in a style of classical Chinese vernacular novella with seven fancy chapter titles to "teach her daughter a lesson." While he quoted Mao's Little Red Book and plead with Zhengzhong to read the "anarchistic" story with a critical spirit, he could not conceal the pleasure and luckiness he felt about his daughter's return.[92] However, we would need the knowledge of his writing habits to learn about these subtler sentiments.

While we cannot generalize Hua Zhongmin's case to all letter writers in Cultural Revolution China, his case shows clearly how letter writers might strategize the information flow according to a shared logic of confidentiality. Hua's atypical trust of his affinal kin and former co-workers whom he enjoyed close friendships, since he obviously wanted to control information flow within the immediate circles of his family and work unit. His family's political status might have played a role in the controlled information flow. His late father, a former partner of a small factory and a

[91] Hua Zhongmin to a co-worker, February 1, 1970.

[92] Hua Zhongmin to Zhengzhong, February 11, 1970.

recipient of fixed interests[93] until 1965, died indirectly of class struggles. Since the Cultural Revolution, the family was labelled as "bourgeois" in class origin, even though he was still trusted by the factory as a member of the proletariat. In comparison, his in-laws' family was politically more reliable. His father-in-law worked in a government organization and his brother-in-law was a young army officer. It was the intertwinement of the personal and the political that determined the level of confidentiality in the letters.

While family letters count for half of the primary sources, I systematically employ statistics, factory archives, diaries, and other sources as well. These data offer a different perspective into the same process from the macro view of the household economy. For example, in the chapters on the impact of austerity on family lives, family letters are juxtaposed with national and city-level statistics, work unit level surveys and anecdotes from other private sources. Although the term "xiaokang" was common in family letters in the mid-1970s, only more general sources like public opinion surveys and widely appreciated literary works could prove that it was indeed the current of the day. No matter how complete and detailed the letters were, there was always a gap between their micro-historical narratives and the macro-historical dynamics.

Beyond the methodological challenges, there is also the question of privacy. Among the few research works based on the letter collections at the CDRCSL, all except one article followed strict social science protocol to apply pseudonyms for the names and the work units for the letters. I follow this standard procedure in this dissertation when I cite letters, diaries, and other grassroots documents at the CDRCSL. The actual names will be available upon request at the CDRCSL

[93] Also known as redemptive interests, "fixed interests" were the PRC government's seasonal payment to former capitalists in compensation of the capital stock nationalized in 1956. I will discuss this institution in details in Chapter Two.

catalog. As for person and place names mentioned in the official archive, archival collections, and published letters, I will cite the actual names as they appear in the sources.

Outline of the Chapters

The narrative arch of the dissertation covers mainly the periods between the onset of the first austerity measures of the Great Leap Forward in 1959 and the start of the market reform in urban China in 1984. After the introduction chapter lays out the historical and methodological frameworks, the first chapter outlines the historical evolution of family-state relations in revolutionary China, focusing on urban China in the 1950s. The chapter starts with the urban experience of war and Communist ideas of the family in the revolutionary years before 1949. The chapter then traces the institutional history of the Communist state's economic and ideological control of the urban family from the perspective of individuals, families, and the street-level bureaucracy. The high revolutionary zeal among urban youths and the utopian vision of a "state-family" during the Great Leap Forward need to be contextualized in the recent history of war, inflation, unemployment, and unnatural death in urban families. These two chapters provide both the larger historical contexts and the institutional backgrounds for family-state interactions between the late 1950s and the early 1980s.

Chapter Two closely follows the urban household economy in Shanghai in the aftermath of the disasters of the Great Leap Forward. Although the casualty of the Great Leap concentrated in the rural hinterland, urban families in Shanghai suffered its more extended structural consequences, as the Communist state forced a massive fiscal austerity on the urban families by cutting down food rations, laying off newly recruited workers, and freezing wages across all sectors. But pragmatic remedies like the work replacement system for workers and the fixed interests payment to the bourgeois class, somewhat cushioned the impacts of the austerity. Meanwhile, the political

and geopolitical struggles after the Great Leap Forward increasingly imbued the sacrifice endured by urban families with a revolutionary motif. The internal consistency between the practical measures, the ideological mobilizations, and worsening internal and external power struggles contributed to the Cultural Revolution.

Chapter Three examines the economics and emotional costs of the sent-down movement as it unfolded in 1968-1979. Drawing on three sets of family letters and archival materials from four archives around China, this chapter examines in close detail how the sent-down policy exerted a substantial financial burden and emotional strains on urban families in the contexts of geopolitics and political economy contexts of the late 1960s. By the mid-1970s, as Mao calculated a retreat from radicalism following China's geopolitical realignment with the United States, the urban youths and their families launched a concerted effort to resist and overturn the policy.

Chapter Four taps the collected letters of four Shanghai families and archival sources in Shanghai factories to sketch out the chaotic family reunion process after the death of Mao. In this chapter, I use the conceptual framework of "emotional communities" to describe how ordinary working families negotiated their return process with the grassroots bureaucracy and among the family members at the end of the 1970s, as the sent-down movement and the Cultural Revolution ended amid rampant protests. As this chapter finds, the chaotic return process of the sent-down youths and other displaced family members in the Cultural Revolution contributed to the final collapse of the grassroots confidence in the Communist project and the return to the family as the source of meaning in life.

Building on the arguments in the earlier chapter, Chapter Five of the dissertation focuses on the everyday politics in Shanghai and other major cities in the 1970s and early 1980s when the returned youths built their families under a changing political economy environment. Based on

family letters, magazines, newspapers, and official surveys, the chapter argues that the youth's experience in the Cultural Revolution crucially shaped a family-based de-politicization and a possessive family culture in post-Mao China. In contrast to the mainstream narratives of the Cultural Revolution as an economic disaster, the 1970s saw a rebooted urban economy, rapid industrialization, and incipient consumerism. But such recovery merely exacerbated the pain of the family separation and the widespread resentment of the austerity measures. Even before Mao died, the idealist factions had lost their popular support, as a new type of urban ideology centered on "Zhou Enlai" worship challenged the Communist ideals of sacrifice.

The conclusion lays out the consequences of the *xiaokang* synergy in contemporary China. On the one hand, China's spectacular economic transformations amid relative political stability since the late 1970s seemed to validate *xiaokang*. Thanks to the durable de-politicization in post-Mao urban China, the Communist Party's rule survived and thrived after Tiananmen, even as the Communist states in Eastern Europe collapsed. On the other hand, the *xiaokang* model, while empowering the Communist state and urban middle-class families, created an imbalanced, unequal, and unsustainable economy, undergirded by a narrow focus on individual families' wealth a social mobility. Much as the conservative urban middle-class still cherished depoliticized family comfort, the *xiaokang* model of depoliticized economic growth has become increasingly unsustainable in recent decades.

Chapter One

Toward a Socialist "State-Family": Experiencing War and Revolution in 1950s Urban China

In July 1952, Wang Qiuyun, a 22-years-old Communist grassroots cadre in charge of mobilizing neighborhood women at a steer-level Party Committee, drafted a brief autobiography in her work journal. Amid barely readable writings and mistakes, Wang vividly recounted her story as a child victim of the Sino-Japanese War and a young zealot of the Communist revolution. Wang began her story of liberation with her bitter childhood and family tragedy in Wusong-Shanghai Campaign:

> "Baoying County of Jiangsu Province is my hometown. Torn by successive wars, most parts of the dilapidated city walls of this culturally backward town have fallen. In the first half of 1938, when I was seven, the Wusong-Shanghai Battle broke out, Chiang Kai-shek, the head of the reactionary government, only resisted passively and withdrew his army. My father trudged along the Wusong-Shanghai Railway to retreat to Changzhou. I fled to Changzhou with my two younger sisters, leaving behind only my grandmother. At Changzhou, as my father's factory was bankrupt, my family relied on petty retail for survival. Two years later, we returned to our hometown. My grandmother already died, the house has burnt down, and all our properties were robbed. My father then entered a Japanese factory in Shanghai to earn a living. In 1943, as prices skyrocketed, I started to work in a factory in Shanghai. They constantly struck me with a rod without teaching me any skills. A few months later, prices increased three times a day, and our family was left with no rice and survived on borrowed meal."[94]

For contemporary readers, the "dilapidated city wall" epitomized the wartime Republican state as a failed state. In *Spring in a Small City*, an award-winning film made in 1948 and premiered in Shanghai in 1950, Director Fei Mu famously opened the scene with a long shot of the fallen city walls of a small town. The symbolism of the fallen walls conjured up the sense of desolation among

[94] Wang Qiuyun Work Journal, p. 51

urban Chinese after China's pyrrhic victory in the War of Resistance[95]. But Qiuyun's understanding of the grand narrative more likely came from the political education she received in the night schools in the 1950s. In the face of the Japanese invasion, Chiang Kai-shek could not protect the lives of its citizens and the safety of their property. After the war, the government simply could not keep the people's livelihood afloat as the Civil War broke out. As Wang identified in her narrative, her family could barely survive as their lives fell apart during the total war and subsequent economic disasters.

Wang identified a turning point in her life in 1948, before the decisive Communist victory in the Chinese Civil War. Her life was back on track when she entered the Needle-Weaving Night School run by the underground Communist Part: "I gradually realized the crimes of the rulers and began propagating the evil deeds of the Americans and Chiang Kai-shek. In 1949, Wang Keqin secretly organized our students to guard the factory. On May 25, after the liberation of the Hunan District, our team began to work openly as the "Service Team for the People". We held meetings and discussions in the daytime and kept vigilance at night. Later, I joined the Songshan Streets Training Night School. Thanks to friendly exchanges with students and warm guidance from teachers, I realized that "I changed my class identity (*fanshen*) to become the master of the country" and began to study politics and technical skills fervently…"[96]

As Wang Qiuyun's autobiography suggests, her political awakening rose sharply with her entry into the organizational life under the Party. The transformative experience of the first two years under the Communist rule schooled her in the critical doctrine of the Party: the service to the People. The "Service for the People Team," consisting mainly of student activists working under

[95] Ibid.

[96] Ibid, p. 52

the Communist Party's underground operations in Shanghai, became the institutional preamble for the Streets Committee, the second-lowest level of the Communist state in urban China. However, her family's economic condition deteriorated in the first post-liberation year. In late 1950, as the economy faltered in the aftermath of the Korean War, her father again lost his job, and she only received discounted pay. When she was still attending political education, her mother passed away amid the crisis of the household economy. But she was convinced that the economic woes were due to the bombardment by the Americans and the KMT.

Wang Qiuyun and her family's suffering not only aroused her sense of responsibility for taking care of her four younger siblings but also made her more aware of the "cruel crimes" of the Americans and the KMT. In the end, Wang avowed: "As I constantly learned from the Competition for Patriotic Production, the Anti-Counterrevolutionary movement, and the Counter-America Aid-Korea Movement, I also contributed a little bit to the great cause with my work. Under the leadership of Chairman Mao, we must consolidate the People's dictatorship, reduce loss in our production, protect our victory, and work towards the prosperity of our nation.

Qiuyun' s life before and after 1949 exemplified the experience of many Shanghai working-class families who barely survived the disasters of the 1940s. They embraced the Communist rule with a sense of salvation in the 1950s. Between 1937 and 1952, urban families in China suffered successive wars, displacement, death, hyperinflation, unemployment, and a shortage of food. Between 1936 and 1948, the value of *Fabi*, the KMT government's fiat money, was destroyed by wartime excess[97].The hyper-inflation continued well into the early years of the Communist rule

[97] C.f. Chiang Kia-Ngau, *The Inflation Spiral: The Chinese Experience 1939-1950*, Stanford University Press, 1958.

until the achieved Party-state price stability in 1952[98]. By then, the primary mode of the household economy for most urban families has transformed beyond recognition. Through a successive wave of radical reforms, the Communist state assumed control of the capital, money, grain, labor, and most of the erstwhile private enterprises. By the late 1950s, urban families no longer depended mainly on the market or kinship networks for their survival. Economically, they became dependent on the Communist state. Socially, grassroots organizations of the Party integrated urban families into a hierarchy of organizations under the control of the Party state.

As Wang's experience indicates, the Republican state had long lost its legitimacy due to its military and economic failures, and the Communist Party already assumed underground control of factory workers in 1948. The Communist takeover of Shanghai further cemented their faith in the cause of Communism and enlisted their participation in the grassroots state-building in the early 1950s. In July 1952, Wang Qiuyun, 21, was among the young activists in charge of the everyday affairs of the Streets Committee even though she was probably not yet a Party member[99]. Both a victim of the war and an activist of the revolution, Wang exemplified the sentiments of politically activist youths in the early 1950s. As urban families failed to offer protection and food, they managed to build state domination over the family through a hierarchy of economic and social organizations.

This chapter explores the reorganization of state-family relations in Shanghai in the first decade under the Communist rule, focusing on the grassroots organizations, "planification" of everyday life, ideological mobilization, and the utopian visions of the Great Leap Forward. With

[98] Dong Zhikai, *1949-1952 nian Zhongguo jingji fenxi* (An Analysis of Chinese Economy, 1949-1952), Beijing: Shehui kexue chubanshe, 2002, pp. 156-160.

[99] Qiuyun's motivation is apparent from a list of tasks in Wang's work journal as she worked for the affairs of women and youths. See, *Wang Qiuyun Work Journal*, p. 24

the war and destruction between 1937 and 1949 still in fresh memory, most urban families in Shanghai welcomed the first decade of the Communist rule with hope and gratitude. For almost four decades, there was peace and economic security. Most families were willing to pay the price by subjecting themselves to tight state control and an organizational form of life, as the vulnerable, self-reliant pattern of family life and gave way to dependence on the state. The heartfelt gratitude to the "state-family" further guaranteed the commitment to the Party and its ideology. A widely-shared, utopian hope for a good life became the defining feature of the social mentality in the late 1950s.

The Ambivalence of the Family in Chinese State Communism

The family has always been considered as the foundation of society in Chinese political philosophy. Unlike ancient Greek and Rome, where "Polis (city-state)" and "Oikos (household)" were conceptually distinctive spheres, the Chinese concept of the state (guojia) was inextricably integrated with the family[100]. In the Confucian classic *Book of Rites*, the family forms the critical intermediary between self-cultivation and the cosmic order. Confucian men must first practice moral cultivation and their moral life to bring harmony to their family before they can proceed to change the world:

> "From the ancient times, those who want to promote great virtue to the world, first need to govern their states; to govern their states, they need first to manage their family; to manage their family, they need first to cultivate themselves; to cultivate themselves, they need to regulate their mind; to regulate their mind, one needs to maintain sincere intension; to maintain sincere intension; one needs to exhaust one's knowledge; to exhaust one's knowledge, one needs to study the essence of the objective world. Study the objective world, then learn everything you can learn, be sincere with your intentions, then regulate your mind; with your mind at the right place, you will be able to cultivate yourself. After you have cultivated yourself, you can manage your family; after your family is in order, you can govern

[100] Deng Xiaomang and Peng Changjiang, *Zhongxi Wenhua Bijiao Shiyijiang* (Eleven Lectures on Comparison between Chinese and Western Cultures, Changsha, Hunan jiaoyu chubanshe, 2007, p.42.

your states; after your state is well-governed, you can bring peace to the world." [101]

The fundamental role of the family in the cosmological order, as defined by the *Classics of Rites*, formed the basis for the Confucian moral cultivation and political order. Since the Song dynasty, the doctrine of neo-Confucianism further moved the family to the cornerstone of the social order. Neo-Confucians like Zhu Xi even went so far as to devise so-called family rites as the blueprint for the management of family affairs, incorporating earlier efforts and taking in local circumstances.[102] The founder of the Ming Empire, Zhu Yuanzhang, began to institutionalize these practices as laws.[103] During the Ming dynasty (1368-1644), the families of various ethnic and class origins gradually constructed multigenerational lineages with a common ancestor, multiple branches, and shared sacrificial practices defined by a family genecology.[104] As Du Yue has shown in her recent studies on Qing dynasty (1644-1912) legal practices, the Manchu emperors further legitimized this vision of family-state. They practiced a radical form of "state-sponsored filial piety" by upholding the unequal legal status of the parents and children. This Confucian principle of state-family synergy lasted until the twentieth century, when they were abolished by post-imperial legal reforms[105].

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[101] Adapted from James Legg's translation of the "Great Learning." https://ctext.org/liji/da-xue/ens (Accessed on December 20, 2019)

[102] Patricia Buckley Library, *Confucianism and Family Rituals in Imperial China: A Social History of Writing about Rites*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2014, pp. 102-145.

[103] Edward Farmer, *Zhu Yuanzhang and Early Ming Legislation*, Leiden, New York, and Koln: Brill, 1995, p. 129

[104] Michael Szonyi, *Practicing Kinship: Lineage and Descent in Late Imperial China*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002, pp. 197-208.

[105] Yue Du, *State-sponsored Filially in Late Imperial China*, p. 121

In imperial China, challenges to the family as the foundation of society came from organized religions such as Buddhism[106] and faith-based movements such as the Taiping rebels.[107] But these challenges to the family-state order were exceptional and short-lived, as key family values such as filial piety penetrated even the religious communities and remained steadfast until they ran into fundamental difficulties in the early twentieth century. The first major challenge came from the modernizing reforms of Republican China when legal reformers weakened the role of the family as the foundation of political order by eliminating the constitutional prerogative of the parents.[108] Within the heterodox Confucians, thinkers like Kang Youwei began to imagine a world order as free associations of equal individuals.[109] In the meanwhile, May 4th intellectual reformers championed the idea of the nuclear family (*xiaojiating*). They introduced Westernization reform to transform the habits and customs of urban families in line with the dominant model of bourgeois families in the West.[110] However, few early twentieth-century reforms questioned the family as the foundation of social and political order. Even fewer followed Kang Youwei to contemplate the elimination of the family.

The existential crisis of a family-based social and political order came to a head with the arrival of Communism on the Chinese shore in the 1920s. The founding fathers of Communism,

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[106] For the assimilation of family values into Buddhism, see Ch'en, Kenneth. "Filial Piety in Chinese Buddhism." *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 28 (1968): pp.81–97.

[107] Shih, V. Y., Shi, Y., Shih, Y. *The Taiping Ideology: Its Sources, Interpretations, and Influences*. United Kingdom: University of Washington Press, 1967, pp. 260-262.

[108] Yue Du, *State-sponsored Filially in Late Imperial China*, p. 122

[109] Wu Fei, Lun Kang Youwei dui renlun de fouding (On the Kang Youwei's Denial of the Family Order), *Zhongguo zhexueshi* (History of Chinese Philosophy), 2019, No.1, pp.101-112.

[110] Susan L. Glosser, *The Vision of Family and State in Republican China, 1915-1953*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 2003, pp. 27-81.

Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, defined the typical family they knew best----the bourgeois family in mid-nineteenth century Western Europe---as an element in the capitalist legal system centered on private property. In a pamphlet that later for the Communist Manifesto, Engels wrote in reply to the impacts of the Communist society on the family, outlining the future Communist order as the solidarity of free individuals:

"The Communist society will make the relation of the two sexes to each other purely private affairs which will interest only those concerned and in which society as a whole has no reason to interfere. It can do that because it eliminates private property and educates children in common and thus destroys the two bases of the hitherto prevailing marriage, namely, the dependency of a woman on man and children on the parents because of private property."[111]

The Chinese Communist vision of the family directly took the lessons of the Marx-Engel vision. The first thing they did after the revolution was the implementation of the Marriage Law, outlawing concubines, child brides, and prostitution. In the very early years of the Communist rule, rural and urban women gained more power and leverage in negotiating their fate with their families and tradition.[112] In the socialist years, rural women gradually gained some degree of freedom in their love and marriage under the Communist rule and even decisive economic resources for a more liberal lifestyle in the Reform Era.[113] Though the liberation of women from the families

[111] Frederick Engels, *Principles of Communism*, The Little Red Library, vol.3, Chicago: Daily Worker Publishing Co, 1837, p. 23.

[112] Neil J. Diamant, *Revolutionizing the Family: Politics, Love, and Divorce in Urban and Rural China, 1949-1968*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 2003, pp. 328-340.

[113] Yan Yunxiang, *Private Life under Socialism: Love, Intimacy, and Family Change in a Chinese Village, 1949-1999*. Stanford, C.A., Stanford University Press, 2003, pp. 217-220.

merely made them dependent on the state and market, the Chinese Communist Revolution did bring a significant change in the traditional family.

The Communist state-formation also creatively appropriated the intellectual sources of the Confucian tradition by adopting much of the practice of self-cultivation. Instead of "managing the family and governing the community," the goal of individual self-cultivation directly served the building of the revolutionary state. As Frederick Wakeman Jr. has shown, Mao Zedong's thoughts were heavily influenced by his intellectual upbringing in the Mind School of late imperial Confucianism[114], in that he placed a strong emphasis on the role of the cultivation of the personal will as the motivation of history.[115] More recent works by Wang Fansen suggests that the Confucian practices of moral self-cultivation and self-criticism found their modern incarnation in the Communist tradition of moral criticism and self-criticism[116]. Liu Shaoqi's ideal of "self-cultivation of a good Communist" also borrowed heavily from Confucianism in articulating the model Communist personhood as a life of strong commitment and moral self-discipline.[117]

Communist attitudes toward the family thus marked both a break and a creative continuation of the Chinese political tradition. While the family as a social institution had its place in a socialist society, the touchstone of the revolutionaries was their readiness to sacrifice themselves and their families for the Communist Revolution. As a strong-willed individualist, Mao was much less clear

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[114] The Mind School was a school of neo-Confucianism founded by the Ming philosopher Wang Yangming. Contrary to the dominant ritualistic strain of neo-Confucianism, the Mind School underscored a more intuitive, self-reflexive approach to discover one's innate goodness.

[115] Frederick E. Wakeman, *History and Will: Philosophical Perspectives of Mao Tse-Tung's Thought*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1973, pp. 244-247.

[116] Wang Fansen, *Zhongguo Jindai Sixiang yu Xueshu de Xipu* (A Genealogy of Ideas and Scholarship in Modern China), Changchun: Jilin renmin chubanshe, pp. 25-27

[117] Wenxiang Gong, "The Legacy of Confucian culture in Maoist China," *The Social Science Journal*, vol. 26, No.4, 370-372.

on the role of the family. In the standard historical narrative, Mao was the model of selfless sacrifice precisely because he lost six close relatives for the Communist Revolution. His eldest son, first wife, two younger brothers, a younger sister, a nephew, all died a violent death during various stages of the Chinese Revolution.[118] Even in the heyday of Maoism, Mao was not mainly involved in building a dynasty, like the founding emperors did for their imperial state. It was not until the last days of his life that he delegated power to his wife and nephew but without making a clear succession arrangement with this family. Instead, he anointed Hua Guofang, a loyalist stakeholder in the Cultural Revolution order as the successor.[119] Indeed, the family seemed to have little role in Mao's conception of an ideal Communist world. Mao's Great Leap Forward experiments were partially designed to phase out the family as a backward, feudalist institution.

Mao's position on the family was exceptional, even with his Party. Most Communists would have hesitated before sacrificing all their family interests for the revolution. In contrast, they would reconcile the state and family interests, even though they were committed to the gradual phasing out of the family. In Mao's China, the offspring of the Party elites at various levels enjoyed overwhelming advantages in education, welfare, and career opportunities, although they also suffered political persecution and physical violence during their parents' fall from grace during the

[118] Mao's family tragedy has become revolutionary lore since the Communist Era. In 1931, the warlord of his hometown killed his first wife, Yang Kaihui. The Xinjiang warlord executed His eldest brother Zemin, a revolutionary leader and financier in 1943. Then he came his younger brother Mao Zetan, a Communist general, who perished in guerrilla battle in Jiangxi in 1935. His adopted sister, Mao Zejian, was executed by KMT troops in Hunan in 1929. Zetan's son Chuxiang, a Communist propagandist, was buried alive by KMT troops in 1949. His eldest son, Mao Anying, died at the Chinese army headquarters during a surprise air-raid in the early days of the Korean War in 1950.

[119] For the succession struggle in Mao's last days, refer to *The End of the Maoist Era: Chinese Politics During the Twilight of Cultural Revolution, 1972-1976*, London and New York: Routledge, pp. 462-536.

Cultural Revolution. [120] In the aftermath of the Cultural Revolution, the rehabilitated Party elders typically developed a sense of guilt for their children's sufferings for their sake. They sought a compensational strategy by instituting their sons and daughters as the "Princelings" appointees to key positions in the Party, the military, and lucrative business sectors. This pattern of power succession was known as "collective succession. [121] This mentality of "collective succession" reflected a more subtle and standard articulation of the Communist mode of state-family relations, which sought harmonize the interests of the family and the state as coherent. We can already notice such a line of arguments in Liu Shaoqi's theory of Communist self-cultivation during the formative years of the Party-state in Yan'an. In his "How to be a Good Communist," Liu underscores the absolute importance of the Communist Party's interests but also carefully allows space to the family and individual.

"Members of our Party must subordinate the personal to the Party interests. All Party members are required to sacrifice them to Party interests if necessary. But this by no means implies that our Party does not recognize, or brushes aside, the personal interests of its members or that it wants to wipe out their individuality. Party members do have their problems to attend to, and they should develop themselves according to their inclinations and aptitudes. Therefore, so long as the interests of the Party are unaffected, a Party member can have his private and family life and develop his inclinations and aptitudes. As far as possible, the Party will attend to and safeguard its members'

[120] Shao Yang, *Beijing: Zhongguo de Gaogan zidi men* (Beijing: The Children of Party Elites), Beijing: Shidai wenyi chubanshe, 2002.

[121] Wang Haiguang, "Xueyuan Wenhua yu Wenhua Dageming"; Yang Jisheng, "Jiti Shixi yu Quanlichang" (Collective Succession and the Field of Power), *Yanhuang Chunqiu*, 2008, No. 6, pp. 50-52.

vital interests; for example, it will allow them to study and acquire education. It will help them cope with health and family problems."[122]

Liu's conception of the Party member's self-discipline, which appeared first in 1939, reflected the experience at the Communist base area Yan'an at a time when the Communist Party competed with the KMT and Japanese for the minds and hearts of young intellectuals. In particular, this principle was the product of the Yan'an Rectification, which subjected all the individualistic inclinations among the young intellectuals to the broader political goals of the Party-state and especially Mao's doctrine.[123] The elements of the Yan'an way of life, such as a collective economy, rigorous ideological commitment, and a small but efficient bureaucracy, held strong appeal for the politically minded youths in the 1940s. As the revolutionaries joined the Party for national salvation, they were willing to sacrifice their well-being or even risk their lives. The real conflicts between the individuals and the Party were between the bourgeois, individualist tendency among the students, such as their ideals of freedom and individual political rights, and ideological control of the Party and especially Mao Zedong thought. However, the last resistance from the liberal-minded youths like Wang Shiwei collapsed during the initial stage of the Rectification Campaign of 1943.[124] As Mao Zedong Thought carried the day, the only legitimate belief was Mao's vision of Communism. All individual thoughts had to confirm with the ideological doctrine.

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[122] Translation adapted from Liu Shaoqi, "How to Be a Communist Party Member" (1939), Kenneth Highan and Mike B. (trans), *Selected Works of Liu Shaoqi, Vol. 1*, Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1984, p. 136.

[123] For the authoritative study of the campaign, refer to Gao Hua, Guo Jian and Stacey Mosher (trans), *How the Red Sun Rose: The Origin and Development of Yan'an Rectification Campaign*, Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2018.

[124] Gao Hua, Guo Jian and Stacey Mosher (trans), *How the Red Sun Rose: The Origin and Development of Yan'an Rectification Campaign*, pp. 335-388.

While Liu Shaoqi's formulation of the individual and the Party sought to reconcile the Communist ideals of class solidarity with the Confucian care for a family-based social order, an inherent contradiction lurked in his moderate approach. On the one hand, the Party must attend to and safeguard the welfare of its members. On the other hand, all individual members must subordinate and sacrifice all their private interests to the Party's highest interests, which were inherently bounded by the Communist telos of egalitarianism and universal prosperity. To what extent should the Party reconcile the required sacrifice from its members and the legitimate material demands of the members? What if the economic development required for the universal prosperity necessarily involves increasing inequalities among its members and within the wider socialist society? The tension between the egalitarian goals of the Party and the concrete material interests of its members was inherent in the Communist Revolution. Such tension was still manageable during the Yan'an days when the "society" under the Party-state control was still relatively small and structurally simple. As there was little private wealth in Yan'an society, most revolutionaries were equally poor. But once the revolution moved into a different terrain, such as the complex and diverse society of China's metropolitan areas, the contradiction threatened the legitimacy of the collective model of a Communist society.

Unlike the imperial state, which sought human flourishing through cosmic harmony, the Communist leaders promised class struggle to achieve human development and welfare for all.[125] Since an efficient economy usually operated on individual incentives and competition between personal interests necessarily led to class differences, the two goals were sometimes contradictory,

[125] For the Confucian view on harmony and human flourishing, see Li Chenyang, *The Confucian Philosophy in Harmon*y, London: Routledge, 2013, pp. 9-10; For the standard Communist view on class struggle and solidarity to achieve total well-being and equality, see Karl Marx, Frederick Engels, *The Communist Manifesto,* in Karl Marx, and Frederick Engels, Selected Works, Vol.1, pp. 98-137.

at least in the short-run. Furthermore, the natural extension of a person's well-being is the family's prosperity. People tended to index human flourishing with their family's well-being. Unless people took collective interests to be the same as those of their family, it would be difficult to reconcile the two goals. The solution could be constructing an intermediate between the state and the family. For example, in late imperial China, the "Confucian" corporate clans in South China, as Zhang Taisu shows, combines the two goals by negotiating egalitarian principles with economic efficiency within the lineage system[126]. In late Qing North China, where lineage tradition was weak, local elites often took the initiatives to build irrigation associations across surname groups and villages.[127]

With the missions of human flourishing and equality, the Communist Party had to replace the Confucian order with a new order, so individuals become so identified with the socialist community or the state-family that they treated the collective as their family and obeyed the central command as to their own decisions. In other words, the Party wanted to socialize the people to sacrifice for a larger community and reoriented its goals from the family's well-being to the interests of the state. In the Yan'an days, the revolutionary restructuring of the society focused on "comradeship", in many ways a modernized version of the Confucian "friendship", as the overriding principles of building a new society. Under this new vision, social relations were not held by familial bonds but the shared sacrifice for a vision of a better society, whereas economic needs were satisfied by the war economic principle of centralized state supply (供给制). The

[126] Zhang Taisu, *The Laws and Economics of Confucianism: Kindship and Property in Preindustrial China and England*, Cambridge University Press, 2017, pp. 265-267.

[127] Contemporary China observers have already noticed the fundamental mismatch between household incentives and communal approach of mobilization. See Dwight Perkins, *Market Control and Planning in Communist China*, Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press, 1966, pp. 88-89.

standardized military-style supply of basic livelihood left a deep mark on the Yan'an veterans' vision of Communism and all aspects of everyday life after their take-over of urban China. [128]

Once the revolutionaries marched triumphantly into the city and brought in their families from the countryside, they found the Soviet-style salary system in the complex urban economy was more suitable than the wartime state provision system for city life. In 1950, the Central Financial and Economic Affairs Commissions replaced direct supply with new salary system. In the 1950s, the hierarchical salary system became the major source of income for most urban households in the government payroll[129]. Xue Muqiao, a leading economist of the Communist Party, once reflected on the institutional change:

"After the liberation, work conditions changed. It was hard to continue the state supply system. The state supply system was simple: we got our rice bowl all year round, a winter coat each year, a cotton jacket every two years, one towel per season, a toothpaste, and a soap. That was all we need! Once in the city, life was not so simple. First, we were all bachelors in the liberation area. I was literally a bachelor. My wife was in Yan'an but I was in Shandong. My mother and daughter was in the Wuxi countryside. I didn't know if there were alive; they were not sure if I survived. We can't take care of each other. After the liberation, my mother and daughter came to live with me in Beijing. How am I supposed to handle them? If we don't feed them as in the revolutionary years, people will say: "How could you refuse to provide for your family, now that you are an

[128] Yan Changhong, *20 Shiji Zhongguo shehuishenghuo bianqianshi* (A History of Changing Chinese Social Life in the 20th Century), Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 2007, pp. 515-517.

[129] The factory wage payroll, where workers and technicians received their monthly income, was modelled after the hierarchical government payroll, except that the basis of hierarchy was not official ranks but skill level and experience. Both systems saw the wage frozen 1963 and 1977. A major exception to the wage system is the redemptive or fixed interests paid to former capitalists and stockholders after the full nationalization of private capital. The seasonable interests payment lasted until the early years of the Cultural Revolution. For a survey of the wage system, see Zhuang Qidong et al, *Xinzhongguo gongsi shigao* (Draft History of the Salary System in the PRC), Beijing: Zhongguo caizhengjingji chubanshe, 1986.

official. How could you still depend on friends and neighbors to feed your children like in the revolutionary days? If we feed them, all cadres will demand the same for their families. So how? This is not an easy issue to deal with. But once we have the salary system, there is no problem. We could feed them in the city if we can afford. If not, we can always send 10 yuan to the rural hometown where everything is cheaper, and they will have enough to make it through".[130]

Xue Muqiao's reflection shows a dramatic change in Communist cadres' family life across the 1949 divide. In the Yan'an days, the revolutionary youths were atomized individuals fully integrated into the collective life of the Party. They pledged to sacrifice to cause of the Party state and war communism simply allowed no space to take care of one's family. As he admits, the hierarchical salary system, necessary to support urban families, was fully coherent with Communist principles, judged by the standard of revolutionary struggles. However, popular moral code such as state responsibility for basic welfare and the principle of reciprocity, applied even to the Communist revolutionaries. They also inherited the traditional practice of sojourning in rural-to-urban migration but imbued it with revolutionary meaning.[131] When time was tough, though, it was still viable to send the family back to the countryside even after 1949, if the "revolutionary" conditions demanded such a sacrifice. As we shall discuss in the following chapters, rustication or "send-down" did become a national strategy in 1960s and 1970s, whenever there was the state found it hard to support too many urban families.

[130] "Xue Muqiao tongshi baogao" (Report of Xue Muqiao), June 20, 1978, Wuxi Municipal Archives, B005-1978-010-0148, pp.11-12.

[131] Sojourning has been a common way for itinerant merchants and scholars since Song dynasty (960-1276). For a brief discussion on sojourner in Qing China (1644-1912), see G. William Skinner, "Urban Social Structure in Ch'ing China", in G. William Skinner ed., The City in Late Imperial China, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1977, 538-546.

Whereas Xue realized the economic infeasibility of the state provision system, Mao attached a special political significance to the system in his attack of the hierarchy salary system as bourgeois and revisionist. His fond memory of the Yan'an days, his life-long distaste of money, and his enduring skepticism of the Soviet model made him highly critical of the salary system. His ideal society, where cadres and workers all engaged in manual labor and lived a simple frugal life according to their basic needs, derived from idealized picture of the the Yan'an years. From 1956 to 1973, Mao repeatedly urged the reduction of wage differentials and the replacement of the wage system by more egalitarian direct provision of basic goods. [132] After the Communist take-over, the spirit of the state supply system survived in the rations alongside with the salary system. During the revolutionary austerity, Mao and his lieutenants would effectively freeze wages and evoke the state supply as an alternative. However, as we shall discuss in later chapters, the Maoist vision's failure to incorporate the fundamental interests of urban families doomed his austerity wage policies.

The Communist wartime economic and social organizations profoundly shaped Communist urban economy and society. After taking over the city, the Communist Party imposed the policy of "Big Pot Rice" 大锅饭, namely, the Party state provide for the family livelihood of all urban residents through both direct supply of necessities and a salary. This remarkable reconfiguration of family-state relations in the 1950s rested on a unique historical condition of a country torn by war and revolution, when the state emerged as the only powerful organizing force after the war destroyed the market and social fabric of urban societies. On the eve of the Communist takeover,

[132] Yang Kuisong, "Cong Gongjizhi dao zhiwu dengji gongzizhi: Xinzhongguo jianli qianhou dangzheng renyuan shourufenpei zhidu de yanbian" (From State Provision to Office-based hierarchical Salary System: The Evolution of the Income Distribution System for the Party-state's Employees), *Lishi yanjiu* (Historical Research), 2007, No.4, pp. 131-133.

tensions between ordinary urban residents whose livelihood were lost or jeopardized under the hyperinflation and the privileged who could shield themselves or even profited from inflation. Conflicts and sometimes violent strife were rampant between workers and capitalists, government employees and the government officials, soldiers and officers, and rentiers and speculators.[133] The Communist policies were a forceful response to such social disruptions.

A few years into the takeover, the Communist state built a massive network of government machinery in charge of everyday life, dominating and transforming the political, economic, and cultural lives of families and communities. In the rapid build-up of infrastructural power of the state, defined by Michael Mann as the power to penetrate the society[134], the Communist state in urban China had an equalizing effect on the families and communities as old hierarchy was destroyed. The equalization of most families' access to rationed food, a new socialist culture, and a new political classification system under the state replaced earlier forms of economic inequalities and political domination at the grassroots level.

Organizing Family and the Community Through Class Struggles

In *the Great Leveler*, Walter Scheidel identifies war as one of the most potent forces in reducing inequality in human societies. Urban China in the late 1940s and early 1950s bear testimony to this destructive, "leveling" power of war.[135] After several years of total war, the

[133] Yang Guoqiang, Zhang Peide, *Shanghai Tongshi: Minguo jingji* (A General History of Shanghai: The Shanghai Economy in the Republican Period), Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1999, pp. 325-329.

[134] Michael Mann distinguishes two forms of state power: the infrastructural and the despotic: the despotic power refers to the power to dominate the society, through means like military force; the infrastructural power refers to the power to penetrate the society and enlist local residents for its state-building by providing public security, education, communication, and other services. See Michael Mann, "The Autonomous Power of the State: Its Origins, Mechanisms, and Results, *European Journal of Sociology*, 25 (2): 185-213.

[135] Walter Scheidel, *The Great Leveler: Violence and History of Inequality from the Stone Age to the Twenty-First Century,* Princeton, NJ., Princeton University of Press, 2018, in passim.

hyperinflation reduced most, if not all, families to the brink of bankruptcy and starvation. With unemployment rate soaring and the inflation rate sky-high, the average worker's family was barely surviving the war with saving or borrowed money. [136] Meanwhile, the old political order also collapsed as the KMT evacuated the city. By the time the Communist army rode into Shanghai, they were the only powerful organization that could reshape the society.

The complete reorganization began in earnest in 1951, after Beijing concurrently launched the "Resist America and Aid Korea" campaign and the Anti-Counter-revolutionaries Movement. In April 1951, the Communist Party carried out a comprehensive survey of a typical working-class neighborhood in Shanghai. The Bureau of Civil Affairs chose the Meifang Neighborhood of Putuo District, an area populated mostly by workers and their families, as the site of their pilot project of grassroots organization building.[137] Based on the demographic data and mobilization experience of the Meifang Neighborhood, the Party launched a sweeping experiment of state-building in a society under only weak state control before 1949 by eliminating the old grassroots elites and mobilizing the population for struggle sessions. In the aftermath of the class struggles, the Party identified a handful of "activists" for further mobilization and organization. By the winter 1952, the Shanghai Municipal Government had instituted neighborhood committees complete with a full

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[136] According to a survey of 335 workers' households in 1956, 1948 and 1949 were the worst years for working families in Shanghai, as the average family earned 20% less than they spent. C.f. "Shanghai zhigong linianlai shenghuoshuiping tigao qingkuang Chubu fenxi" (Preliminary Analysis of The Rising Incomes of Shanghai Working Households), B 127-1-1001.

[137] Shanghai Mingzheng Zhi Bianzuan weiyuanhui (Shanghai Civil Affairs Gazetteers Editorial Committee), *Shanghai Minzheng Zhi* (Shanghai Civil Affairs Gazetteers), Shanghai: Shanghai Academy of Social Science, 1990, p. 17.

set of personnel in charge of hygiene, propaganda, welfare, and women's work in all the urban areas of Shanghai.[138]

In March 1951, the Bureau of Civil Affairs meticulously surveyed the Meifang Neighborhood, a relatively young and uneducated community, to mobilize its residents for a class struggle. With 4,376 residents in 1,019 families, the Meifang community was typical of a middle-sized working-class neighborhood. The average family size was 4.2. The relatively small household size compared with the Shanghai average of 4.7 was probably due to young, migrant nature of the population, since 55% of the population was below 35.[139] Of the 2,200 economically active residents, 1,010 were industrial workers, 408 handicraft workers, 155 officer workers, 304 small merchants, and 25 "bourgeois" capitalists whose capital stock was higher than the "merchants". The Third Cotton-Cloth Factory employed around 60% of the industrial workers in the neighborhood. The community was predominantly illiterate or minimally educated. Of the 86% of the population above the school entrance age, 53.4% were illiterate, and another 24.4% did not graduate from primary school. The highest educated male of the community was a college graduate, whereas the most educated female resident did not even finish senior high school. Only 44 men and three women, or 1% of the 4,376 residents completed junior high schools.[140]

The Meifang Neighborhood was also a typical migrant community divided by the places of origin. In terms of place of origin, about a third of the residents came from two counties in Jiangsu. At the same time, the rest of the population originated from the rest of Jiangsu, Anhui, Shandong,

[138] Ibid, p.51

[139] "Meifangli linong zuzhi gongzuobaogao ji jinhou linong gongzuo Chubu yijian" (Work Report on the Organization of the Meifang Neighborhood and Preliminary Suggestions for Future Work), B 168-1-766, p.1-3

[140] Ibid.

Zhejiang, and Hubei.[141] These internal divisions corresponded to the profiles of the "*Bao-jia*" heads—the state-appointed leaders of the grassroots administrative units who mediated the bureaucracy and the households.[142] The investigation finds that 17 of the 26 leaders of *Jia* on record were from Jiangsu, followed by three from Shandong, Zhejiang, Hubei, and Anhui, roughly following the share of each province in the overall population of the neighborhood. Within the 17 Jiangsu heads, eight were from Yancheng County, marking this neighborhood as a typical "Subei" (North Jiangsu) society, which in the 1950s were the principal targets of the prejudice of the middle-class residents in Shanghai, who came predominantly from Zhejiang and Southern Jiangsu. Locality-based gangs also played a crucial role in grassroots management. One of the Hubei heads of Jia belonged to the Hubei Gang in Shanghai.[143]

The key criterion by which the neighborhood was selected as a model of grassroots state-building was the mobilization potential of its population. The Meifang neighborhood was thus slightly more dominated by migrant workers and more susceptible to class struggles than the rest of Shanghai. However, its demographics were broadly representative of the working class of Shanghai. In a population survey of Shanghai in 1954, the statistical Bureau found that Shanghai's working-class, accounting for about 40% of the population, predominantly worked in industry,

[141] Ibid, p.4

[142] Bao 保 and Jia 甲 are China's long-standing grassroots administrative units. In late imperial Shanghai, a "Jia" typically consisted of 10 households, whereas a "Bao" consisted of 10 "Jia". In urban China under the Republican and Japanese administration (1928-1949), the units were much larger due to higher population density: one "Jia" typically comprised of 20-25 households, whereas a typical "Bao" consisted of 20-25.

[143] "Meifangli linong zuzhi gongzuobaogao ji jinhou linong gongzuo Chubu yijian", pp. 5-7

commerce, and handicrafts, while 60% were economically inactive dependents.[144] It was also predominantly a society of migrant workers. Migrant workers like Wang Qiuyun, who arrived from north Jiangsu during the recent decades of war, constituted 46% of the city's working-class neighborhood, such as the Meifang Neighborhood.[145]

The Shanghai Police Bureau followed on the heals of the investigators to ferret out suspicious households from the 1,019 families. The survey mainly targeted two social groups: the politically suspect households with ties to the KMT and the old grassroots elites who played a role in the bao-jia system. In the end, Civil Affair Bureau singled out 21 households as "bad element" and 19 residents as morally corrupt. Following the traditional practice of household survey, the Communist bureaucracy classified the households primarily by the profession and affiliation of the head of the family, including two heads of "*bao*," one county magistrate, four members of the Nationalist Party, three cadres of "Welfare Society," and three suspected secrete agents.[146] Also, they found 19 heads of the family as morally corrupt or politically suspicious, including four members of "Thin Knife Party," two engaging in "suspicious" activities, a thief, a convicted robber, a rumormonger, two drug-dealers, a drug addict, two "hooligans," three "sex offender," and three street vendors with unidentifiable sources of income.[147] By rendering legible the political and

[144] "Shiwei Guanyu benshi jiaqing hukou guanli he zhubu jinsuo Renkou de zhishi" (The Shanghai Party Committee's Directives on Strengthening Household Registration Work and Gradually Control Population), B 25-1-1, p.80.

[145] Cai Liang, *Xinshuai zhiji: Jindai shanghai Zhabei de Subeiren* (Between Prosperity and Decline: the Subei People in Modern Shanghai), Taipei: Yuanliu Publishing House, p. 9.

[146] "Meifangli linong zuzhi gongzuobaogao ji jinhou linong gongzuo chubu yijian" (Work Report on the Organization of the Meifang Neighborhood and Preliminary Suggestions for Future Work), B 168-1-766, p.7

[147] Ibid, p.8

moral history of the population, the Bureau identified a handful of "bad" elements from the "good" majority.

After a complete survey of the neighborhood, the Bureau found 28 heads of the "*bao*" and "*jia*" units to be members of the old grassroots elites. These "*bao*" and "*jia*" were the most enduring system of grassroots governance in rural and urban China. The KMT government implemented a new version of the system in 1930s urban China. Coming from diverse places and professions, most of these old elites were not affiliated with the KMT regime but rather were members of local gangs. In terms of occupation, they represented the majority population of the community: eleven heads of the "*bao*" belonged to the class of "merchants" or peddlers. Ten were even workers or craftsmen. There were even two unemployed workers. A more critical criterion for the "enemies" label was the affiliation with the local gang centered on a street bully named Xu Yuliang. Based on the affiliation with the top villain, the survey indicates that 20 heads as "bad" and "suspicious" elements, including gang members who were closely associated with the KMT[148]. The Party also has significantly penetrated the local community before 1949. At least three of the 28 "*bao"* and *"jia"* heads were underground Party members, friends, or "covers": an underground Party member, a "close friend" of the Party, and a father of a Party member. [149]

The last task of the survey was to identify the chief villains and create an official narrative of the community for political mobilization. This narrative helped the authority to focus on the interlocking networks of the "bad" elements and grassroots elites to locate the root cause of "class exploitation." According to the final version of the community history, the working community's misery was due to the thuggish rule of two state-sponsored villains. Between 1938 and 1941, Du

[148] Ibid, p. 9

[149] "Meifangli linong zuzhi gongzuobaogao ji jinhou linong gongzuo chubu yijian", pp. 8-9

Lanxin, a member of the Green Gang, briefly reigned supreme through his unruly "disciples." Since 1941, Xu Yuliang, a former disciple of Du, became the leader of a gang closely associated with the Japanese by making himself an "adopted son" of a Japanese officer. In 1946, Xu briefly hid his identity and bided his time. In 1947, he remerged as a local leader by making himself a disciple of Yang Hu, a significant gangster and a member of the KMT. The KMT government named Xu as the leader of the "Welfare Society (fulihui)," a grassroots organization in charge of collecting utility bills, organizing elections, and distributing relief grains. Financed by a 45% surcharge on the utility bills, Xu rounded up unemployed youths and organized a core group of 27 disciples under "Thin Knife Gang." [150]

The narratives then focused on organized crimes of the KMT-affiliated local gang as responsible for the economic plight of residents. With the help of his "Thin Knife Gang," Xu quickly amassed a fortune and instituted himself as the ruler in the neighborhood. As the workers' narrative tells: "Before the liberation, Xu's Thin Knife Gang consisted of unemployed wanderers and bad elements. Their principal source of income was extortion of businesses and households. Take the example of the Big Beard Zhao. He relied on the Thin Knife Gang to make a living. If a newly opened shop in the neighborhood did not give them money for protection, he would pour dung on their wall and smash their new neon lights. When the local theatre opened, Xu ordered his thugs to extort a ransom. His gang compiled up nine bags of rice in front of the theatre's main gate and served as ticket inspectors, demanding extra payment from the audience. Besides, Xu also hired out his disciples as hitmen, lent to the poor upon usury, collected seasonal tribunes, and assaulted female workers."[151]

[150] Ibid

[151] Ibid, p. 10.

Such a micro political history narrative based on dozens of interviews with the working-class families helped the Party cadres to spotlight Xu Yuliang as the “enemy of the people" and, therefore, a worthy target for class struggle. His multiple identities as a local bully and a representative of the KMT state made him an ideal scapegoat of the community’s history of suffering. In 1950, the new Communist police speedily disbanded Xu and his gang. Based on his role as a gangster, the local People’s court sentenced Xu to two years of corrective labor in the Labor Reform Camps[152]. But Xu’s fate took a darker turn in December 1950, when the state initiated the campaign to suppress counterrevolutions, following China's entry into the Korean War. Capitalizing on the spirit of patriotism within the working-class neighborhood, Mao decided to establish the Party-state’s authority by openly cracking down on all the internal enemies in the name of a war of self-defense.[153] The Korean battlefields thus formed the immediate context for the revolutionary mobilization around the Meifang Neighborhood.

Based on a precise population profile of the community, the cadres went from door to door to mobilize the entire neighborhood, setting the stage for the climactic event, a struggle session against Xu and his acolytes. On the eve of this showdown, the Party sent "work teams" to scout out potential activist organizers and suitable accusers for the struggle session. In the beginning, the cadres only managed to persuade a handful of residents, while most residents, especially Xu’s

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[152] A critical part of the Chinese penal system from 1950 to 2013, the Labor Reform Camp (Laogai ying) was China’s version of the Soviet GULAG., the labor reform camps system was designed to reform certain categories of criminals, typically perpetrators of petty offences or political crimes, through hard manual labor so they could rejoin the proletarian mass someday. For a brief discussion of the *Laogai* system in the history of Chinese penal system, see Xiaoqun Xu, *Heaven Has Eyes: A History of Chinese Law*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2020, pp. 196-198.

[153] Yang Kuisong, “Reconsidering the Campaign to Suppress Counter-Revolutionaries," *The China Quarterly*, No. 193 (Mar. 2008), pp. 102-121.

victims, though sympathetic to the Party's cause, hesitated to show up in the struggle session. After a week's door-to-door mobilization, the work team managed to stir up the anger of the most residents and convinced the participation of most victims. By the eve of the struggle session, more than a thousand residents competed for 736 tickets to the struggle session.[154]

After several weeks of mobilization, the Meifang Neighborhood held the struggle meetings on May 8, 1951. The three-hours-event turned out to be a sensational political theatre. An hour before the scheduled opening, more than 1,000 residents, or 10% of the population, packed the venue.[155] Thanks to the meticulous house-to-house work of the Party workers, the anger of the crowd vis-à-vis the villain proved unstoppable:

> "Once the meeting started, the atmosphere of the assembled mass was tense and solemn. Universal hatred was on everybody's face. Some were moved to tears by anger; some could not speak in fits of excitement; some clenched their fists while crying silently, ready to beat or bite Xu Yuliang. Suddenly, the crowd shouted with one voice: 'Crackdown on the counter-revolutionaries and shot Xu Yuliang to death!'"[156]

The collective feeling of victimhood was ripe for the cathartic moment of class struggle and the people's court. As the cadres in charge later remarked, "the great power of the mass dispelled the remaining doubts of the rests." The work team then sent five accusers and one commentator onto the stage. These five accusers, four men, and one woman came from hundreds of victims for their bitterness and authenticity. The organizers ordered their appearance according to their sufferings in crescendo. The commentator, a primary school teacher, and now an activist in the neighborhood summarized the emotional narratives of the five accusers into a summary political

[154] "Guanyu zuzhi kongsu dahui de xiaojie" (Summary on the Organization of the Struggle Sessions), B128-1-766, p. 128.

[155] Ibid, p.130.

[156] Ibid, p.131.

lesson on the higher goals of cracking down the counter-revolutionaries and building a New China. The original plan for the political theatre included a disciple of Xu, who had wholeheartedly confessed his crimes. Still, the organizational team had to drop this accuser due to the concerns of the police.[157]

The performance of the political theatre exceeded even the expectations of the organizers. In the end, the five accusers proved hugely successful in heating the emotions of widespread hatred to a boiling point. As Xu became the cause of all past sufferings of the community during the war years, the crowd had no qualms in meting out capital punishment. Though the Communist court had hesitated to apply the death sentence, the cadres present quickly decided on behalf of the Party. By the end of the meeting, Xu's penalty was converted from two years in a labor camp to capital punishment, while the agitated female workers hurried to search for Xu's concubine.[158]

This official and the only surviving record of the event at the founding of Shanghai's first neighborhood committee likely exaggerated the orderliness of the events and the authentic public sentiments. Like any contemporary government reports, its function was to set an example for latter works rather than accurately chronicling the events. The report seemed to imply that the mass already knew how to stage a "performance" in the struggle session under the state surveillance and the grassroots cadres knew perfectly how to stage a performance on paper for the superior. In reality, the process might be much more chaotic and fraught with unexpected turns. However, it is beyond the scope of this research to verify and reconstruct what happened beyond the official story. Rather, as this record did demonstrate, the standard approach of grassroots state-building in 1950s urban China suggested a new logic of the family-state relations in early Maoist China. Unlike the

[157] Ibid, p. 132.

[158] Ibid, p. 133.

bao-jia system, the new system of grassroots state was no longer limited to control and surveillance. Since its inception, the Communist grassroots state actively took part in the shaping of the political identities of the residents. Through the mobilization of the mass, it hoped to transform a society of diverse backgrounds into a community of shared purpose and sentiments.

The emotional and ideological mobilization set the stage for the Party's institutional building in several ways. First, it served to establish the Communist ideology of class struggle among the mass by aligning the hearts and minds of the people with the Party's policy objectives. Through skillful use of political theatres and storytelling, the Party-state transformed a motley crew of weakly-connected migrants mired in economic difficulties into a highly-politicized community organized "New Society" according to the Party's doctrine of a class struggle. Second, the movement helped the cadres to identify a few political activists and potential Party members. As "director" of the political show, the Party cadres quickly sorted out the most enthusiastic participants of the struggle sessions from the mass. They integrated them into the ranks and files of grassroots Party workers who mediated state power and social life[159]. Third, the organizational work in preparation of the political theatre made the local society, including the personal history of all its members, more legible to the Communist state. All such information went into the construction of a new grassroots bureaucracy. Though there was certainly limits to this mobilization model of grassroots state-buildings, its basic message was simple and clear. The

[159] *Jiji fenzi* (activists) played an essential role in the PRC's state-building at various urban grassroots units, such as neighborhood and factories. These volunteers or activists are still an important part of neighborhood governance in urban China today. For an analysis of the "activists" in various Party-state units, see: Julia Strauss, "Morality, Coercion and State Building by Campaign in the Early PRC: Regime Consolidation and After, 1949-1956", *China Quarterly*, 2006, No. 188, pp. 891-912; Joel Andreas, *Disenfranchised: The Rise and Fall of Industrial Citizenship in China*, New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 68-70, 90-91; Benjamin Read, *Roots of the State: Neighborhood Organization and Social Networks in Beijing and Taipei*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010, pp. 173-175.

Communist state intended to penetrate through the thickets of social relations and project its power on the life of each and everyone of its subjects.

In their mobilization of violent class struggles in urban China, the Communist Party cadres built on their earlier experience in the political work in the People's Liberation Army and land reform in rural north China in the late 1940s. In Hinton's *Fanshen*, he sketched out how the political theatre of class struggles played a vital role in the mobilization of peasants for the revolutionary cause.[160] More recently, Qi Xiaolin's work on the mobilization of peasants further highlighted a crucial political function of mass violence in the struggle session, since the killing of class enemies at the hands of the peasants created a point of no return for the ordinary peasants. After they participated in the gruesome murder of the landlords, the otherwise risk-averse and apolitical peasants had to join the People's Liberation Army for the safety of their families.[161] The Meifang experience and the sweeping reorganization of urban Shanghai testified to the power of this organization technique. The mobilization of "the people" for violent retribution transformed the disorganized, fragmented local society into a community under state control.

The Neighborhood Committee also incorporated the functions of grassroots organizations. In terms of their organizations, the Committee needed both permanent Party members and a group of young activists who were still "mass". The first batch of the neighborhood committees usually drew from the activists among the so-called "unorganized" elements, namely, housewives as the primary source of the taskforce.[162] In terms of organizational structure, the taskforce required the

[160] William H. Hinton, *Fanshen: A Documentary of Revolution in a Chinese Village*, New York: Monthly Review Press, 2008(1966).

[161] Qi Xiaolin, *Huabei genju di nongmin ruhe zouxiang zhanchang* (Becoming a Soldier: How Did Peasants in North China Revolutionary Base Area Walk to the battlefield), Chengdu: Sichuan Renmin chubanshe. 2015, pp. 445-447

[162] "Shanghai shi jumin zuzhi qingkuang" (The Organizational Condition of Shanghai City Residents), A6-2-90, p.7

mobilization of existing self-organized communal groups. In many cases, the Committee drew on the members of the Winter Preventive Group, a temporary volunteer group in the neighborhood responsible for preventing fire and frostbite.[163] The Meifang Neighborhood Committee, founded in May 1951, added a robust political purpose to all these previous roles. A small team of five political activists and two Party members, the Neighborhood Committee, had to carry out a range of work from organizing political movements to maintaining public hygiene.[164]

The grassroots reorganization also introduced significant changes to class and gender composition of the grassroots state. Under the self-governed *Bao-Jia* system, almost all grassroots leaders were middle-aged men. In the Meifang Neighborhood, 24 of the 28 bao-Jia heads were older men above 50 with a background in various gangs.[165] Under the Communist system, around 80% of the grassroots cadres in Shanghai's neighborhood committees were workers and especially their dependents.[166] Since grassroots work was, in large part, tedious emotional work with the families, the Party considered women with primary education and revolutionary enthusiasm as the most suitable candidates for the job. In this way, the new neighborhood organizations recruited a

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[163] Ibid

[164] Xinwen Ribao chuban Bianweihui (Editorial Committee of the News Daily), *Jiedao linong jumin shenghuo shouce* (A Guide to Life of Residents under the Streets and Neighborhood Systems), Shanghai: Xinwen Ribao Chubanshe, 1951.

[165] "Meifangli linong zuzhi gongzuobaogao ji jinhou linong gongzuo Chubu yijian" (Work Report on the Organization of the Meifang Neighborhood and Preliminary Suggestions for Future Work), B168-1-766, pp. 4-5.

[166] Zhang Jishun, "Shanghai linong: jiceng zhengzhi dongyuan yu guojia yitihua zouxiang" (Shanghai Neighborhood: Grassroots Political Mobilization and the Road towards Unification), *Social Science in China*, 2002, No.2, p.55

substantial share of the old elites regarded as "allies," typically among these were educated women from the “bourgeois” background, such as the suspicious business and intellectual families. [167]

By the early 1950s, the newly-minted Communist neighborhood system had fundamentally reshaped family-state relations in urban China. Since its inception, the committees bolstered the state power to penetrate and intervene in the everyday life of each family. As the early history of Meifang Neighborhood shows, the Communist state’s skillful exploitation of social tension and popular sentiments in a troubled time led to the reorganization of the community and mobilization of urban residents. The massive mobilization of women for employment, a natural outcome the momentum of the urban revolution, tapped labor force of the families for the industrialization of the socialist state. Meanwhile, the mini-welfare state that the Communist Party established in the late 1950s in urban China took over the essential functions of the family, such as child-caring, elderly care, and even the preparation of daily meals, during the short-lived urban Communes Movement in the Great Leap Forward. Although the expansion of state capacity proved unsustainable, the sheer scale of the development reflected the power of mobilization and organization characteristic of the Communist war machine when it rolled into China’s biggest cities.

Urban Livelihood under the War Economy

When the Communist Party took over Shanghai, the metropole had been mired in a prolonged economic crisis for nine months. The crisis had already come to a head, after the Nationalist Party

[167] The definition of “bourgeois” was always tricky in the early PRC text. Generally, bourgeois family referred to the capitalists who earned substantial interests from their capital. In the National Conference of Wives of Capitalists and Female Capitalists, all the representative speakers came from capitalist families. All the participants had some experience as representatives of the Neighborhood Committee. C.f. All-China Women’s Federation et al., *Quanguo gongshangyezhe jiashu he nvgongshangyezhe daibiao huiyi wenjian* huibian (Collected Documents of the National Conference of Wives of Capitalists and Female Capitalists), Beijing: Caizheng jingji chubanshe, 1956.

lost the decisive battles in Manchuria and Central China in late 1948, when the last-ditch effort to save the economy with a new gold-backed currency ended in a catastrophe. By April 1949, the KMT had all but abandoned Shanghai and relocated the financial and monetary apparatus of the state to Taipei, leaving behind a demoralized, overstretched garrison to be overrun by the Communist. Meanwhile, as urban inflation rates skyrocketed, many businesses bankrupted and official unemployment was at least 16 %. Even those with jobs and monthly incomes could barely earn a living to support their families as the hyperinflation reduced their money to worthless paper.[168]

As hyperinflation and massive unemployment raged on after the Communist takeover in May 1949, even the old intellectual elites could barely make their ends meet. As Gu Jiegang, a leading historian who concurrently served as a senior editor and university professor in Shanghai recorded the continued hyperinflation in his diary entry on November 20, 1949: "Although the price is more stable now, it remains high. The "material unit" now equals to 2,393 yuan RMB. A month ago, it was only 700 yuan RMB. A newspaper now sells for 300 yuan, compared with only 100 yuan a month ago. How can our family survive inflation? Today, all parents have become the slaves of their children."[169]

[168] It must be noted here that 16% registered unemployment is an understatement of the actual level of unemployment, either registered or unregistered, which can be much higher. The internal report of Xu Dixin shows that 230,000 (26.7%) of the 900,000 workers in Shanghai were unemployed or semi-employed in 1949. C.f. Zhang Renshan, *1949 nian Zhongguo shehui* (Chinese Society in 1949), Beijing: Social Science Academy Press, 2005, p. 370; Xue Muqiao, "Qida chengshi gongshang juzhang huiyi" (Conference of the Directors of the Seven Major Cities' Bureau of Commerce), in Xu Jianqing, Dong Zhikai, and Zhao Xuejun ed., *Xue Muqiao Biji Xuanbian* (Selected Work Journals of Xue Muqiao), Vol. 1, 2017, p. 173

[169] Gu Jiegang, *Gu Jiegang Riji 1947-1950* (Gu Jiegang Diary, 1947-1950), Taipei: Lianjing Publisher, 2007, vol. 6, p. 551.

The "monetary unit" refers to a new accounting unit of money under the “Material Standard” originated in Shandong in the Sino-Japanese War.[170] In the early 1940s, the Communist armies in Shandong had to contend with the Japanese and KMT financially and politically. Leveraging their stronghold in the rural area, the financial branch of the Shandong Communist government under Xue Muqiao crafted a new system of money that worked like a coupon: each unit of the new money was backed a basket of basic goods such as grain, coal, and cotton cloths. The economic bureaucracy of the Communist state simultaneous built three institutions in support of the system: the grassroots units of the military-state maintained control over the production of essential commodities; the Bureau of Commerce requisitioned rural agricultural products through its commercial outlets and stored them in their storehouses; the banks kept the value of the fiat currency stable by pegging its value to a basket of goods available via a network of state-run cooperatives.[171] Riding on the success at Shandong, Xue and his colleagues perfected the system in Manchuria, the critical battleground of an economic war between KMT and the Communists.[172] Eventually, all Communist-held areas adopted similar money systems, which integrated into the RMB system in late 1948. When Chen Yun arrived with the management teams of the Central Finance and Economic Commission in Shanghai in June 1949, the “material standard” system began to operate in China’s economic heartland. [173]

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[170] In many Chinese cities in the 1950s, one material standard refers to the price for a basket consisting of 500-gram medium quality white rice, 500-gram medium chi, 500-gram salt, and 50-gram cooking oil. In the early 1950s, wages were paid in material standards. Me Shuben, *Sanshiwu nian zhigong gongzi fazhan gaishu* (An Outline of the History of Employee Wages for the Last 35 Years), Beijing: Laodong renshi chubanshe, 1986, p.55.

[171] Huang Yanjie, Constructing a National Oikonomia: China's Great Monetary Revolution, 1942-1950, *East Asian Institute Working Paper No. 161*, pp. 7-9

[172] Ibid, p.10-11

[173] Ibid, p. 14.

In the first months of the Communist takeover, the speculators had the upper hands in their struggle with the state financiers. As the military operation was still ongoing in 1950, the Communist state could hardly afford its exorbitant military expenditure and balance the budget without printing excessive money. As a result, price levels kept rising in the first years of the Peoples' Republic of China. The private speculators in Shanghai hoarded all the stocks of rice, coal, and cotton cloth under their control in anticipation of continued price hikes in late 1949[174]. Meanwhile, in urban China, dollars and gold bars still dominated the underground economy, even after the People's Liberation Army stormed the Shanghai Stock Exchange in September 1949. The disinflation effort of the Commission failed in 1949-1950, as the RMB tumbled three times between September 1949 and March 1950.[175]

The period between 1950 and 1952 saw pitched battles between the Communist government and private merchants over control of critical commodities. As trains loaded with grain, cloth, coal, and other necessities came from all over the country, the Shanghai Commerce Bureaus damped rice, cloths and other commodities on the Shanghai market. The resultant falling price dealt fatal blows on the private enterprises. As the economic war heightened, the Communist Party gradually imposed total control over the purchase and sale of all daily necessities. By monopolizing the supply of daily needs, the Communist slowly brought hyperinflation under control in 1953. In January 1955, Shanghai residents began to use a new version of the RMB, their first stable fiat currency in recent history. Yet the victory had also come at a hefty cost. In the titanic effort to

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[174] Li Zhaojin, *The Rise and Fall of China's Financial Capitalism*, London and New York: Routledge, 2003, p.50.

[175] *Ibid*, p. 52

achieve macroeconomic stability, the Communist state effectively reduced the private sectors into total subjugation.

The outbreak of the Korean War further limited the options available to Party state financiers in Beijing and Shanghai. The first source of disturbance came from the end of the trade with China's erstwhile major trading partners across the Cold War divide, as the United States launched a naval blockade and excluded Shanghai from global trade networks soon after the outbreak of the Korean War. The economic mobilization for the military action in Korea further added to Beijing's fiscal burden, especially the agricultural tax in the form of "public grain" on the peasants. As Song Yongyi noted, the Korean War normalized the Communist war economy by expanding state fiscal capacity and embedding the Chinese economy in the Communist world. From 1949 to 1952, the Central Financial and Economic Commission raised agricultural tax by 44% to finance the war and exported the equivalent of 20 billion *jin* of grain to the Soviet Union and North Korea in exchange for needed war supplies.[176]

The military approach to the "economic war," including the economic mobilization for the Korean War, moved the Chinese political economy decidedly towards state monopolization of strategic commodities like grain, cloths, and fuel. As the Communist state increasingly controlled the production and sales of essential products in the institutionalization of the "material standard," Shanghai merchants were either put out of operation or reduced to commercial agents of larger state entities. In 1951, Shanghai pioneered the state monopoly of cotton textiles to cope with the speculators and stepped up intervention into other markets. The final blow to the commodity market came in 1953. As the economic stabilization under the Communist state brought about a

[176] Song Yongyi, "Liangshi zhanzheng: tonggou tongxiao, hezuohua yundong yu dajihuang" (Grain War: State Grain Monopoly, Collectivization, and the Great Famine), *Twentieth First Century*, 2013, No.4, 68-69

sharp rise of the urban demand for grain and incentivized the peasants to store up their grains, the Shanghai grain market again suffered an acute shortfall in supply and price hike.[177] In July 1953, the Commission decided to monopolize the procurement and sale of all grain on the market, transforming all private merchants into agents and subsidiaries of the state bureaucracy. All essential commodities came under monopoly purchase and sale (*tonggou tongxiao*). In 1956, almost all essential household commodities from daily food supply to fuels became part of the state monopoly.[178] The urban families could only purchase these goods if they had both money and the relevant coupons. The state commercial agencies became a giant "household" agency while collecting primary products from the peasants and factories. It rationed them out to urban consumers at a state-administered, artificially low price.

The state commercial monopoly secured a steady supply of food and other daily necessities to urban markets at a low price. A hierarchy of state companies, specialty shops, and grassroots outlets were established under the aegis of the commercial bureaucracy to mediate the state and material needs of urban families.[179] The mobilization potential of the vertically-integrated system was unprecedented. Under the state monopoly of grain, the total urban grain sale jumped from 68,794 to 89,865 metric tons as the urban population in Shanghai expanded from 5.83 to 6.88 million from 1955 to 1961[180]. In a market economy, such a rise in urbanization would undoubtedly

[177] Tang Yongqing, *Shanghai Liangshi jihua gongying yu Shimin shenghuo* (Planned Provision of Grain and the Shanghai Society), Shanghai cishu chubanshe, 2011, pp. 34-36.

[178] Ibid.

[179] Dorothy J. Solinger, *Chinese Business Under Socialism: The Politics of Domestic Commerce*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1984, pp. 34-38.

[180] Shanghai Liangshi Zhi Editorial Committee, *Shanghai Liangshi zhi* (Shanghai Grain Gazetteers), Shanghai: Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences, 1995, p. 80.

lead to a sharp increase in price levels and living costs in the urban region, according to the classic Lewis model of a dual-sector economy.[181] In 1950s China, however, since the Communist state had eliminated the grain market and assumed control over grain, there could not possibly be a check on urban population via a surge in living costs, though the strains of rural to urban migration on food supply was acute. The result thus necessitated state control of overpopulation and population movement between urban and rural sectors. The state must maintain its extraction power over their rural households and match the state's grain requisition quota with the industrial and population expansion in the city.

The state monopoly over the grain trade created tension between the urban price level and rural livelihood. On the one hand, the state wanted the maximum extraction of cheap grain from the agricultural sector to support rapid industrialization. On the other hand, the state had to ensure the sustainability of rural livelihood. When industrialization raised the demand for food among non-food producing urban laborers, the country needed either a miraculous leap in grain production or a sharp reduction in urban grain consumption. The Communist state adopted both strategies. Despite repeated cautions from the Party's agricultural and other economic specialists, Mao insisted on increasing collectivization. He believed that a higher level of collectivization could meet the impossible twin goals of grain production and acquisition. In urban China, the propaganda machine urged cadres to mobilize urban residents to restrain their consumption.

Citing a survey of food consumption on two working communities, the Shanghai Bureau of Grain and the Bureau of Public Security established a standard grain ration for its residents. The rations distinguished three categories for the working class: 39.58 *jin* for the heavy industrial

[181] E. Wayne Nafziger, *Economic Development*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006, pp. 138-140 .

workers, 31.97 *jin* for the light industrial workers, and 29 *jin* for mental labor; and three categories for the non-working class: 31.8 *jin* for college and secondary school students, 33.7 *jin* for retirees, and 19 *jin* for children. In a survey of the Huaxin Neighborhood Committee, a typical working-class neighborhood, the estimated average grain supply was 26 *jin* per month.[182] For each household, the supply of daily necessities depended on the size and composition of the family. Families with more workers, and especially heavy industrial workers, had a considerably higher level of supply. Families with fewer working personnel and many small, school-age, or unemployed children had less entitlement to rationed food and basic goods, even if they had the money to buy them.

When the Commission of Finance and Economy brought inflation and commodity supply under control by eliminating all private traders, the Bureau of Labor, working closely with the newly established Shanghai General Trade Union, tackled massive unemployment with a similar strategy. Since the first days of the Communist rule, the Committee on Unemployment headed by the Bureau of Labor sent off grassroots cadres to every neighborhood to register unemployed workers. The Commission classified all unemployed workers into four categories: the educated class, the skilled workers, the physically healthy (unskilled) workers, the able-bodied housewives, and the rural migrants. The migrant workers were divided into those who could return to the countryside, and those who lacked rural family supports. The Commission allocated the 76,000 educated personnel to various government organs, assigned 16,000 skilled workers to the reopened factories and shops, and placed 90,000 able-bodied people into construction works. Even employable housewives found their place in various government organs, textile factories, and

[182] "Guanyu heshi chengzhen Renkou de baogao" (The Report on the Verification of Urban Population), SMA B125-1-868, pp.3-4

grassroots care providers like the daycares and kindergartens. Between 1950 and 1954, about 600,000 unemployed workers found their jobs via this agency.[183]

As Chen Yun termed it, this employment policy followed the moral economy principle of "Eating from a Big Pot," a practice that originated in the Communist labor movements and logistics practice of the revolutionary army in the 1920s. At least since the Yan'an days, the Communist state had established a hierarchical system of direct state supply to feed the military and cadres. The "Big Pot" here refers to the survival level of daily food supply for ordinary soldiers and students.[184] In the early 1950s, Shanghai workers used the "Big Pot" to refer to the economic arrangement whereby their barely operating factories supplied basic meals to the workers and their families on the factory floor. The egalitarian ideology received support from workers whose livelihood was jeopardized by hyperinflation and unemployment. The Central Financial and Economic Affairs Commissions headed by Chen Yun responded by expanding the "Big Pot" principle to all urban residents by offering employment for all unemployed workers and imposing food rationing for all urban residents, including former employees of the KMT state factory and government agencies. In the words of the moment, it let five people share the food of three so everyone can survive.[185] The "Big Pot" thus served as a perfect metaphor for a state-sponsored moral economy of livelihood based on the spirit of egalitarianism.

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[183] "Shanghai shi Linian zuzhi jiuye qingkuang baogao" (Report on the Organization of Employment in Recent Years), SMA B127-1-290, p.1

[184] There are also "small pots" and "middle pots," which catered more nutritious food for the few leaders and a fraction of mid-rank cadres and intellectuals, respectively. See Pei Yilin, Wutuobang de huanmian: Yan'an yidai shilin (The Utopia Disillusioned: The Yan'an Generation of Intellectuals), Taipei: The Independent Bookshop, 2009, p.120

[185] Bo Yibo, *Ruogan zhongde juece yu shijian de huigu* (Reflection on the Important Decision-making and Events), vol.1, Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 2002, p.15.

A critical consequence of the "Big Pot" principle was the unprecedented role of the street-level bureaucracy in the distribution of jobs and livelihood among urban residents. By the mid-1950, even the last vestiges of the labor market disappeared in urban China. Before 1949, Chinese workers usually found their works in a "labor market" via the factory recruitment systems and personal networks. By the mid-1950s, these private channels gave way to state-controlled trade unions. For example, a study of the worker registration forms of older workers in the Wuhu General Trade Union shows that, while "friends and family introduction" played a decisive role in the job search before 1949, the state labor agency took over all employment decisions after the Communist takeover. The institutionalization of "organizational affiliation" replaced the networks of families and friends in the job allocation process so that the state gained unprecedented control over everybody's career trajectory.[186]

As the Communist state monopolized grain supply, food became a weapon against the political enemies of the country. Although the potential enemies, including intellectuals and cadres who opposed the central policy, were among the absolute minority, the threat to family livelihood effectively neutralized possible resistance within the ranks and file of the Party system against the political campaigns of the late 1950s. During the Anti-Rightist Campaign in 1957-1958, the state summarily deprived or degraded the food supply of those labeled as rightists while demoting them from professional positions to low-income and political pariah status in the most extreme cases, the state sent the rightists to labor camps, where they had to carry out exhausting manual labor without adequate food. At Jiabiangou Labor Rectification Camp, one of the most well-known labor camps where the "rightist" Shanghai intellectuals were concentrated, the monthly grain ration fluctuated between the sub-survival level of 14 *jin* and the bare minimum of 24 *jin* during the Great

[186] Li Tian and Felicia Tian, "Guanxi and Job Mobility in the Socialist Transformation." *The China Review: An Interdisciplinary Journal on Greater China*, Vol. 20, No. 2 (May 2020), pp. 183-209.

Leap Forward.[187] Such levels of grain could lead to starvation and bare survival, depending on the type of the grain, alternative food substitute, and the condition of the forced manual work.[188] In milder cases, they could lose their salary and food supply. Ai Qing, one of modern Chinese laureate poets, lost most of his salary and royalty income in the Anti-Rightist Campaign of 1957 and then a small quantity of husked grain in 1966. While he survived on the grain from other family members, his health suffered irreparable damage.[189] In the aftermath of the Anti-Rightist Campaign of 1957, few intellectuals dared to speak out due to such an existential crisis.

In the *Great Transformation*, Karl Polanyi outlines three principles of economic organization before liberal capitalism: reciprocity, redistribution, and householding. We can see that after the wartime economy in urban China eliminated the free market and the new Communist state established redistribution as the fundamental principle of the national economy, Karl Polanyi's principles of governing non-market economies were operative under the new regime. In particular, the Maoist economy exemplified the principle of autarkical, state-sponsored "householding" and the centralized "redistribution".[190]The Party and its economic agents actively carried out the duties of the heads of the family, seizing all surplus products while taking care of the livelihood of the

[187] Yang Xianhui, *Jiabiangou Jishi* (Stories from Jiabiangou), Guangzhou: Huacheng chubanshe, 2008, pp. 233-235.

[188] If we take 1200 Calories for adult male as recommended by the World Health Organization and 334 calories per kg unhusked wheat, then 12 kg or 24 *jin* is the absolute minimum survival grain level.

[189] "Furen gaoying huiyi Ai Qing," *Shanghai fazhi bao,* October 17, 2003.

[190] In Polanyian definition, householding refers to production for one's own use. While there was of course no modern economy that strictly followed householding, the Maoist-era work units, local industries, and even national economy all embodied this principle, especially during the revolutionary austerity decades, when trade was extremely low compared to domestic product. For the Polanyian definition, see Karl Polanyi, The *Great Transformations: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time*, New York: Beacon Press, 2009 (1944), pp. 46-48.

subjects. Although the Party applied the moral economy of "Big Pot" to feed everybody, it also demanded regular sacrifice from the households and often meted out economic punishments to disloyal subjects. Like a family writ large, the Maoist society thus amalgamated politics, moral sentiments, and everyday livelihood into a basic form of life. When the Party state attempted to replace most functions of the family with an organized life under unprecedented mobilization and surveillance in 1958, this state-dominated form of collective experience would gain an apt name, "the big socialist family."

Grassroots Propaganda and Public Sentiments

As the Communist state penetrated deeply into China's war-torn society in the early 1950s, urban family life was placed increasingly under the surveillance and intervention of the neighborhood. In many ways, the neighborhood agency mimicked the Party apparatus, with specific task forces focusing on economics, hygiene, security, population, registration, and, most importantly, propaganda and thought work in the urban mass[191]. Take the example of *Handbook for Collective Life of Neighborhood Residents*. The author of this definitive guide to socialist communal life outlined an array of new institutions, such as the billboard, the radio networks, the neighborhood library, the newspaper reading groups, and home visits as the stronghold of the grassroots

[191] The classical work on Maoist bureaucracy, Franz Schurmann's *Ideology and Organization in Communist China*, placed urban works in a larger structural-functional analysis of the Communist Party state. After the "cultural turn" in history studies, scholars of Mao-era urban propaganda and thought work have developed a keen interest in China's propaganda system. Their research topics include grassroots interactions, historical continuities, institutional settings, among others. See: Franz Schurmann, *Ideology and Organization in Communist China,* Berkeley and Los Angeles, C.A.: University of California Press, 1968 (2nd edition), pp. 365-403. Aminda M. Smith, *Thought Reform and China's Dangerous Classes: Reeducation, Resistance, and the People*, Lanham, MD: Roman & Littlefields, 2013, pp. 51-78; Timonthy Cheek, "China's Directed Public Sphere: Historical Perspective on Mao's Propaganda State", in James Farley and Matthew D. Johnson ed, *Redefining Propaganda in Modern China*, London: Routledge, 2020, pp. 36-54; Chang-tai Hung, *Politics of Control: Creating Red Culture in the Early People's Republic*, Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i University Press, 2021, pp. 84-108.

propaganda machinery.[192] Indeed, everyday politics at the family and communal levels centered on winning the hearts and minds of the residents to the cause of Communism.

Wall posters and blackboards harked back to an ancient technology of moral and political control. In the late fourteenth century, Zhu Yuanzhang, the founding emperor of the Ming dynasty, ordered each neighborhood to set up two pavilions: The Praise Virtue Pavilion and the Bad Pavilion. As the names indicate, each Pavilion was equipped with a board where the village heads posted the names of morally commendable and blamable persons.[193] The Communist systems of wall posters and blackboard reached a higher level of penetration and sophistication. Since 1951, each neighborhood was to set up a blackboard and wall posters at the entrance. The blackboard served as the intermediate medium between the newspaper and television, as it introduced the essential visual messages from the paper to the neighborhood. The most salient item on the blackboard was important news from the Party newspapers. Every day, the Propaganda officer of each neighborhood would update the stories with simple sentences and phrases. Also, each community was encouraged to update the board with columns like "neighborhood news" (*linong dongtai*), "residents service" (*jumin fuwu*), "common knowledge for family life" (*jiating changshi*), "*messages from the Women's Federation*" (*Fulian xiaoxi*), "basic medical knowledge" (*weisheng changshi*), "movie and theatre" (*yingju jieshao*), as well as the name lists of the good and the bad. In the meanwhile, each neighborhood had to prepare a poster board to supplement the information on the board. They usually hosted longer articles that explained in more detail the government policy, neighborhood news, and moral commentaries on notable characters.[194]

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[192] *Jiedao linong jumin shenghuo shouce*, p. 25

[193] *Ibid*, p. 31.

[194] *Ibid*, p.39

Before the posters known as "Big Character Posters" evolved into a potent political tool for the Party-state in the Cultural Revolution, they already served as a bottom-up tool of grassroots mobilization during the Great Leap Forward. On May 11, 1958, the Shanghai General Workers Union's official daily, *Labor,* reported that Caoyang New Village, Shanghai's first working-class residential compound and the communal home to 36,000 families.[195] The whole neighborhood posted around 1,000 Big Character Letters over two weeks in praise of morally outstanding individuals. These letters were laden with various sorts of commendable behavior in socialist China: an old lady who chaired neighborhood committee leader learned politics by reading newspapers and taught it to the youths every day; a female worker helped her neighbor with all her housework when she gave birth; a working couple tirelessly cleaned the neighborhood alleyways until midnight; a housewife managed to save 1 yuan a week and provide 3.2 yuan to her mother-in-law out of a tight monthly household budget of 72 yuan; a stepmother treated her three stepchildren better than her own. While these family and community-centered moral tales had little intrinsic Communist goals, they were remediated in the city's leading newspapers and framed by the editors as exemplary of the "six" socialist virtues in the "Red Flag" movement of the Great Leap Forward.[196]

If the blackboards and posters represented continuity with traditional political media tools, the radio networks represented a significant deployment of modern communication methods for public civic education. Radio networks were nothing new in Shanghai, but their nature changed drastically after 1949. On the eve of Japanese capture of Shanghai, there were more than 200,000

[195] *Shanghai Chengshi guihua zhi*, Shanghai: Shanghai shehui kexue chubanshe, 1999, p.528

[196] "Dazibao xuandeng" (Selected Reprints of Big Character Letters), *Laodong Bao*, May 11, 1958.

home radio sets and 24 private radio stations in the city, before the vibrant media networks declined in the wartime.[197] The Communist propaganda machine, which attached immense importance to radio networks, quickly controlled the supply of radio information and grouped the listeners around the neighborhood. The very first thing that the Propaganda Department of the Communist Party did after the People's Liberation Army captured Shanghai in late May 1949 was to reform the broadcasting service. [198] In April 1951, the newly minted grassroots units of the Women's Federation sent out cadres to requisition the radio-owning families to mobilize their radios for the use of the neighborhood. In Hongkou district, all families in the 60 neighborhoods left only one family member to guard their houses and gathered around 250 radio-owning households to hear Mayor Chen Yi's Labor Day speech.[199] While the intensity of neighborhood radio broadcasting was not as dense as work units like schools and factories, the radio listening networks was institutionalized as a fixture in all Shanghai neighborhood by the late 1950s.

The Communist also introduced neighborhood newspaper reading groups to boost its propaganda power. The reading groups usually relied on high school students as volunteer readers, who read aloud and explain newspaper editorials to a gathering of workers, homemakers, and the elderly in the evening. The stories all came from major official newspapers such as *People's Daily*, *Liberation Daily*, *Wenhuibao,* and *Laodong Bao* (*Labor*).[200]. The networks of reading groups developed rapidly in Shanghai between 1951 and 1952. In 1952, there ware 11,694 readers and

[197] Shi Fukuang, *Shanghai shehui daguan* (Facets of Shanghai Society), Shanghai: Shanghai Shudian chubanshe, 2003, p. 314.

[198] Qiu Zhiren, "Jiefang chuqi de shanghai Renmin guangbo shiye," http://www.archives.sh.cn/dajc/201412/t20141231_41873.html (Accessed on February 3, 2020)

[199] *Jiedao linong jumin shenghuo shouce*, p. 36
[200] Ibid.

42,473 "mass newspaper reading groups," covering all districts of the city.[201] Working under the supervision of grassroots cadres, the reader must devise an efficient reading strategy so the textual message could have maximum impact on the ears of each resident. In a standard *Newspaper Manual* published in 1952*,* the writer instructed the newspaper readers to pick "vivid, concrete, and narrative" news stories and "contextualize the story in everyday life experience of the working class'. The readers should read interactively by paying attention to the reaction of the listeners. When the listeners appeared bored, the readers must immediately appeal to drawings, doggerel, and other "fun" ways. [202]

The newspaper reading groups were at the grassroots level of a propaganda system that the Communist bureaucracy had installed in the 1950s across all sectors of urban China. Another powerful institution in the new sonic landscape was the regular public lectures. The lecture halls and theatres in large cities regularly hosted "transmission sessions," when participants of national political events and foreign visits conveyed their officially approved stories to the audience. When carefully choreographed, these lectures could move and persuade even elite intellectuals who had traveled and read widely.

On January 23, 1956, Gu Jiegang jotted down in his diary a note on the economic and social plight in urban Japan from a transmission session at his work unit, the Chinese Academy of Science. Delivered by a recent tour group of Chinese scientists, the lecture left a strong impression:

> "Heard a lecture today. I learned that the Japanese farmers had bankrupted, the Japanese industries hopeless, and people's livelihood endangered since they descended into a colony of the United States. Tokyo's seeming prosperity was deformed. An overcrowded city with a total population of 8.5 million, it was now a city of prostitution and crimes. It is worse than pre-war Shanghai. The salaries of professors were barely equivalent to 80 yuan RMB, so they

[201] Yang Liping, Xinzhongguo chengli chuqi shanghai de dubaozu jiqi zhengzhi gongxiao (Newspaper Reading Group and its Political Effects in Shanghai in the Early PRC), *Jiangsu shehui kexue*, 2018, No.1, p. 242

[202] Dubaoyuan shouce (Manual for Newspaper Readers), Zhangjiakou: Chahaer Renmin chubanshe, 1952

had to do odd jobs to make ends meet. The professors of medical schools thus had to run clinics, selling drugs but without asking for a service fee. Such money-making practice has destroyed the business of the local pharmacies. Now they must make a living by peddling cheap facial creams and toilet water on the street! Alas, the social volcano in Japan will soon erupt!" [203]

The information that the official delegation conveyed to the elite intellectual audience was not unfounded. But the reports also blended knowledge with ideological indoctrination intended to set up role models and stir up emotions in the listeners. While the politically savvy Gu might have written his diaries with the prevailing political atmosphere in mind, there was no doubt that he compared urban China favorably with Japan. Even his prediction of the political upheaval turned out prescient, as Japanese students struggled against the Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security between Japan and the United States in 1960. However, the apparent "social volcanoes" were only growth pains of a rapidly industrializing economy. In the mid-1950s, Japan was undergoing a significant economic recovery, whose standard of living was significantly higher than their Chinese counterparts.[204] But a historian and an intellectual as worldly and sophisticated as Gu Jiegang seemed convinced that socialist China was pulling ahead of capitalist Japan. Gu Jiegang's reaction to the propaganda revealed the power of the socialist state to shape people's perceptions and opinions.

Among all the cultural amenities of the neighborhood, the community libraries were the most sophisticated undertaking in a working-class neighborhood, since a flourishing reading society depended on high literacy rates. As the Meifang Neighborhood's demographics suggest, only a

[203] Gu Jiegang, *Gu Jiegang Riji 1956-1959* (Gu Jiegang Diary), in *Gu Jiegang Quanji*, Taipei: Lianjing Publisher, 2007, vol. 8, p. 11,

[204] For example, according to official statistics in both countries, the Engel coefficients for Tokyo and Shanghai in 1956 were 41% and 51%, respectively.

small fraction of the residents in a typical working neighborhood could read books in 1951[205]. There were also other significant challenges, especially the availability of space and books in the community. In 1952, there was still such a scarcity of books that these libraries relied mainly on donated books from the neighborhood families.[206] The golden days of the libraries arrived in 1958 when the Great Leap Forward swiped across the cultural and propaganda work at the grassroots. During the height of the initial Great Forward, Shanghai built 14 street-level libraries and 836 neighborhood libraries in a few months.[207] The content of books was also a significant source of concern. Due to the scarcity of books, the cultural bureaucracy began to focus on the building up of revolutionary books in the community libraries. The *Works of Mao Zedong* became the standard intellectual furniture in the neighborhood, followed by the Party's revolutionary lore, Soviet novels, and political education books. At the same time, old favorites of popular readers like Chinese and Western classical literature gradually disappeared from the open shelves. The library staff also routinely surveyed the reading habits of the youths, persuading them to read revolutionary books and dissuading them from non-revolutionary one's[208].

Among the legacies of this sprouting revolutionary reading culture was the institution of "Gushihui" (Storytelling Sessions) at the communal level. Starting in the late 1950s, the

[205] Shanghai's average literacy was only a little above the typical working class district. Although Shanghai's literacy rate was above the national average, only 42% of men and 17% of the women above 15 knew how to read. Hu Huanyong, Pan Jiyi, ed, *Zhongguo Renkou: Shanghai fence* (Chinese Population: Shanghai Volume), Beijing: Zhongguo caijing chubanshe, 1987, p. 339.

[206] *Jiedao linong jumin shenghuo shouce*, p. 47

[207] *Dangdai Zhongguo de shanghai*, p.298

[208] Li Wen, Shi Ming, Peihua, "Wenhua zhanxian Shang de Yi zhi jinxin: Shanghai Jiedao Linong Tushuguan de chengzhang yu fazhan" (A New Army on the Cultural Front: The Growth and Development of Community Library Shanghai), *Xueshu yuekan*, 1965, Vol. 6, p.30

community libraries regularly held "storytelling sessions" to make the reading experience an audible public event. The library routinely employed volunteer "storytellers," typically librarians, trained propagandists, PLA officers, local police, and retired workers, to tell the bitter experience in the Old Society and the experience of the Communist Revolution to a crowd of listeners. The typical stories revolved around the past sufferings of the retired workers. The themes could vary from the maltreatment of workers, the death of children, to the hunger of their families. The stories invariably ended with Chairman Mao as the savior, affirming the group's commitment to the revolution.[209] The storytelling sessions reached its height in 1963 when Mao launched the mass movement to create personal revolutionary narratives at the level of the family, factory, and commune levels. The storytelling station at the Pingliang Streets Library hosted 112 sessions that attracted a total of 15,544 attendees.[210] The year also marked the birth of the namesake magazine *Guishihui*, still one of China's most well-read weeklies after five decades of self-transformation from a collection of personal revolutionary stories.[211]

Home visits were a laborious exercise that demanded enormous work from the neighborhood activists. Yet these visits also served as crucial institutional infrastructure at the grassroots level. As the Meifang Neighborhood shows, the cadres of the Bureau of Civic Affairs visited every household in the neighborhood to obtain the detailed information about the household economy, communal politics, and the history of the district, while seeking out and mobilizing active elements in the community for the class struggle and neighborhood organization. Before all the Neighborhood Committee started to operate, the Women's Federation led the efforts to survey each

[209] Ibid, p.31.

[210] Ibid, p.32.

[211] *Jiedao linong jumin shenghuo shouce*, pp. 39-42

household in 1951-1952. Young female cadres like Wang walked across the streets and lanes to visit each family, mobilizing each family for political work and identifying active members of the Committee. After the Neighborhood Committees were institutionalized, family visits became the routine work of the committee members. Again, the art of family visits stressed the technique of persuasion. For the successful implementation of every home visit, the cadres needed to learn about the class background, household economy, and the thoughts of each family member.

Through two types of visits, random visits, and routine visits, the grassroots cadres who represented the state made sure that the state had the most updated knowledge of its subject. The grassroots bureaucracy could then take immediate care of every family's urgent needs from the needs for welfare subsidy to the intervention in family disputes. Such a monumental task of information collection and problem resolution demanded a commitment from every member of the households for a useful task: the youths as readers, the elderly as storytellers, the housewives as part-time workers, and the even the young children as occasional helpers.[212] In other words, the home visits facilitated "capillary" exchanges between the state and the family daily: the family offered loyalty to the Party-state, and the state solved the immediate problems of the family. The experience with the grassroots state reinforced the propaganda message that the omnipresent Party-state was always accountable for the needs of its people.

By the late 1950s, the Communist gospel of a revolutionary way to human flourishing had become common knowledge among the urban residents, after years of drills, lectures, and propaganda exercises. As a result, the notion of the Communist Party as an omnipotent savior became ingrained in the popular mind. The sense of salvation reached a new height in the Great

[212] *Jiedao linong jumin shenghuo shouce*, pp. 44.

Leap Forward in 1958, when the mass deployed popular folk songs to express their feeling of self-transformation. Doggerel, by an anonymous spinning worker of the Shanghai 9th Cotton Cloth Factory, expressed precisely such sentiment. Typical doggerel out of more than 100,000 such folk literature authored by enthusiastic urban workers, it reflected the extent which the Communist gospel of good life has reached the very bottom of urban society:

> "Before the Liberation, we lived in a thatched shed,
> After the Liberation, we moved into brick buildings.
> Before the Liberation, we went to the pawnshops,
> After the Liberation, we frequent the banks instead.
> Before the Liberation, every workshop felt like a hot steamer,
> After the Liberation, every workshop feels a breeze of wind.
> Before the Liberation, we gave birth to babies who barely survived,
> After the Liberation, our babies are always fair-skinned and plump."[213]

The post-liberation life depicted in idealized picture was, of course, a distortion of reality. As the Shanghai Worker's Union Livelihood Survey in 1956 suggested, the average working family in Shanghai were barely making ends meet under multiple economic burdens. According to a comprehensive survey of 5,000 workers, 10-20% of the workers in Shanghai factories were living in extreme poverty, and 5-7% lived under permanent hunger. These workers typically had to feed seven to six persons with around 50-60 yuan without access to regular assistance. Around half lived in slums with horrible hygienic conditions. [214] The upbeat sentiments in the popular songs expressed not reality but a shared utopian vision among the masses after a decade of gradual economic recovery and enhanced propaganda.

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[213] *Gongren dazibao jijin* (Selected Big Character Letters of Workers), vol.2, Beijing: Gongren chubanshe, 1958, p. 133

[214] Shanghai General Workers Union, "Guanyu muqian shanghai zhigong shenghuo qingkuang he cunzai wenti de baogao" (Report on the Living Conditions and Existing Problems of Shanghai Workers), A36-1-133, pp.1-10

The contrast between the old and new societies suggested that overwhelming support for the Communist Party came from its immense might in transforming the mind of urban residents, rather than the material world. The hope for a better, hopeful future was an essential factor among post-war reconstruction projects. The New Town Movement, which paralleled China's massive urban reconstruction in the 1950s, had its roots in the ideological drive captured in works like Ernst Bloch's *Principle of Hope*.[215] The Chinese Communist Party's propaganda machine crystallized this desperate desire for a better world as a collective faith in the transformative power of the Party and the masses under its leadership. This dream formed emotional basis for the "Great Leap Forward."

The Great Leap Utopia of the Socialist "State-Family"

By the mid-1950s, the Communist Party and the multiple arms of its power, such as the Workers' Union, and work units, the neighborhood committees, the propaganda network, were at the zenith of its prestige in urban China. As Zhang Letian has shown in his recent study of family letters of young intellectuals, who were at the forefront of state-building, there was fervent zeal and steadfast hope for a better future, regardless of their family background and social status. Even youths from a bourgeois experience who endured suspicion and underwent thought reforms tended to look to the future with great hope and expectations. The comparison was between an old China

[215] Rosemary Wakeman, *Practicing Utopia: The Intellectual History of the New Town Movement*, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2015, pp. 47-50.

torn by war and a new China of peace and development. [216] Even the Anti-Rightist Campaign did not dampen the utopian vision among most young intellectuals. [217]

Mao and his colleagues had a reason to be proud of the Party's achievements and upbeat about its transformative potential. Historically, the Party-state under his signature leadership has scored success after success by employing their unique approaches to politics and strategy. Between 1946 and 1949, they had defeated the KMT army which initially outnumbered the PLA by several times and captured the most populous nation in the world with a combination of military and united front strategies[218]. In 1950, Mao overruled his more cautious colleagues by joining the Korean War. Between 1950 and 1953, Chinese People's Volunteers had mustered the courage to fight the most formidable military power, the United States, to a stalemate in the Korean War.[219] In 1956, Mao and the Communist Party flexed its far-reaching geopolitical clout in the Soviet-led responses to the Hungarian Uprising of 1956, lending decisive support to a beleaguered Khrushchev. In the aftermath of the Hungarian crisis, Mao made another bold challenge to the Soviet model by resorting to ideological and economic mobilization to pre-empt a similar disaster at home.[220] All these successes encouraged Mao and his colleagues to set a high target for China'

[216] Zhang Letian, "Xiwang de moli" Zhongguo Qingnian zhishifenzi de ziwo goujian (The Magic of Hope: Self-Making among Young Chinese Intellectuals), *Tansuo yu zhengming (Exploration and Debate)*, 2017, No.2, pp. 104-113.

[217] For an apt record of the intellectual atmosphere, refer to Qian Liqun, Mao Zedong Shidai he hou Mao Zedong Shidai: Lingyizhong lishi shuxue (The Maoist Era and post-Maoist Era: Another Historiography), pp.113-145

[218] Odd Arne Westad, *Decisive Encounters: The Chinese Civil War, 1946-1950*, Palo Alto, C.A.: Stanford University Press, 2003, pp. 260-261.

[219] Chen Jian, *Mao's China and the Cold War*, Chapel Hill, and London: University of North Carolina Press, pp. 88-90.

[220] Dandan Zhu, *1956: Mao's China and the Hungarian Crisis*, Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2013, pp. 264-268.

s economic growth. Ever since the death of Stalin, Mao had mulled over China's elevated political status and backward economy. A rapid, if not momentous transformation of China into a leading Communist power on par with the Soviet Union, gradually become a shared vision among the leaders and the mass. Such a yearning for a leap in China's economic capacity gained considerable traction among the elites in the aftermath of the Sputnik Moment in the Soviet-American Cold War bid for power.

In 1956, China's economy had chalked up a rapid recovery but still lagged far behind the industrialized countries. China's GDP rose by 60% from 1952 to 1957. In Shanghai, the household income and expenditure of average working families surged by 70% from 1948 to 1957. (Figure 1-1). But overall, the country was still predominantly agricultural, lagging not only far behind the industrialized nations of the West but also trailing India and Burma in terms of her social and economic development. In 1957, China's per-capita income was $619, while the United States and the Soviet Union had per-capita income of $10,914 and $3,566 respectively[221]. In terms of steel output, China's steel production was 5.35 million, only a fraction of the output of the United States (113 million) and the Soviet Union (45 million). [222] Around 60% of the economy was still agricultural, and 90% of the population worked in the countryside. China was also far from a potent military power on par with the two superpowers, as most of its modernized troops increasingly relied on Soviet-made heavy weapons since the Korean War.[223] Even the rapid economic growth

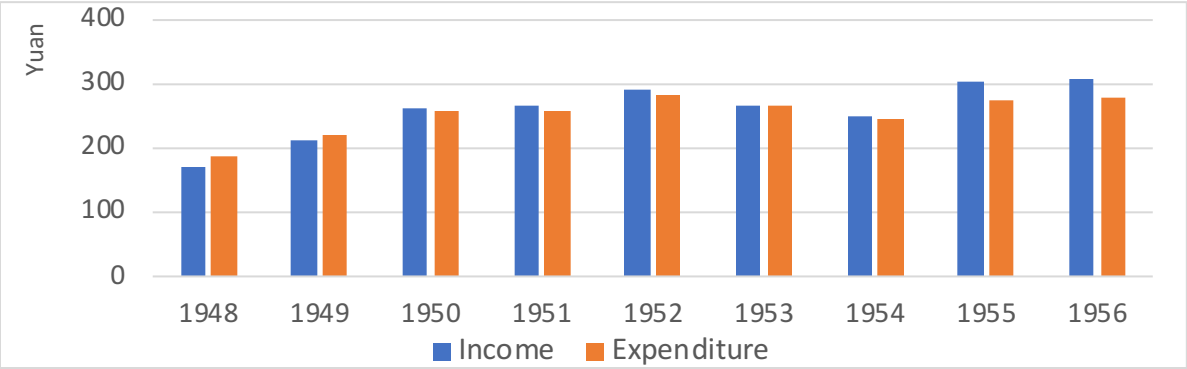
[221] All values are in 1990 Dollar. Maddison Angus, *The World Economy: Historical Statistics*, Paris, OECD, 2003, p. 89, 96, 174

[222] Bureau of Foreign Commerce, *World Trade Information Service 1958*, Washington D.C.: Department of Commerce, 1958, pp. 4-5

[223] Li Xiaobing, *China's War in Korea: Strategic Culture and Geopolitics*, Singapore: Springer, 2019, pp.180-181

and recovery of the 1950s were not particularly remarkable in a global comparison, as all the major western industrialized countries, United States, France, and the United Kingdom all achieved industrial growth between 20% and 50% between 1950 and 1955. The most severely war-torn national economies of the Soviet Union, West Germany, and Japan grew at the rates of 70%, 80%, and 120%. [224]

Figure 1-1: Average Household Income and Expenditure of Shanghai Working Families



Source: *Shanghai Lishi tongji ziliao huibian, 1949-2009* (Collected Materials on Shanghai Statistics, 1949-2009), Beijing: Zhongguo tongji chubanshe, 2009

The development in the late 1950s reflected both a continuity and a break with the Communist industrialization experience. In the early 1950s, Mao used to favor the Stalinist model as the ideal way for China's industrialization during its initial take-off.[225] But in the prevailing mood of anxiety and hope of the 1950s, Chinese political elites decided to unleash the Party state's mobilization machinery nationwide by forcing urban and rural households into higher levels of collectivization.

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[224] G. I. Khanin, "The 1950S: The Triumph of the Soviet Economy", *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 55, No. 8, p.1178

[225] Li Hua-yu, *Mao and Economic Stalinization of China*, Lanham, MD, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2008, pp. 185-187

This decision of the Mao and the Party to deviate from the planned economy and adopt a more aggressive, decentralized "Big Push" strategy for industrialization reflected this anxiety.[226] The sweeping socio-economic reorganization across the rural-urban divide transformed the household economy. Scholars have demonstrated how the Maoist state implemented unprecedented mobilization of peasants' households in rural China by organizing the families into communes and subjecting the consumption of food to supervision under the institution of the public canteen. The incentives of peasants. They reduced their productive efforts but increased their food consumption. The destruction of the rural household economy resulted in a grave food crisis: a shortfall of food production. Amid the acute crisis, the state procurement level did not decrease but briefly rise. The natural outcome was a major famine.[227] In urban China, the Communist state geared up the grassroots organization for rapid industrialization. The massive increase in urban employment, especially of women and rural migrants, changed the profile of the working population.

The conceptualization of the urban Communes was to build a "socialist big family", an interim stage between economic backwardness and an industrialized communist society by seizing individuals from their families and integrating them into the new collective family. the Hongshun Neighborhood, Tianjin, one such a big socialist family, exemplified this development. By leveraging the popular sentiments of the residents and mobilizing all employable members of all the family for collective labor, the Neighborhood Committee pushed the collectivization of family life to a new level. Under the principle of "production before life," family life was to be reorganized

[226] Mao's approach in 1959-1960 accorded with Gerschenkron the state-led massive investment. But it also deviated from the Big Push by highly decentralized community-based ideological mobilization. For Gerschenkron theory and its developments as applied to the "developmental state" model of industrialization, see Meredith Woo-Cummings, *The Developmental State*, Ithaca, N.Y., Cornell University Press, 1999, pp. 182-185.

[227] Wen Guangzhong and Gene Hsih Chang. "Communal Dining and the Causation of the Chinese Famine of 1958 1961.", *Economic Development and Cultural Change* (October 1997): 33-34.

for industrial production. Among the main tasks of the neighborhood cadres was the orientation of women's work from housework and childcare to community-level industrialization projects, such as neighborhood factories. This industrial mobilization required thought reform through the freshly minted grassroots propaganda machinery. In May 1958, the grassroots organizations of the Party quickly achieved their targets by appealing to the moral politics of the "savior state" and the personal desire of the women participants in the urban commune: "Before the organization (of women for work), the Committee opened mass forums to propagandize and 'cultivate' (*yunniang*) women's collective sentiments. The cadres also visited each household to point out to the womenfolk the way of Liberation and the significance of their role in constructing socialism, while laying out the benefits. Upon hearing the mobilization call, most workers were strongly motivated and pledged to join the construction work to contribute to socialism. But some women hesitated. Some said: "I don't care about the petty cash and will not participate. Others said: "I can participate in labor work, but I don't trust the daycares'".[228]

Since the new organization was to be "voluntary," and without the use of force, the grassroots bureaucracy did some research and held a debate so that the grassroots women can discuss their concerns. The discussion started with the ways to help with construction and went to liberate women from housework. Some said: 'We are not working for money but socialism. Look how our lives have changed before and after the Liberation. How can we only care about ourselves and neglect our country? And how can we liberate ourselves without participating in construction?" Others said: "We are still young. How can we allow childcare to drag us down so we can do nothing

[228] Tianjinshi hebeiquwei jiedaogongzuo bangongshi (Office of Grassroots Works, Hebei District, Tianjin City) *Shehui zhuyi dajiating* (Socialist Big Family), Baoding: Hebei Renmin chubanshe, p.6

else?" Still, others said: "Let the elderly women take care of our child. They are more experienced, and our children will receive good care!"[229]

On June 14, 1958, in a matter of three weeks, the social experiment of the urban commune became fully operative. A routine day of the urban People's Commune follows closely a carefully choreographed, collective way of life:

> "This morning, everybody happily walked to their work stations. Old Jia woke up the earliest. He cleaned every corner of the neighborhood and placed flower pots neatly along the alleyways. At eight o'clock sharp, the clock struck, and all seventeen young women of the Production Group sat on the well-prepared looms and started a day's work. The loom spun rapidly, wiring copper wires on wooden sticks. None of the children under seven were at home. They all flocked to the neighborhood daycare or kindergarten in the early morning. They danced, sang, played, listened to stories, and learned etiquette. When they felt bored, the elderly ladies led them to wander around. No one bothered their mothers. At mealtime, women at the Production Group left their station, and the children came back from schools. Everybody successively walked into the commune canteen. The three elderly cooking ladies already prepared everything, and they also installed the dish labels. There was rice, bun, a hot dish, and a cold dish for everyone's liking. The cooking ladies made sure their taste followed the family-style, so they were cheap and delicious. Whenever residents need anything, they walk up to the Service Center for Everyday Goods to choose between more than 300 commodities. Nearby there is also a saving station for people to deposit cash and a Sewing Group for people to make their clothes. After a day's labor, some people go to learn reading; others enter the Community Library; still, others join the Culture Club to learn singing. To improve everybody's health, the residents will practice calisthenics twice with radio music. "[230]

The new economic organizations, like the neighborhood production workshops, which flourished in major cities like Tianjin, Beijing, and Shanghai, transformed the organization of the socialist economy and initiated a significant change in urban family life. In essence, they were social engineering projects to transform the conjugal family by mobilizing women to participate in the labor force and by building a grassroots welfare state to take care of their most onerous

[229] *Ibid*, p.7
[230] Ibid, p.11-12.

housework. Former housewives were organized into work teams responsible for child care, cooking, laundry, and public hygiene of all neighborhood families. While the collectivization in rural China failed to reduce women's housework and childcare labor, as Gail Hershatter suggests for rural north Shaanxi,[231]they did make some headway in large cities however briefly. In Shanghai, the system of nursery rooms, daycare, and kindergartens at work units and the neighborhood level for a time covered more than 60% of all women workers, before the government later shut most of them down.[232]

Another immediate impact of collectivization was on household income. In Hongshun Neighborhood, the most significant economic benefits accrued to the most impoverished families. Wang Huizhen's family of seven used to survive on 60 yuan a month. After she enrolled in the production group, and her elderly father-in-law served on the distribution center, the family earned an additional 35 yuan.[233] As Lu Hanchao finds in the case studies of Shanghai neighborhood workshops, the concern for income and livelihood lay at the very center of the participation of women, beyond the political motives of women's Liberation and industrialization. Even after the failure of the Great Leap Forward, the economic rationale for women's labor still played a crucial role in the household economic logic of survival. In the early 1960s, as many women lost their jobs, some of the families survived by running a small household economy. In 1969, there were

[231] Gail Hershatter, *The Gender of Memories: Rural Women and China's Collective Past*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London, C.A: University of California Press, 2011, 141-143

[232] Huang Sha, Meng Yankun, ed., *Shanghai Funu zhi* (Gazetteers of Shanghai Women), Shanghai: Shanghai shehui kexueyuan chubanshe: pp. 566.

[233] "Shehui zhuyi da jiating," p.16.

still 60,000 such households in Shanghai. Having survived the Cultural Revolution, their average living standard was better than the ordinary working families.[234]

In the more distant future, the Communist leaders in the frontline of the Great Leap Forward envisaged a utopia of a technologically advanced, fully industrialized society in Shanghai. What would this future world look like? Chen Pixian, the Mayor of Shanghai, envisioned everyday life in a Communist nation in 2000. In this new society, the rural-urban divide, material scarcity, the free market, technological backwardness, and even the family would have given way to a community of individual voluntarism armed with all-powerful technology and medicine:

> "In terms of eating, we will have a food distribution point at every crossroad. People will prepare hot water, rice, and noodles in the thermos for the passersby. Once we ate them up, the staff will fetch materials from the stock nearly and cook anew. In terms of clothing, the difference between men's and women's attires will disappear. Everything will be in polyesters. No one will want cotton cloth anymore. In terms of daily use, after we have disbanded all the factories, we will have a hundred thousand 'multi-tasking' machines. If you want anything, just let them make it; if they can't make it, post a 'Big Character Poster', and the engineers will make it immediately. In terms of living, all the old Shikumen houses will be available for use after we chisel out feudalist and bourgeois styles. Also, we will have a lot of Workers' New Villages. Since we would have abolished the family by then, we can switch your abode every day. Every utensil will be kept clean. You can make or pick up worn-out parts from the 'multi-tasking' machines. In terms of transportation, all children have their bicycles, while all adults ride on a three-wheeled motorbike. Such traffic practice saves us traffic petrol. The life expectancy of the elderly rise and rise after taking "the Long-Life Pills." They can all live up to 100 years. Everybody will have the bodily strength to do any manual labor. The railway will be automated and free for all. They move around the nation like the semi-finished products move on the assembly line."[235]

Chen Pixian might have exaggerated his case for a futuristic Shanghai, but the almost religious euphoria was a widely-shared feeling among the cadres and intellectuals. Chen Yi, a military writer and former Director of the Arts of the PLA Political Department, was named as a

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[234] Lu Hanchao, "More than half of the Key: Women and Urban Neighborhood Workshops in China, 1958-1978", *China Quarterly*, 2019, pp. 22-23.

[235] "Dayuejin shiqi lingdaomen shexiang de 2000 nian de shanghai" (Shanghai in 2000 as Imagined by the Leaders during the Great Leap Forward), *Xuexi Bolan* (Learning and Reading), 2011, No.5, p.46

rightist and sent to Heilongjiang for corrective labor for his critical opinions. On the National Day of 1958, Chen missed his time together with his family. He felt sorry as they were smarting under the shame of his political fall. But the significant progress that the nation was making towards a Communist society more than compensated his sense of loss. On October 2, 1958, he wrote to his children in Beijing:

> "I was listening to the real-time radio broadcast of the National Day Parade yesterday. Did you participate in it? If you participated, I would have heard your voice. While listening, I thought about our old days, when our family spent May Day at the capital and watched the fireworks in the evening. Today all these have vanished without a trace. This misfortune happens because your father has made a mistake and stumbled, bringing harm to your mind and body. I feel guilty whenever I think about this. But I have learned the lesson after my fall, and the misfortunate will become a blessing in disguise. Perhaps we will all get stronger after this suffering. Therefore, I hope you do well in your studies, labor, and physical health. Your bodily health is especially true today when our country is leaping forward like this! Though I have stumbled, I am thrilled that the enterprise that I have struggled for twenty years, the realization of a Communist society, is happening right now. As we think in this way, we will get our house in order. You will all make progress under the Party. After all, your mom is still a Party member, and your dad will eventually return to the fold of the Party. Please rest assured of the Party and Chairman Mao's policy. You should be happy and steadfast as always. Eliminate your moral weakness and bad habits, so that you can better serve socialism!"[236]

Chen Yi might have exaggerated his sense of optimism in the family letter, which came out in a volume many years later after it was written. Writing in the politically sensitive times, he could have practiced self-censorship to weed out any private content. Moreover, as he was battling with his "rightist" identity and the shame on the family, he could have simply followed the political correctly way to speak about a more problematic reality. However, even this politically correct vision of family-state relations still testifies to the logics of "state-family" and the weighty optimism it once commanded. Under this prevailing ideology, individual wrongs and family tragedies were only temporary pain. There was no doubt that the Great Leap Forward would

[236] Chen Yi, *Chen Yi Jia Shu* (Family Letters of Chen Yi), Shanghai: Fudan University Press, p. 92.

eventually benefit every family and individual. Once the country achieved the higher objective of the Great Leap Forward, all personal wrongs would be righted.

The optimism among the Party members and the masses reached many corners of the society where Communist ideology had more limited impact than among the workers. In 1958, even the former capitalists of Shanghai, who were more skeptical of the neighborhood propaganda, found a way to identify personal visions with the country's future. Since 1956, they had seen their life quality and political status guaranteed by the Party. Under the pressures from state mobilization, a large percent of the capitalists gave up their interests in their private business to support the industrialization.[237] A diary entry of a technician from a bourgeois family background suggests that at least some bourgeois youths shared the optimism about a significant leap in their living standard and career prospect. On April 24, 1958, Shu Jialiang, who had just married with his wife Fan for two weeks, jotted down in his diary the ideal future he dreamed:

> "Our domestic life will certainly be delightful and fulfilling. In the future, I will turn in all my salary to my mom (who will live with us), while Fan's salary will provide for the family expense and subsidize her mom's living. If we can subsidize a little less, we can afford a better-off lifestyle. Otherwise, we need to be a bit economical. We shall try to hire a domestic servant to help mom cope with housework. In the spring of 1959, we shall try to have a child. In general, I won't mind having many children if Fan's health allows. Our house is now equipped and arranged for a comfortable life. In a few years, we shall try to live in a house with a garden. In our pastime, we shall try to devote ourselves to music, arts, science fiction, and political affairs. We love traveling, especially touring foreign lands. But the most important matters are our careers. Although the social atmosphere today appears to oppose 'careerism', I don't think this situation will last. We must make ourselves into real engineers, scholars, statesmen, especially diplomats. My wife is undoubtedly the best companion in this pursuit. We shall explore together the way of science or the path to truth in this world, write books or monographs on our desks, discuss big questions in the garden, and search materials in the library. Let our labor shine! Let our life not to be wasted! From now on, let our life flourish."[238]

[237] Liu Anbing, Shanghai shi gongsiheying qiye dingxi yanjiu (A Study of the Redemptive Interests of the Public-Private Enterprises in Shanghai), *Dangdai Zhongguo shi yanjiu* (Journal of Contemporary Chinese History), 2013, No.2, pp.54-57

[238] "Shu Jialiang Diary," Center for China Social Life Data and Research (CDRCSL), Fudan University, Vol.4, p. 25.

While being a bourgeois youth, Shu's dream shared the ubiquitous idealism of his time without the mainstream socialist vision for a collective future. Rather than the big socialist family, his goal was shaped by his childhood experience of the bourgeois life. Thanks to the Communist reconciliatory policy towards the capitalists and most intellectual elites, their lifestyle and living standard did not suffer any significant change in the 1950s[239]. Hailing from better-off capitalists and professional families in Shanghai and Tianjin, Shu and his wife must have retained their wealth through the fixed interests, a seasonal payment of 5% for nationalized capital stock, as most families of similar background did. Thus, Shu's dream for an affluent lifestyle outpaced the average expectation of working families in Shanghai and Tianjin. Nevertheless, they partook with the working mass the euphoria towards the socialist future. His dream for a more comfortable life and a conjugal relation centered on careers and comradeship also fit with Chen Pixian's vision for Communism without its patent collectivism. Besides the spiritual delight in books, a professional career, and comfort of a garden house, the paraphernalia of Shu's good life included a commitment to the nation's future development along a less political path of technocratic management. Ironically, while the early 1960s did represent such a hiatus between the utopianism of Great Leap Forward and radicalism of the Cultural Revolution, this brief leniency only came at the hefty costs of the Great Famine.

Epilogue: The Ill-fated "State-Family" Project

The tremendous appeal of the Communist Party's state-building for everyday life rested on the memory of war and the socio-economic collapse of the 1940s. The omnipotent and omnipresent savior, in the form of the Party, appeared on the scene when most urban residents demanded the

[239] Lu Hanchao, "Bourgeois Comfort under Proletariat Dictatorship: Home Life of Chinese Capitalist before the Cultural Revolution, *Journal of Social History*, 2018, Vol. 52, No.1, 74-100.

end of the wartime crisis. Indeed, the Communist state in urban China rallied extensive supports across the class divide through successive mobilization campaigns such as the Korean War, the struggles against class enemies, the economic recovery, and the Great Leap Forward. The sense of salvation and the resulting gratitude to the Party enabled an unprecedented level of state control over the material and spiritual conditions of everyday life. The new social order momentarily erected a "state-family" or a big socialist family as an alternative to private family life, as state power and ideology remade the grassroots society and penetrated deeply into the everyday life of individuals and families.

Such transformation of urban Chinese society and economy was fundamentally shaped by the Communist Revolution before 1949, especially the revolutionary experience during the Yan'an years. When the Communists soldiers and cadres entered the cities, they were equipped by a set of economic and political tools that they developed in their struggles with the KMT and the Japanese: militarized-style command, state monopoly of key commodities, class struggle, and a system of propaganda. Armed with these tools, they transformed urban China from the chaos and disorder of the wartime years into a stable, hierarchical system under military-style command. The Communists firmly believed that such a model could bring about the successes of building Communist, just as it did in the Party's military struggles.

In the light of the transformative capacity of the state and its potent propaganda machine, China once experience a utopian vision of "state-family" unseen since the messianic Taiping Heavenly Army captured Nanjing in 1853[240].The widely-shared euphoria among urban Chinese simultaneously reconciled the defining contradictions of Communism, between prosperity and

[240] Jonathan Spence, *The God's Chinese Son: The Taiping Heavenly Kingdom of Hong Qiuquan*, New York: W.W. North, 1996, pp.270-272.

equality. This coincidence was contingent on the leveling effects of the destructive war and the measured approach of the Communist state. For the working class, the restoration of peace and livelihood was enough to inspire hope for a better and more egalitarian future. The radical increase in urban employment and living standards during the Great Leap Forward drove such expectations to an unprecedented height. Even for many old elites who remained in the grand coalition, the 1950s appeared as an era of hope. After the total war eliminated much of the private wealth and made the former bourgeois dependent on the state, the united alliance policy of the Communist with the capitalists gave them strong hope for the future. The economic promise of the Great Leap Forward was so powerful that even the petit bourgeois could embed their dream of a comfortable bourgeois-style life in the grand national narrative.

However, the Great Leap Forward and its disastrous aftermath soon exposed the weakness of the utopian vision. In retrospect, the socialist "state family" embodied by the People's Commune turned out to be a reincarnated paternalism, where all members left their livelihood all to the Party as the "father". Apart from some unsustainable welfare improvement, such an "old wine in new bottles" could amount to little revolutionary change.[241] The failure of the Great Leap Forward was already apparent in 1959 when food supply became a problem. The Great Leap approach required a massive mobilization of grain. Without the market mechanism and leaps in technology, the only way to meet food demand from increasing number of urban workers was to squeeze the livelihood of the peasants. Yet the forced collectivization of rural life and total subjugation of the family economy resulted in a sharp decline in food production due to the misplaced incentives,

[241] Feng Youlan, *Zhongguo zhexueshi xinbian 7* (Newly Edited History of the Chinese Philosophy, Vol. 7), *San Songtang Quanji* (Complete Works of Feng Youlan), Vol. 10, Zhengzhou: Henan renmin chubanshe, p. 608.

bureaucratic misguidance, and misallocation of rural labor from to grain production to infrastructural projects such as dam-building. Since Mao had crushed the skeptics at the center and decentralized policy implementations to the provincial leadership in 1958-1959, these policy failures remained uncorrected until 1961.[242] In May 1961, under the pressure of rural famine, the top leadership temporarily revived the rural economy based on grassroots market and households, while laying off the urban workers and sending them back to the countryside.[243]

When the Great Leap effort to replace family with class-based community solidarity collapsed, it revealed how much the socialist society still relied on the family. First, when it came to laid-off workers in urban China, they had to roll back the massive employment of women and made them dependent on the family. Second, when the state failed to deliver enough food, the survival of families demanded sacrifice among their members, strengthening rather than weakening family ties. Third, when the state further pursued the austerity policy by sending urban families to the countryside, they had to force family members to rely on each other and become more closely knit rather than more dependent on the state. The failure to push for "state-family" merely accelerated the transformation of the family into more emotionally tightly knit and economically more agile units. All these mechanisms undermine Communist ideals.

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[242] For a detailed account of the political origins and the bureaucratic processes in the unfolding of the Great Leap Forward crisis, refer to: David Bachman, *Bureaucracy, Economy, and Leadership in China: The Institutional Origins of the Great Leap Forward*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991, pp. 119-213; Edward Friedman, Paul G. Pickowicz, Mark Selden and Kay Ann Johnson, *Chinese State, Socialist State*, New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1991, pp. 214-245; Frederic C. Teiwes and Warren Sun, *China's Road to Disaster: Mao, Central Politicians, and Provincial Leaders in the Unfolding of the Great Leap Forward, 1955-1959*, London: Routledge, 1998, pp. 83-119; Alfred L. Chan, *Mao's Crusade: Politics and Policy Implementations in China's*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2001, pp. 198-243; Wemheuser, Felix. *Famine Politics in Maoist China and the Soviet Union*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014, pp. 77-114.

[243] Jeremy Brown, *City versus Countryside in Mao's China: Negotiating the Divide*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012, p. 84

As I shall discuss in the next chapters, the history of family-state relations in the 1960s-1970s China built on the contradictions between the basic premises of Communism and the grassroots ideologies that emerged in coping with economic outcomes of the Great Leap Forward. The epic struggle between Communist goals for class equality and family goals for a better life permanently transformed the foundations of Chinese society, economy, and politics. This story of multifaceted transformations of family life and the family-state under the long-term impacts of the Communist Revolution and especially Great Leap Forward will be the topics for subsequent chapters.

Chapter Two

Revolutionary Austerity: Economic Adjustment, Maoist Ideology, and Urban Family Life in the Aftermath of the Great Leap Forward, 1962-1968

As the Great Leap Forward famine led to massive deaths in the countryside, urban China was still well protected from the famine by the guaranteed albeit reduced rations[244]. However, as rural China began to recover from the deadliest famine in modern history in 1962, urban China descended into the worst economic crisis since the abysmal experience of total war between 1937 and 1949. Food was tightly rationed and in short supply. Hundreds of thousands of women who had entered the workforce during the Great Leap Forward were laid off by the state factories and neighborhood

[244] Until September 1960, Beijing made urban grain supplies an absolute priority to be achieved at all costs. After the mass death became known by then, it began to reduce grain transfers and cut rations for the urban areas. See Felix Wemheuser, *Famine Politics in Maoist China and the Soviet Union*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014, pp. 125-137.

production workshops. Most recently recruited rural workers headed for their rural hometowns and returned to the life of peasants. On average, 82% of Shanghai families saw their income decline from 1957 to 1962. [245] The living standard also reached a nadir, as food ration fell and household income fell. The Engel Coefficient of Shanghai households rose from 51.5% in 1958 to 57.6% in 1962.[246] To control the future burden on urban food supply and public finance, the Shanghai Municipal Government urgently introduced family planning measures, making it mandatory for urban families to limit the number of children to three in 1963 and two in 1968[247]. In the meanwhile, the Party temporarily revived rural marketplace and allocated "family plots" in rural China to produce various non-staple food.[248] Known in history as "the Great Downsizing," the economic adjustments between 1961 and 1965 witnessed a 14% nationwide decline in urban employment.[249]

The Great Downsizing of the early 1960s initiated a prolonged period of stagnant wages, limited employment, forced rustication, welfare cut, and incremental birth planning, when urban Chinese were mobilized to sacrifice in the name of the continuous revolution to build Communism. Such "revolutionary austerity" lasted almost twenty years. The essential items in the policy package, such as the freeze of wage rates and stagnation of urban hiring, continued until the late 1970s. The Great Downsizing constituted a pragmatic phase of the revolutionary austerity since

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[245] "Zhigong shenghuo diaocha cailiao" (Materials on the Investigations of the Living Standard of Workers), SMA C1-1-248. p.1.

[246] Calculated based on Shanghai Statistical Bureau, *Shanghaishi guomin jingji he shehuifazhan lishitongji ziliao* (Materials on the Statistics of National Economy and Social Development), Beijing: Zhongguo Tongji chubanshe, 2001, p. 11

[247] *Shanghai Funu Zhi* (Gazetteer of Shanghai Women), Shanghai: Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences, 1990, p. 101.

[248] *Shanghai Fushipin shangye zhi* (Gazetteers of Shanghai Supplementary Food Commerce), Shanghai: Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences, 1988, p. 271.

[249] Luo Pinghan, *Da Qianxi: 1961 dao 1963 nian de Chengshi renkou jingjian* (Great Migration: The Downsizing of Urban Population, 1961-1963), p.255.

some of the economic policies still contradicted the revolutionary ideology. These measures included a revival of the market in rural China and the guaranteed urban family livelihood through work replacement and fixed interests. The tension between economic policy and official ideology became a battleground of Mao's confrontation with his pragmatic colleagues and the "revisionist" model of the Soviet Union in the 1960s. The domestic and geopolitical struggles eventually led to the Cultural Revolution. After Mao's loyalists consolidated their hold on power in the aftermath of the revolution, the new leadership moved the austerity to an "idealist phase" by sending millions of youths to the countryside.

Even as the Party's economic bureaucracy of the 1960s readily bolstered Mao's ideological leadership, the supreme leader refused to accept more conciliatory, temporary reintroduction of the market economy. While the pragmatic economic readjustment was still ongoing, Mao sought to stem any bourgeois tendencies by immersing the cadres and the mass in rigorous socialist education. Initially, the austerity policies and socialist education worked well together. By the mid-1960s, Mao no longer tolerated any pragmatic elements and saw the moderate economic policies under his colleagues as dangerous challenge to his political legacy. Behind the scenes, in the aftermath of the revolutionary austerity, Mao gradually built his camp of ideological hardliners by counting on the PLA under the command of his chief ally Lin Biao. At the same time, the Party launched a series of campaigns to purge the cadres and masses of bourgeois influences. These purges culminated in 1965 when the Party's "Four Clear-up" Movement[250] caught 174,757 or 14%

[250] The "Four Clean-up Movement" (1963-1966), also known as "Socialist Education Movement", was a political movement jointly launched by Mao and his colleagues to cleanse the Party-state cadres of all ranks of bourgeois and revisionist thoughts and practices.

of all Party cadres on file for capitalist and revisionist delinquencies.[251] When the Four Clear-ups failed to meet Mao's expectation, he attempted a complete overhaul of the Party-state by unleashing the revolutionary zeal of his young followers and the mounting discontent of urban residents. The ideological, political, and economic fallout of the pragmatic austerity eventually manifested themselves in the systemic crisis of the Great Proletariat Cultural Revolution.

This chapter explores the costs of economic austerity and the strategies of urban families from different classes caught between the Maoist ideology and pragmatic measures of the Party-state bureaucracy. Based on grassroots archives and family letters from Shanghai and elsewhere, the chapter argues that urban families adopted a range of strategies to secure their livelihood while bracing for the austerity measures. The chapter also zooms in on two institutions of family-state synergy for the bourgeois and the working families, fixed interests and the work replacement system, which guaranteed the livelihood of the two classes in the face of the austerity. Caught between the Maoist spirits for sacrifice and the pragmatists' concern for urban livelihood, many working and bourgeois families were savvy enough to minimize the cost on the family while securing the best deal they could in the space between the operations of the bureaucracy and ideology. The grassroots bureaucracy, while serving as agents of the state, coopted the urban working families whenever possible. This model of politics and family life ended in the Cultural Revolution when most urban families involuntarily participated in the idealist phase of the revolutionary austerity.

Origins of the Revolutionary Austerity

[251] Yang Jisheng, *Tianfan difu: Zhongguo wenhua dageming shi* (The World Overturned: A History of the Cultural Revolution), Hong Kong: Tiandi tushu, p.32

Historically, the revolutionary austerity of the 1960s marked the resurgence of the Communist war economy of "self-reliance" and "revolutionary struggle" that the Party-state had practiced in the Yan'an-centered Shan-Gan-Ning Base Area in the early 1940s. Between 1939 to 1943, the Communist base areas in north China faced extinction under the "scorched earth" policy of the Japanese army, while the Communist Party currently waged wars with the KMT. By building a network of batteries and no-men zones across North China, the Japanese and their Chinese auxiliaries cut deep into the lifeline of the Communist forces after the Communist Eighteenth Route Army's attacks on Japanese railways and supply lines in 1940. In response, the Party radically shrunk the size of its army and bureaucracy by sending cadres and soldiers to reclaim land, build irrigation, and grow economic crops such as tobacco and opium.[252] To increase the agricultural production of the peasants, the Party rolled back attacks on the landlords and installed the more moderate measures of "rent reduction" in place of redistribution of land.[253] Meanwhile, the Party bureaucracy reduced material supplies and enforced a strict ration system on its cadres and workers according to a hierarchy of political and administrative status.[254]

The austerity measures adopted in the Shan-Gan-Ning frontier region proved immensely successful. Within a few years, the fiscal and economic situation of the frontier region improved markedly as the Communist government restored grain self-sufficiency and fiscal stability. The other Communist bases around the country likewise adopted a similar strategy of downsizing and

[252] James C. Mulvenon, *Soldiers of Fortune: The Rise and Fall of the Chinese Military-Business Complex*, New York: M. E. Sharpe. 2001, pp. 30-34.

[253] Huang Zhenglin, *Shan-Gan-Ning Bianqu shehui jingji shi, 1937-1945* (Socio-economic History of the Shan-Gan-Ning Border Region), Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 2006, pp. 272-286.

[254] Xing Guang, Zhang Yang, *Kangri zhanzheng shiqi shanganning bianqu caizheng jingji shigao* (Draft Fiscal and Economic History of the Shan-Gan-Ning Border Region during the Sino-Japanese War), Xi'an: Xibei daxue chubanshe, 2001, p.321

imposed tight budgetary controls, with various degrees of success.[255] By the end of the Sino-Japanese War, the Communist-controlled regions in North China Plain emerged as an archipelago of relative financial and social stability. Compared with the territories held by the KMT and the Japanese-controlled puppet, it still retained relative price and monetary stability.[256] As discussed in Chapter One, this model of the Communist war economy developed further in the Civil Wars of the late 1940s into a full-fledged system of economic mobilization in the 1950s.[257]

For the Communist Party, the geopolitical situation in the 1960s was, in some sense, a replay of the early 1940s. Since the Korean War, mainland China had been suffering an embargo by the American military and its allies. In the early 1960s, the political crisis and eventual collapse of the Sino-Soviet alliance further cut China's trade and technology transfer from the Eastern Bloc, which had hitherto welcomed China's incorporation into the socialist world economy. [258] The Chinese economy in the early 1960s faced a similar, if not a more complicated external blockade and domestic depression. The Communist approach to the crisis again featured the strategy of self-reliance and stoic struggle, except that this time the scale of suffering extended across the whole urban area of mainland China. Even the roll-back of the radical agrarian policies found its way into the playbook of the economic adjustments of the 1960s, as the Party leadership under Liu

[255] Institute of Economic Research, Chinese Academy of the Social Sciences, *Geming gengju di jingji shiliao xuanbian vol. 2* (Selected Materials on the Economic History of the Revolutionary Base Areas), Nanchang: Jiangxi Renmin chubanshe, 1986, pp. 9-13, 84-89, 90-95, 155-169.

[256] Hebei Institute of Finance, *Jinchaqi bianqu yinhang* (The Bank of Jin-Cha-Ji Border Region), Beijing: Zhongguo Jinrong chubanshe, 1988, pp. 42-43.

[257] Zheng Yongnian, Huang Yanjie, *Market in State: The Political Economy of Domination in China*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018, pp.223-227.

[258] William C. Kirby, "China's Internationalization in the Early People's Republic: Dreams of a Socialist World Economy", *The China Quarterly*, No. 188 (2006), pp. 889-890.

Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping rolled back Mao's Communes and tolerated a conditional revival of family responsibility system in rural China.

Austerity has been humming in the background of the Chinese political economy since the Yan'an days. In 1955-1956, for example, Shanghai underwent a major reduction of employment and rustication for cadres and workers, under what Nara Dillon aptly terms "a Chinese austerity", as the state institutionalized a narrow and highly unequal welfare program[259]. However, the scale and nature of the austerity did not amount to a massive, nationwide political mobilization. When the austerity returned with a vengeance in the early 1960s, standard institutional procedures and grassroots propaganda works were no longer sufficient. Amid massive sacrifice from urban families, Beijing resorted to the Yan'an revolutionary approach to fiscal austerity. The South Mud Valley, the central story of the Great Production Movement (1939-1945), was a large project of land reclamation successfully undertaken by the Communist Army's 359th Brigade under the command of Wang Zheng. Since the 1950s, he led the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corp and then the Ministry of Farmland Reclamation. As the very symbol of the Great Production Movement, the South Mud Valley rarely featured in the *People's Daily* in the 1950s, as the economy enjoyed relatively steady growth. In 1960-1966, however, as the economy fell into prolonged recession after the Great Leap Forward, South Mud Valley and South Mud Valley Spirits, became the buzzwords of the day. The "South Mud Valley" appeared 39, 18, 17, 25 times in 1960, 1961, 1962 and 1964. In 1964, the East Red was premiered, the song and dance of South Mud Valley became one of the five items in the Communist Party's iconic narrative of the war of resistance against Japan[260].

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[259] Nara Dillon, *Radical Inequalities: China's Revolutionary Welfare State in Comparative Perspective*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015, pp. 224-225.

[260] Zhou Haiyan, *Jiyi de zhengzhi* (Politics of Memory), Beijing: Fazhan chubanshe, 2013, pp. 251-255.

In the Communist Party's history, the Great Production was launched alongside another major political movement, the Yan'an Rectification, when Mao cleansed the heart and mind of the newly enrolled, educated youths with relentless, soul-searching criticism and self-criticism. While China historians usually framed the Rectification in the history of Mao's rise to power and the Communist Party's political culture of ruthless purge,[261] the heightened political control and ideological mobilization also served as the "spiritual" side of Mao's comprehensive strategies, when the Yan'an mini-Party state faced multifaceted external threats and geopolitical isolation. Summarizing Mao's reflection on the Yan'an experience in the early 1950s, Mao's political secretary Tian Jiaying identifies the Yan'an Rectification and the Great Production as the spiritual and material side of the same grand strategy[262].

As the first "revolutionary austerity", Mao's economic and political strategies in Yan'an already laid the theoretical groundwork for the Communist Party's approach to future crisis of the political economy. In short, the austerity measures must serve revolutionary politics. As Tian Jiaying aptly summarizes in a booklet on the two movements, the fiscal measures of the Great Production must always subject to revolutionary politics:[263]:

> "Comrade Mao Zedong criticized (in his articles on the fiscal policies during the Great Production) the wrong view that treated politics and economy as separately rather than mutually integrated. Lenin rightly said: 'Politics is the concentrated representation of economics'. Thus, we must always treat economic matters with a political eye and evaluate all our economic policies with political yardstick. Comrade Mao Zedong opposed the view

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[261] C.f. Gao Hua, Guo Jian and Stacey Mosher (trans), How the Red Sun Rose: Yan'an Rectification Campaign, Hong Kong: the Chinese University Press, 2018.

[262] Tian Jiaying, *Mao Zedong tongshi lun kangri zhanzheng shiqi de zhengfeng yundong he shengchan yundong* (Comrade Mao Zedong on the Rectification and Construction Movement during the War of Resistance), Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1953, p.29.

[263] *Ibid*, p.23.

> that economic construction is the central task of the Party and the economy should be separate from revolutionary war as early as during the First National Revolutionary War (1927-1935). He said: 'The revolutionary war was the central task of the day. Economic construction must serve its purpose, unfolded around it, and follow its command. Only after the revolutionary war was over could we speak of economic construction as the central task".[264]

Since the revolutionary austerity called for a political approach to economic problems, the implementation of the revolutionary austerity in the 1960s naturally called for even more intensive political mobilization and ideological control. In the 1940s, the revolutionary austerity was relatively easy to swallow: The Long March veterans, the voluntarist youths, and peasant soldiers were all steeped in the spirit of revolutionary sacrifice and the accustomed to life under the shadow of death. In the 1960s, however, the Communist state faced a far more complex situation of the Cold War and an urban society transformed by the Communist Revolution. While most adults in early 1960s urban China must have experienced war in the youths, the children born in the 1950s had grown up in peace. They had suffered the recent economic downturn but not the deadly famine in the countryside. How did the CCP mobilize urban families for sacrifice without creating undue political tensions and undermining the Communist Party's legitimacy? Following the Maoist model of ideological mobilization, the Party-state implemented a succession of socialist education and anti-bourgeois purges.

The Politics of the Revolutionary Austerity

The Great Leap Forward initially enjoyed extensive supports among the local and grassroots cadres, as they were provided unprecedented funds to build new factories, hire new workers, and increase industrial output. In rural China, families were forced to give up their plots to till on the communal land and be fed in the public canteen. Under the misinformed belief that the highly-collectivized organization yielded a record-breaking level of total grain yields, Beijing vigorously

[264] *Ibid*, p.24.

encouraged provincial and local leaders to exceed targets. After a top-down process of increasing procurement, the actual procurement at the village level far surpassed a reasonable level.[265] In urban China, the grassroots state once mobilized 90 million men, women, elderly, and even children to build "backyard furnaces" in the unrealistic believes that mass mobilization would create a miraculous boost in steel production so that China would catch up with the United States in fifteen years. [266]

Beyond the collective euphoria, however, the model soon ran into deep crises. Rural China suffered acute food shortages as the lack of peasant incentives brought down crop yields and state requisitioning based on inflated grain output figures depleted rural grain stock. In the face of imminent rural famine and local government alarms, Beijing still would not lower grain requisition level until 1961. As urban industrial industrial workforce expanded, Beijing had made feeding urban workers and their families an absolute priority over rural livelihood. [267] Since the state's grain reserve also determined the money supply under the "material standard" of money supply, Beijing could not find an alternative to more grain requisition if it wanted to fund rapidly expanding industrial investments.

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[265] Li Huaiyin, *Village China Under Socialism and Reform: A Micro-History, 1948-2008*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009, pp. 87-90

[266] Warren Sun, "Mao Zedong: Utopian Visions and Practical Realities", in C. M Paine ed., *National Building, State Building, and Economic Development: Case Studies and Comparisons*, London: Routledge, 2015, p. 122.

[267] Recent works of Felix Wemheuser and Yang Jisheng provide excellent discussion on the logics of decision making. Felix Wemheuser, *Famine Politics in Maoist China and the Soviet Union*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014, pp. 62-76; Yang Jisheng, Stacey Mosher and Guo Jian trans, *Tombstone: The Great Chinese Famine, 1958-1962*, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2015, 483-498.

In the small elite circles in Beijing, the pragmatists, including most Mao's colleagues in the Politburo, were skeptical of Mao's more optimistic and ultimately overheated approach to the economy in the beginning. Zhou Enlai, Chen Yun and the other top leaders cast doubts on the feasibility of the Great Leap plans in 1958, though their resistance failed in the face of forceful response from Mao. In late 1958, the euphoria gripped even the more pragmatic leaders as the leadership collectively believed in a rapid transition to Communism.[268] As rural famines became known to all level of Party cadres, even Mao had to step back from the more extreme measures. Just when the Party elites decided to correct some of the excesses in the Lushan Conference in September 1959, Mao launched a counter-attack on Peng Dehua, the Minister of Defense who dared to air his opposition frankly. After Peng's purge, all intraparty resistance to the Great Leap Forward in the Party disintegrated as China continued the policy of harsh grain requisition amid massive famine for another two years.[269]

However, as the rural famine death toll mounted and reached unheard levels in 1961, even local Party cadres began to lose confidence in the Great Leap doctrine. In 1961-1962, some cadres began to push for faster policy revisions. In Anhui, Zeng Xisheng, the Province Party Secretary, who ardently pursued Mao's Great Leap Forward strategy, took the hefty risk to experiment with the household responsibility system as an extreme famine-relief measure.[270] A rural cadre in

[268] Jin Chongji, Chen Qun, and Cao Yingwang, *Chen Yunzhuan* (Biography of Chen Yun), Beijing: Central Literature Press, vol. 2, 2005, 1119-1124; Frederick C. Teiwes with Warren Sun, *Mao, Central Politicians, and Provincial Leaders in the Unfolding of the Great Leap Forward, 1955-1959*, New York and London: M.E. Sharpe, 2000, pp. 99-102.

[269] Li Rui, *Lushan Huiyi Shilu* (Veritable Record of the Lu Shan Conference), Zhengzhou: Henan Renmin chubanshe, revised edition, 1998, pp. 277-279.

[270] Luo Pinghan, *Nongcun Renmin gongshe shi* (History of Rural People's Communes), Fuzhou: Fujian Renmin chubanshe, 2006, p.162.

Shanxi, Yang Weimin, took huge personal risk in 1961 by sending several petition letters to Beijing and calling for the dismantlement of the Commune system[271]. By January 1962, even Mao's most trusted local Party boss of Shanghai, Ke Qingshi, expressed reservations about fulfilling a state grain procurement quota of 15 billion *jin*[272]. Nevertheless, even with mounting tensions within the leadership, Mao allowed only tactical modification of the Communes to constrain excessive "leftism" rather a more drastic overhaul. As Qian Xiangli surmises, Mao, a romantic visionary at heart, regarded the sublime goal of communism as worthy of all sacrifice.[273]

These tensions eventually led to a mini-coup against Mao at an extended session of the Communist Party's Central Committee, known later as the Seven Thousand Cadres Conference. Convened in Beijing in January 1962, the Conference was meant to summarize achievements and address the problems of the Great Leap Forward. In the planned theme of the Conference, the main culprit was the "work-style" of cadres. However, when Liu Shaoqi, Mao's hand-picked successor and an earlier supporter of the Leap, put away a pre-scripted speech and improvised on his views on the calamities, the direction of the Conference changed.[274] Citing the staggering death tolls in his hometown, Liu called Mao's bluff. Before thousands of the Communist Party's grassroots cadres, Liu presented an indictment of the Great Leap Forward as a vast policy failure rather than

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[271]. Lu Yuegang, "Preface," in Yang Weimin, *Yang Weimin wencun* (Unpublished Works of Yang Weimin), Jinan: Shandong Pictorials Press, 2004, pp. 10-15.

[272] Qian Xiangli, *Lishi de bianju: Cong wanjiu weiji dao fanxiu fangxiu* (Historical Turn: Responding to Crisis and Combatting Revisionism), Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2008, p.53

[273] *Ibid*. p.59

[274] According to recent research on the Conference, Liu's speech was pre-circulated within the Politburo, including Mao. Knowing the pervasive disapproval among the cadres, Mao neither approved nor refused it. When Mao finally had the chance to revenge on Liu later in the Cultural Revolution, he expressly rebuked the speech as treacherous. See Qian Xiangli, *Lishi de bianju: Cong wanjiu weiji dao fanxiu fangxiu,* pp. 73-85

a natural disaster. These words fell on the audience like bombshells. For a moment, there was complete silence. There was a thunder of applause and stimulating murmuring in the Hall. Liu called the famine "70% human disaster, 30% natural calamity", naming the whole Party leadership as responsible for the calamity.[275] While other top leaders were much more moderate in their criticism, they likewise supported a drastic overhaul of the Communes. The major exception was Lin Biao, the powerful Minister of Defense who upheld Mao's infallibility and lay the blames on local leaders. His position reflected the top military leaders who remained diehard supporters of Mao. After the Conference, Mao left Beijing and embarked on a "southern tour," leaving the center stage of national politics to the pragmatists. [276]

The extraordinary austerity measures were the Party state's answer to an unprecedented fiscal crisis. The unprecedented mobilization of capital and labor into the formal state-run sector during the Great Leap Forward resulted in severe budget deficits. Initially, the government thought there was a budget surplus, as the national product rose rapidly in 1958. By early 1961, however, the financial supervisors under Chen Yun came to recognize that there was, in fact, huge deficits since 1958[277] (Figure 2-1). Amid the euphoria of the Great Leap Forward, the local government and state factories merely filled their storehouses with useless capital goods such as the unusable pig irons produced by the backyard furnaces. In 1958, the government spent 25% on the backyard

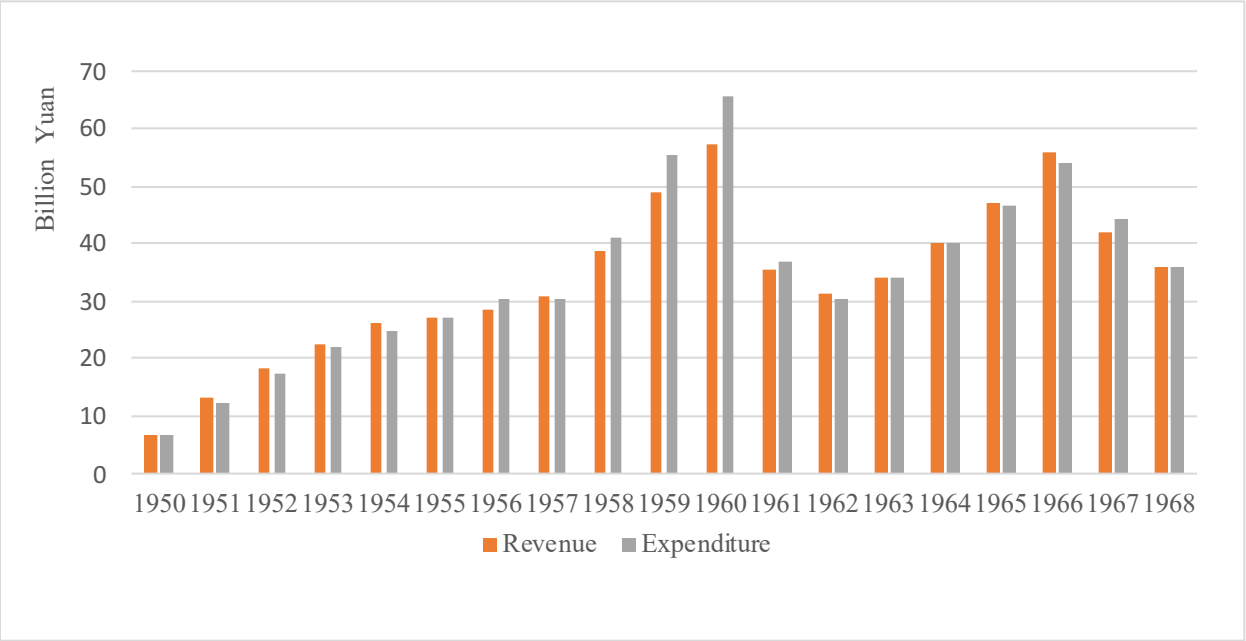
[275] While Mao verbally accepted the responsibility and stepped back from the political frontline, he was never convinced of the large death toll. When the Director of the General Office Yang Shangkun presented a secret internal statistical survey, he was quoted as saying "I don't believe this at all". See Li Xin, "Mao Zedong yu Yang Shangkun Guanxi Tan" (On the Relationship Between Mao Zedong and Yang Shangkun), in *Li Xin Wenji* (Collected Works of Li Xin), Vol. 1, Beijing: The Higher Education Press, 2008, p. 78.

[276] Qian Xiangli, *Lishi de bianju: Cong wanjiu weiji dao fanxiu fangxiu,* p.73.

[277] Qi Zhang and Mingxing Li, *Revolutionary Legacy, Power Structure, and Grassroots Capitalism under the Red Flag in China*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2019, pp. 135-136.

furnaces but only. Once the Ministry of Finance calculated the revenues with their true values, the actual revenue decreased radically in 1961. [278]

Figure 2-1: The PRC Government Revenues and Expenditure, 1950-1968



Source: National Bureau of Statistics, Materials on the Statistics of National Economy and Social Development in the Last 50 Years, Beijing: Statistics Press, 1999

The Cold War also critically conditioned the fiscal contraction. In the 1960s, the significant areas of spending were defense, foreign aid, capital investment, urban salary, and social welfare. There was little room to cut military spending and related investment since China's geopolitical situation had deteriorated on all frontiers since 1959. There were several emerging flashpoints along the frontier in the early 1960s: the Sino-India frontier of Tibet, the Sino-Soviet frontier of Xinjiang, and the maritime frontier vis-à-vis the United States and its allies. Just as China's

[278] Qian Xiangli, *Lishi de bianju: Cong wanjiu weiji dao fanxiu fangxiu,* p.73.

relations with the Soviet Union worsened, the tension between the two Vietnams developed rapidly from incessant border skirmished to full-scale war. In 1963, as the South Vietnam government's inability to defend itself against the Viet Cong became increasingly apparent to American military planners, the Johnson Administration in the United States changed the relative restraints of the Kennedy Administration by sending in combat troupes. In March 1964, the Tonkin Bay Incidence led to further escalation of the conflicts. [279] Other frontiers were restless as well. In winter 1962, China fought successfully a brief border war with India and quickly retreated from the front line, when the leadership was still reeling from economic and political consequences of the Great Leap Forward famine.[280]

Even as the Vietnam War still dominated Beijing's strategic concerns, the Soviet Union increasingly overshadowed the United States as China's ideological and strategic rival in the mid-1960s. The narratives of "Soviet backstab" was manufactured and widely propagated in the political atmosphere in the early 1960s, when Sino-Soviet conflicts went from covert disagreement to overt confrontations. The targeting of the Soviets reflected both domestic and geopolitical dynamics as the widening gaps between the ideological and geopolitical stands of the two socialist powers mirrored the rift between Mao's idealism and the pragmatism of his colleagues. At the international level, Mao opposed Khrushchev's de-escalation of the Cold War by seeking peace deals with the United States as a great power ploy to sacrifice China's strategic interests. At the

[279] Between 1965 and 1968, a million Americans gradually entered the war, fighting along the fault lines of the two Vietnams and in the jungles of the Cambodian-Vietnam-Lao borderlands. In response to these critical developments, China launched a multi-pronged preparation: the PLA under Lin Biao stepped up military recruitment, training, and preparations; the developments of B-bomb and H-bomb accelerated, and the national economy had to gear up for the total war.

[280] Bertil Lintner, *China's India War: Collision Course on the Roof of the World*, New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 107-113.

domestic level, Mao refused to follow the Soviet call to build a new vision of "socialism" for all the people by opposing Khrushchev's doctrine of de-Stalinization and peaceful coexistence.[281]

From 1958 to 1963, the Sino-Soviet rivalry gradually escalated from managed tension to full-scale confrontation. The Soviets looked down at China's Great Leap Forward as an irrational and doomed challenge. In 1959-1960, the perceived Soviet partiality to India during the Sino-Indian conflict after the Tibetan insurgency deeply offended China. From 1960 to 1961, the latent Sino-Soviet tensions finally erupted into full-fledged ideological conflicts as the Soviets and Chinese began to name each other as "doctrinarism" and "revisionism" at the International Conference of Communist and Labor Parties at Bucharest.[282] The standoff almost escalated in 1962 as rural China recovered from the worst famine and the Chinese leadership resumed the effort to confront their Soviet counterparts. In the spirit of Maoist strategies, Mao's tactical withdrawal on the economic front camouflaged an ideological offensive against the pragmatic position. The escalation of the Sino-Soviet ideological confrontations in 1962 reflected Mao's new strategy. Unhappy about the domestic situation, Mao quickly found an opportunity in the renewal of Sino-Soviet tensions in 1962, when thousands of Kazakhs and Uyghurs under the duress of the Great Famine fled from Xinjiang to Soviet Central Asia. Since late 1962, the two Communist parties began a series of caustic exchanges centered on the nature and future of socialism in newspapers, on radio waves,

[281] Chen Jian, *Mao's China and the Cold War,* Chapel Hill, and London: The University of Carolina Press, pp. 63-65.

[282] Lin Yunhui, *Hutuobang Yundong: Cong Dayuejin dao Dajihuang, 1958-1961* (The Utopian Movement: The Great Leap Forward and the Great Famine, 1958-1961), Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, pp. 575-578.

and the negotiation tables. In 1963, two Communist powers began a struggle on the doctrine of communism by engaging in an acrimonious ideological debate and strategic rivalry. [283]

These geopolitical shifts created an ideal opportunity for Mao to take back at least part of his command. Between March and June 1964, Mao vetoed the new Five-Year Plan, which would have phased out the austerity and introduced more pragmatic measures. Under Mao's urging, Beijing decided that military preparation for a struggle with the revisionist powers should set the tone for domestic politics and take precedent over economic recovery.[284] As a result, military spending as the share of budget jumped from 10% in 1959 to 25% in 1968 (Figure 2-2). For almost a decade, the share of military spending in national budget exceeded "social expenditure", defined as the total spending in public health, social relief, education, science and technology (Figure 2-3).

In addition to military spending, China's strategic response to the geopolitical challenges, the Third Front Movement, amounted to a massive build-up of military-industrial investments in the interior provinces.[285] Naturally, as the odds of confrontations with the United States and later the Soviet Revisionism, the aid to Vietnam, Albania, and increasingly other Third World countries increased steeply after 1962 and remained high through the 1970s.[286] The developments of strategic weapons such as long-range missiles and nuclear weapons also required continued

[283] Charles Kraus, "Laying Blame for Flight and Fight Sino-Soviet Relations and the Yi-Ta Incident in Xinjiang, 1962", *The China Quarterly*, 2019, vol. 238, 504-523.

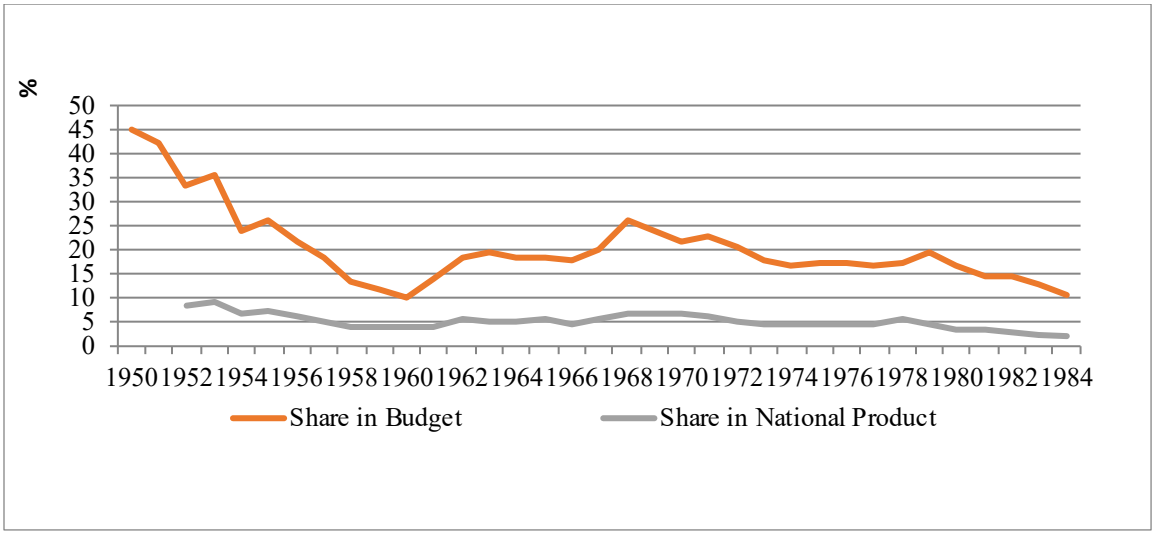
[284] Qian Xiangli, *Lishi de bianju: Cong wanjiu weiji dao fanxiu fangxiu*, pp. 473-474.

[285] For a recent study of these industry-military projects, refer to Covell Meyskens, *Mao's Third Front: The Militarization of Cold War China*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2020.

[286] Zhang Yuhui, *Zhongguo duiwai yuanzhu yanjiu 1950-2000* (A Study of Foreign Aid in Mao's China), Beijing: Jiuzhou chubanshe, 2012, pp. 104-105.

massive funding from Beijing.[287] The only real option was to cut expenditure in urban China, from industrial investments to workers' wages and welfare. Such fiscal arrangements inevitably squeezed the urban household sector and forced urban families to bear the costs of Beijing's strategies.

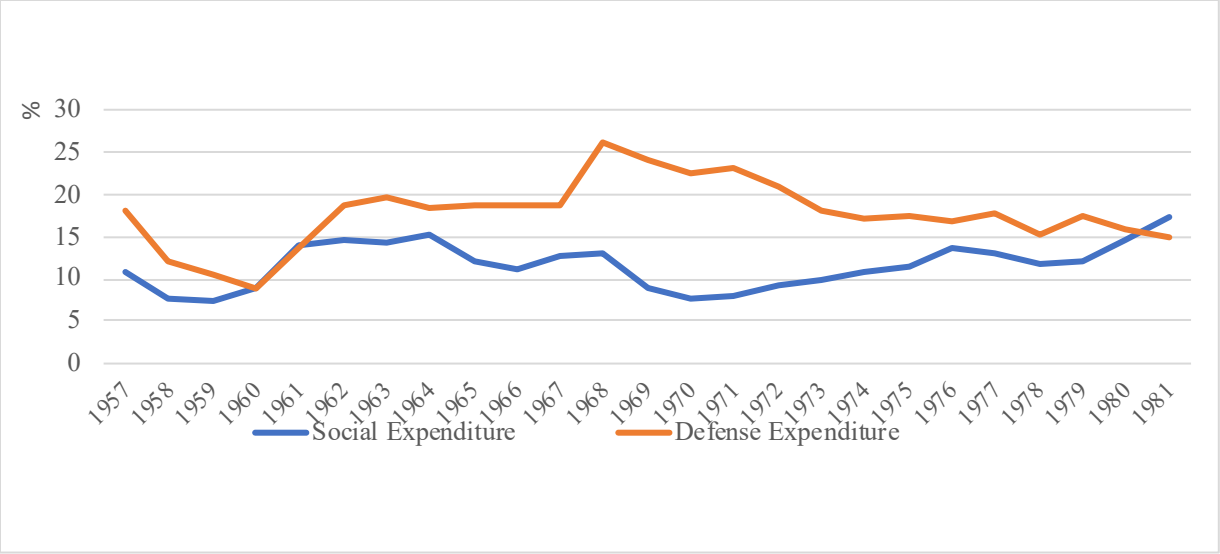
Figure 2-2: Share of Defence in PRC Budget and GDP, 1950-1984



Source: General Office of the Ministry of Finance, Zhonghua renmin gongheguo caizheng shiliao (Historical Materials on PRC Public Finance), vol. 2, Biejing: Zhongguo caizheng jingji chubanshe, 1983, pp. 440-442.

Figure 2-3: Share of Defense vs. Social Expenditure in National Budget, 1957-1981

[287] The decision to develop atomic bombs was finalized in 1961 and the first atomic bomb was successfully detonated in 1964. In 1965, a special task force headed by Zhou Enlai took over the development of missiles, human-made satellite, and other advanced technologies. The task force comprised of 26 ministries, 20 provinces, and at least 1,000 research institutes. See Wang Suli, "Liangdan Yixing de zhanlue juece yu lishi jingyan" (The Strategic Decision and Historical Experience of Atomic Bombs, Missiles, and Man-made Satelite), *Zhonggong dangshi yanjiu*, 2001, vol.4, pp. 55-60.



Source: General Office of the Ministery of Finance, Zhonghua renmin gongheguo caizheng shiliao (Historical Materials on PRC Public Finance), vol. 2, Biejing: Zhongguo caizheng jingji chubanshe, 1983, pp. 440-442

The Great Leap Forward crisis and the subsequent militarization of the economy called for a multi-pronged strategy of fiscal contraction. On the urban front, a radical reduction in investment and massive lay-off of workers began in 1961. On the rural agricultural front, Beijing felt the need to increase grain production and reduce state requisition. Here the Yan'an strategy of turning "non-productive personnel" from net consumers to producers of grain was immediately relevant. In March 1961, a five-member Leading Small Group headed by Zhou Enlai was set up to de-urbanize the population by sending nearly 18% of the urban population, mostly recent migrant workers and their dependents, to their rural hometowns. In essence, the Communist state shifted the economic burden of feeding a substantial population to urban families who suffered rustications and lay-offs. The state also encouraged voluntary migration of urban youths from regions where employment was scarce due to austerity to rural areas and the frontier region. In Shanghai, the Labor Bureau championed Xinjiang Production and Construction Corp as an ideal destination for unemployed

youths, as this frontier region populated by ethnic minorities became restless in the 1960s during the Sino-Soviet debate.[288]

For the top leadership, the major obstacle to the smooth implementation of the pragmatic austerity measures was Mao's ideological "red line." Mao's attitude to the pragmatic policies was ambiguous at best. He had little objection to urban austerity as a tested strategy of the Yan'an days but rejected the roll-back of rural communes and the return of rural markets. In 1962, many rural areas instituted the "family plots" of peasant households in response to Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping to adopt a pragmatic approach in economic affairs. Meanwhile, the basic accounting unit changed from the Commune to the brigade. In Jiangsu, the new Party Secretary Jiang Weiqing experimented with a limited "household responsibility system" by allowing rural families to till on its land and keep a fixed portion of their produce. With the backing of most rural households, the de-collectivization immediately stimulated grain production and raised the standard of local livelihood. However, none of these local measures and their central sympathizers could gain Mao's full support for their potential anti-Communist tendency. The pragmatic policies remained as an "emergency" measures, and never gained full ideological legitimacy.[289]

Revolutionary Mobilization for Austerity

Just as the Communist Party's besiegement in Yan'an presented Mao a golden opportunity to seize all power from close rivals like the Soviets-backed Wang Ming, the geopolitical context of the early 1960s provided Mao with an ideal opportunity to combat the pragmatists. As China confronted both superpowers and some of its Asian neighbors on multiple fronts, the role of

[288] Charles Kraus, "Laying Blame for Flight and Fight Sino-Soviet Relations and the Yi-Ta Incident in Xinjiang, 1962", *The China Quarterly*, 2019, vol. 238, 504-507.

[289] Zhang Hairong, "20 Shiji wuliushi niandia baochan daohu Hefa diwei queshi de duowei fenxi" (Multidimensional Analysis of the Household Responsibility System's Lack of the Legitimacy in the 1950s and 1960s China), *Contemporary China History Studies*, 2006, Vol. 13, No.1, pp. 45-54.

ideology in national politics reached a zenith. In contrast, the pragmatic wings of the Party faced mounting pressure to justify the market- and family-oriented policies. The grassroots politics did not help the pragmatists, as most victims of the austerity---rural migrants, unemployed youths, the elderly, and women---absorbed the costs of the austerity within the family without openly challenging the policies until the Cultural Revolution[290].

The economic austerity at home and ideological confrontations on the global stage provided a strong impetus for the ideological offensive of anti-capitalism, and anti-revisionism campaigns at home since the drastic decline in living standards amid massive unemployment naturally required a reasonable ideological explanation and emotional solace to prevent negative attitudes towards the Party and its goals. The Party's propaganda department rose to the challenge. One of the propaganda techniques was a nationwide anti-Soviet campaign, including grassroots political study sessions and broadcasting official commentaries on Soviet revisionism. In 1963-1964, while Beijing's leading ideologues all engaged in an acrimonious debate on the nature of socialism with their Soviet foes, the government radio networks in urban China broadcasted daily *Nine Commentaries*, the Chinese official polemical pieces against Soviet revisionism, across every corner of urban China. The aesthetic effects were such a sensation that it left a deep mark on the memory of a generation of young listeners. In an analytical account of the use of media, Sun Peidong aptly captured this pervasive use of media power to send a violent, belligerent discourse directly to every urban resident as "visual-audio violence[291]

[290] The opinion surveys and newsletters of the Shanghai Labor and Wage Commission did find much complaint and dissatisfaction but few significant collective action from 1962 to 1965. The most serious situation was the visit of 64 rusticated former workers from several major factories in May 1964 but it was quickly pacified. C.f. *Laodong Gongzi Qingkuang* (Newsletters of Labor and Wage Conditions), May 15, 1964, No. 15, A11-2-89, pp. 87-90.

[291]." Sun Peidong, "Shiting Baoli: Jiuping de shengchan, chuanbo ji hongweibing yidai de jiyi" (Visual-Auditory Violence: The Production and Transmission of the Nine Commentaries and Memories of the Red Guard Generation), *Harvard-Yenching Institute Working Paper Series*, pp.1-42

Another propaganda technique was “telling bitterness” through a movement to produce personal and collective narratives of the Communist Revolution. In 1964, Beijing urged the students to engage in a range of historical writings to remember the bitter days under capitalism and the transformation of life under communism. The family stories of workers revolved around the personal autobiography centered on personal suffering in the Old Society and their salvation after 1949. For example, Shanghai Youths and Children's Publishing House released two 4-volume series of collected stories, *Tales of Old Shanghai* and *Tales of New Shanghai*. The former selection includes stories on the plight of abandoned babies in the missionary nurseries, the sufferings of the ordinary workers in foreign factories, and the poor condition of old Shanghai electrical system controlled by Anglo-American capitalism. In contrast, the recent stories depicted the high-spirited workers in state-run factories, Shanghai’s industrial growth in the 1950s, and the state-run education center for youths and teenagers.[292] As required reading for students at all levels, these stories of suffering and salvation served to buffer the austerity in a broader historical context of national pride and improved livelihood.

Through the grassroots media networks built in the 1950s, the Communist propaganda machine created an intense atmosphere of impending war with hegemonic powers and deadly class struggle at home. It inspired a large chunk of urban youths to participate in revolutionary austerity. Typical among these mobilization drives was the "Go to Xinjiang" campaign in Shanghai. By targeting the unemployed youths and especially those from the bourgeois background, the campaign sought to deploy vigorous socialist education to mobilize youths to build self-reliant military colonies at China’s Cold War frontiers with the Soviet Union. In 1965, the Shanghai

[292] See Shi Feng ed, *Jiu Shanghai de Gushi* (Stories of Old Shanghai), Beijing: Shaonian ertong chubanshe, 1963; Xin *Shanghai de Gushi* (Stories of New Shanghai), Beijing: Shaonian ertong chubanshe, 1965.

Youth League unveiled a series of lectures, featuring "exemplary youths" from various classes of youths, who had volunteered to settle in Xinjiang Production and Construction Corp. On May 20, 1965, Zhu Baiyuan, a Shanghai youth from a wealthy family, recounted his experience of self-transformation:

> "I am a youth from the Huaihai Neighborhood, Ruijin Streets, Luwan District. I was born in a bourgeois family and a son of a former owner of a textile company. In the past, I thought the value of life was in delicious food, fine cloth, comfortable housing, and a fun lifestyle. I did not pass the college entrance exam in 1963 and entered the Guanghua prep-school. In 1964, I tried again but still failed. However, I still believe in hard work in school. If I failed the entrance examination again, I could still apply for college next year. In ancient times, some people passed the Civil Service Exam at the age of seventy. Don't I stand a chance? Therefore, I continued to prepare for college entrance exams and regarded college as the only way for my life. When cadres at the neighborhood came to mobilize me to go to Xinjiang, I replied drily: 'I do not want to go to Xinjiang. I want to go to college". At that time, I thought: 'Xinjiang was the destination for poor people. They can make a living and relieve their family's financial burden by going to Xinjiang. My family's economic condition is so good and my life so comfortable, why should I go to Xinjiang?"[293]

During the rigorous socialist education campaigns of 1963-65, Zhu Baiyuan's worldview was reportedly transformed by the night classes at the neighborhood center, and primarily through his family history. He came to realize that the affluent lifestyle of his family built on "blood and toil" of the workers:

> "After I became more conscious of class politics, my feelings about my family changed. I started to realize that my father was not respectable but despicable. I came to loath my class background. I began to think about the future: what kind of person do I want to make myself? What road should I take? I must choose the road of socialism. A revolutionary youth must unconditionally surrender his will to the Party and go to the frontiers of struggles. This principle applies especially to people like me who came from a bourgeois background and grew up in a comfortable lifestyle. As Chairman Mao wrote in his *Theory of Practice*: 'In a class society, everybody lives by class status and every thought has the imprints of class.' Therefore, I must go to the most challenging places to revolutionize my life. I must go to Xinjiang and delve into the revolutionary melting-pot so that I can become a worthy successor of the proletariat class"[294].

[293] Zhu Boyuan, "Juexin Zou shehui zhuyi Guangming dadao, lizhi Zuo wuchanjieji jiebanren" (Determined to Choose the Bright Road of Socialism and Become a Successor to the Proletariat Class), p.1, SMA B127-1-833
[294] Ibid, p. 4.

Zhu Baiyuan's self-transformation narrative offered a model for a bourgeois family's strategy at a time of revolutionary austerity. There were reasons to doubt the authenticity of Zhu Baiyuan's personal voice, since the speech must have undergone several rounds of revision before it appeared in the archival form. He omitted all the institutional prejudice that his family suffered under the regime. For instance, his failure to attend the college could well be due to his failure to pass the review on his family and political background.[295] Indeed, Zhu could have made a virtue of necessity so that his rational choice sounded like as a voluntarist act. As a son of a former factory owner, Zhu must choose between the material comforts of a bourgeois family in Shanghai and the elevated political status as a young volunteer in Xinjiang. The decision to sacrifice material comfort for political recognition could be a strategy to minimize political risks at a time of intensifying class struggles.

The self-transformation experience of bourgeois youths like Zhu Baiyuan both revealed both the power and ambiguity of "revolutionary austerity" as the shaping force for a new state-family relation. Ideally, the voluntarist commitment to the Maoist ideology helped to sever the ties between the bourgeois youths and the family and atomize them into disciples of Mao. However, it was hard to tell whether it was the economic or the revolutionary rationale of the "revolutionary austerity" that made a decisive impact on the bourgeois youths and their families. Indeed, jobless youths might have used revolutionary rhetoric as a cover for economic motives, as they saw the relocation as a viable means of livelihood. Indeed, a more common and mundane motive for many Shanghai volunteers to Xinjiang and other frontier regions was family finance and a sense of shame,

[295] Sun Changkun, "Wengeqian gaokao quanli zhuti de yanyi: 1953 dao 1965 nian de Gaokao zhengshen zhidu" (The Institution of Political Review for College Entrance Examination, 1953-1965), *Zhongguo kaoshi* (China Exams), 2009, No.1, pp. 29-34

since a breadwinner enjoyed a higher moral worth than unemployment dependent among the working class.[296] In both cases, family separation entailed a necessary emotional costs for urban families' survival in a difficult time. While the heroic display of voluntarism performative aspect of revolutionary austerity, the deeper rationale was more likely economic and political stakes of urban families who wanted to balance political survival with household economy.

Although most Shanghai youths might not have raised serious questions about the rationale of the Party's anti-revisionist propaganda, some thoughtful youths already realized an inherent contradiction between anti-Soviet revolutionary austerity and the telos of communism. Are the Communist Party delaying or even betraying their promise of better material life in their relentless push for revolutionary sacrifice? Are they hiding their economic incompetence behind the curtain of the ideological rhetoric? Perhaps the Shanghai Party Committee was also worried about such thoughts so that the Propaganda Department arranged a series of public opinion questionnaires. In August 1962, when the political atmosphere was still relatively relaxed, Xu Dalun, a Youth League Secretary of a graduating class in the Southern District High School, frankly told the investigative team from the Bureau of Education his critical view of the current situation.[297] Xu's critical opinion represented a small but politically strategic segment of the old professional and economic elites. His candid assessments of China's geopolitical situation offered a sharp critique of the Communist economic policies and their ideological justification. Situating the current economic

[296] *Laodong gongzi qingkuang* (Newsletter of Labor and Wage Conditions), No. 23, August 12, 1965, SMA A11-2-92, pp. 120-124.

[297] Shinan zhongxue gaosanliuban tuanzhibu Shuji Xu Dalun dui dangqian guojia yixie wenti de kanfa (The Views of Xu Dalin Youth League Secretary of Class 3F, South Shanghai High School, Xu Dalun's on Some Issues of the Country), SMA A30-2-5, p.27.

difficulties in the ongoing Sino-Soviet debate, Xu was not only skeptical of the Communist Party's Yan'an style of mobilization but also frankly sympathetic to the Soviet 'revisionist' socialism:

> "Our situation is the same as the Soviet Union in the 1920s. It is reasonable to endure a period of hardship before things get better, such as during the Yan'an days. However, now there is a saying that 'the youths should endure hardship for life.'This is non-sense. No one will bear with a meagre 12.5 kg of grain ration per month forever. You always say that the revolutionary cadres have endured such and such hardship in the past. We do not buy it. How can we compare the revolutionary days with the peaceful years? You can no longer sell ideas like 'endure hardship for life' these days. Everyone must look after his interests. If we cannot feed ourselves well, our children will be in poor health, and the future is bleak…...the Communist Party are not experts in economic affairs and lacks modesty. They do not listen to the experts. When the experts raised objections to their policy, they persecuted them. The Communist Party applies guerilla warfare to economic affairs. This method is not suitable for economic management."[298]

Xu Dalun's observations reflected the dominant view of many old elites who remained skeptical of the Party's more radical policies without opposing the Party. They knew through their family history that the Communist state's call for sacrifice came at a substantial cost. In 1965, when the Shanghai government called for unemployed youths to work at the military farms along the Sino-Soviet frontier in Xinjiang, the family members were often skeptical of the motive A Shanghai resident who was a junior high school student in the 1960s recalled the story of his sister:

> "When the recruitment drive to Xinjiang reached the climax in 1964, my elder sister was sixteen. A top-ranking student and a class leader, my elder sister was moved by the propaganda. She volunteered to go to Xinjiang without asking father's permission. When father knew this on the dinner table, her name was already on the billboard. He was furious. He went straight to the teacher and explained that my sister's health condition would not allow her to live in Xinjiang. He then sternly warned my sister: 'If you leave for Xinjiang, never come back.' This blunt rebuttal left my filial sister with no choice but to withdraw the application. She became despondent and later volunteered to work in the countryside in Shanghai."[299]

[298] Ibid, p. 28

[299] Interview with YMC, a junior high school student in the 1960s Hongkou district, Shanghai, July 18, 2018.

The revolutionary mobilization for austerity in the 1960s had a strong imprint of Cold War geopolitics as China engaged in an ideological and strategic struggle with the Soviet Union. As Chen Jian observed, Mao has staged the confrontations with the Soviet Union, mainly served ideological struggle at home.[300] While his colleagues were in command of the ideologically ambiguous pragmatic measures, Mao quickly bounced back from the post-Great Leap setback and went on a political and ideological offensive. From a strategical and ideological commanding height, he promoted the "continuous revolution" to encase the austerity measures in a revolutionary straightjacket. The balance between revolutionary mobilization and pragmatic measures was precarious at best.

Distributing the Costs of the Great Leap Forward

The conflicts at the elite and strategic level locked the post-Leap economic adjustment and political radicalization in the 1960s into a process of dialectical escalation. The more the Party's economic team under Liu and Deng rolled back the Great Leap Forward and restored the economy, the more Mao and the ideological hardliners advocated for class struggles, which in turn undermined economic recovery. The geopolitical dynamics proved to be a decisive arbiter who favored the latter. Leveraging the geopolitical situation, Mao eventually bent the economic adjustment towards a comprehensive national mobilization against the Soviet threats. By the outbreak of the Cultural Revolution, the political and geopolitical tensions, rather than economic rationale, became the main determinants of the adjustment.

A similar process unfolded at the grassroots level. While the ideological mobilization did help many urban families rationalize the austerity measures, they also created tensions within the

[300] Chen Jian, *Mao's China and the Cold War,* pp. 277-279

families and between the families and the state. The adjustment shifted the economic burden of the austerity from the state to the family. At the same time, the revolution called for class solidarity and further weakening of the family relations by mobilizing the youths against their parents and their family interests. The state authority came to dominate the fate of its children by eliminating inherited wealth and status for bourgeois and working families alike.

For the bourgeois class, the revolutionary austerity presented the hard choices between family livelihood and political status, as fixed interests became the identity marker for exploitative class. For the working class, while political survival was not a significant concern, the revolutionary austerity made it imperatives for family members to share the costs of lay-offs and resettlement. In either case, the best strategy for urban families was to minimize their emotional and economic sacrifice.

For most working families, the pains of the austerity took multiple forms: the immediate lay-off of newly recruited workers, the sent-down of workers and their families to the countryside, the mobilization of the youths for jobs outside the urban centers, and reduced food ration. Young couples in marriageable and childbearing age suffered the additional reproductive consequences of drastic birth control. In all these cases, the state invariably shifted the costs for taking care of working families from its financial means to the urban families. In the spirits of the Great Production Movement of Yan'an days, some urban households had to be "self-reliant". Like the Red Army soldiers and cadres in the 1940s, they were sent to nearby countryside to till the land and feed themselves, in support for the austerity policies of massive lay-off and reduced grain supply to the cities.

As a carefully orchestrated campaign, the Great Downsizing considered both the political and economic costs when it demanded sacrifice from select urban families. Gender, class, and

status were the primary selection criteria for the lay-off. The lay-off and rustication policies generally did not affect male, able-bodied, and politically reliable workers in state-run factories. In contrast, female workers of non-proletariat background were the top candidates to give up their jobs and return home. Besides these fixed criteria, the household economic condition of each family was also a key factor for consideration. Those workers with a large family to feed could appeal to the factory and neighborhood for leniency on the ground of "special consideration." In contrast, those workers with few family members in the city and most family members in the countryside were most susceptible to rustication.

Table 2-1 Decline of Household Income at Select Shanghai Work Units (Unit=1962 Yuan)[301]

Work Units	Average Household Incomes			Percentage Change, 1957-1962	Percentage Change, 1961 -1962
	Jun 1957	Jun 1961	Jun 1962		
Shanghai Steel No.3 Factory	86.84	95.03	80.99	-6.7	-15.7
No.1 Construction Company	86.02	92.00	82.00	-4.9	-10.9
Hudong Shipbuilding	99.79	111.17	103.88	4.1	-6.7
No. 8 Branch, China Departmental Store	92.11	99.62	89.05	-3.2	-10.5
No. 4 Units, Shanghai Port Stevedoring Company	87.52	97.86	92.25	5.2	-5.5
Greater China Rubber Company	116.17	124.31	113.25	1.7	-4.9
No. 4 National Cotton Factory	123.72	130.93	123.16	-2.5	-3.2
No. 1 Yimin Food & Beverage Factory	100.42	104.41	102.34	1.9	-2.0

Table 2-2 Decline of Per-capita Income at Select Shanghai Work Units (Unit=1962 Yuan)[302]

Work Units	Average Per-capita Household Incomes	Percentage Change	Percentage

[301] "zhigong jiating shouru qingkuang de yixie cailiao" (Some Materials on the Households of the Employees," C1-1-284, p.2

[302] *Ibid,* p.4

	Jun 1957	Jun 1961	Jun 1962	From 1957 to 1962	Change from 1961 to 1962
Shanghai Steel No.3 Factory	18.39	17.21	14.47	-21.3	-15.9
No.1 Construction Company	19.46	18.20	16.09	-17.3	-11.6
Hudong Shipbuilding	23.15	22.25	20.13	-13.0	-9.5
No. 8 Branch, China Departmental Store	18.61	19.55	17.63	-5.3	-10.03
No. 4 Units, Shanghai Port Stevedoring Company	18.25	17.29	15.28	-19.4	-13.1
Greater China Rubber Company	20.48	20.55	19.65	-4.0	-4.0
No. 4 National Cotton Factory	22.40	21.10	20.10	-11.4	-4.9
No. 1 Yimin Food & Beverage Factory	20.86	20.03	19.66	-5.8	-1.8

The immediate victims of the mass lay-offs were the newly recruited, mostly women workers in the neighborhood factories. Indeed, the neighborhood factories bore the brunt of the austerity. Between 1961 and 1962, the Shanghai General Labor Union found that there has been a significant decline in household and per-capita incomes of 11914 working families from eight representative work units in the heavy, light, and service industries, respectively. (Table 2-1) The average household income fell from 108.27 in 1957 to 101.06 in 1962, while per-capita income fell from 20.8 to 18.6 yuan. The number is undoubtedly an understatement of the crisis since the income of recently rusticated workers were not included in the report. More significantly, the pains of the slump distributed highly unevenly across the industries and sectors. The working families with breadwinners in the heavy industries, such as steel, construction, and docks, suffered relatively more precipitous decline than the light industries, because many of their wives, who entered workforce in 1958, were now laid off on a large scale. Their sudden lay-off during the austerity caused a sharp decline in per-capita household income.

The uneven distribution of economic pains reflected the gendered nature of the lay-off policy, which targeted newly female recruits in the neighborhood factories. The scale of lay-off mirrored the equally breathtaking mobilization of women a few years ago. According to a large sample of 12,000 working households, wage-earning spouses of the workers in the surveyed factories decreased from 9,090 to 6,731 between 1961 and 1962. About 20% of all 11,914 sampled households had at least one dependents who lost their job. Among those dependents who entered the workforce in 1958, two-thirds lost their jobs by 1962. [303] Overall, the total number of female workers rose in all forms of enterprises from 609,000 in 1958 and then fell to 504,000 in 1963[304].

The gendered lay-off hit families with multiple dependents the hardest. Take the case of Huang Tiheng, who earned 66 yuan as a steelworker. In 1957, the family had to survive on a minimum livelihood guarantees as per-capita income was below 9 yuan. In 1958, his mother was enlisted as a temporary worker in the Shanghai Steel Company, while his wife and younger sister found jobs in the neighborhood factories. With a total income of 131 yuan, the family of 8 had a per-capita income of 16.5 yuan in 1961. In 1962, as his mother and younger sister were laid-off, the per-capita income fell precipitously. At the level of 10.2 yuan, the family was again qualified to receive the minimum livelihood guarantees. In the case of Zhang Benye, another worker in the furnace workshop with six dependents, the lay-off of his wife from the neighborhood production workshop caused their household income to fall by 30 yuan. As their per-capita income suffered a free fall from 13 to 9 yuan from 1961 to 1962, the Zhang family was in an existential crisis.[305]

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[303] "Zhigong shenghuo diaocha cailiao" (Survey Materials on the Living Conditions of Workers), SMA C1-1-248. p.3.

[304] "Shanghai shi Guanyu kuoda shiyong nv laodongli de diaocha," CA, 143-2-85, in *Zhonghua Renmin gongheguo jingji dangan ziliao xuanbian*, 1958-1965, p.150

[305] "Zhigong shenghuo diaocha cailiao," SMA C1-1-248, p.4

The lay-off of workers and the decline of household incomes led to a general decline in the economic well-being of urban families across the board. In June 1957, only about 12% of working families were qualified for minimum livelihood subsidy (per-capita income below 12 yuan) and 5% for minimum income subsidy (per-capita income below 9 yuan). By June 1962, 19% of working families could apply for minimum income subsidy and 8% for income subsidy. If we take 30 Yuan per-capita as the level of relative better-off standard of living, the share of the better-off families declined from 22% to 15% between 1957 to 1962. This trend of impoverishment closely reflected the national trend, which was even more serious than Shanghai. According to a National Statistical Bureau survey on 1,738 households across 15 large and medium-size cities in June 1962, 980 or 56.3% of all the sampled families had to draw on saving or debt to make their ends meet.[306]

While jobs and wages are the principal ways that the austerity impacted urban families, the post-Great Leap fiscal contraction also constraint family life in less visible channels. In the 1950s, urban Chinese work units routinely provided their workers with a host of welfare benefits, such as medical insurance, labor accident insurance, retirement benefits, subsidized housing, price subsidies, daycares, and kindergartens. While these work unit-based welfare benefits provided vary widely by the scale, administrative status, and geographical locations of the work units, the Great Leap Forward led to a universal expansion of welfare benefits in most work units.[307] Since 1962, all these benefits were drastically downsized. Among these benefit cuts, childcare and housing were perhaps most consequential for urban family life. Shanghai work units generally

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[306] *Dangdai zhongguo* Bianjibu (The Contemporary China Series Editorial Board), *Dangdai zhongguo de zhigong gongsi fuli yu shehui baoxian* (Contemporary China's Employee Wage, Welfare, and Social Insurance), Beijing: China Social Science Press, 1987, p. 199

[307] For a definitive account of the Great Leap in the work unit-based welfare state, Nara Dillon, *Radical Inequalities: China's Revolutionary Welfare State in Comparative Perspective,* pp. 229-267

ceased to provide accommodation and childcare services such as daycare and kindergarten to workers between 1961 and 1976, as the investments in housing and social services stagnated in the 1960s and then fell in the early 1970s.[308] Urban working families with many young children born in the Great Leap Forward[309] had to live with more limited living space while devoting more resources to childcare in the 1960s and 1970s.

Table 2-3 Percentage of Workers in Different Per-capita Income Groups[310]

Year	Percentage of Workers in Monthly Income Brackets %					
	Below 10	10-12 Yuan	12-15 Yuan	15-20 Yuan	20-30 Yuan	Above 30 Yuan
1962	8	11	17	23	26	15
1961	4	7	15	26	30	18
1957	5	7	14	24	28	22

The Shanghai General Workers' Union's household economic survey also identified high birth rates as a factor in urban poverty and suggested an immediate implementation of birth control. In their analysis of the situation, they found the initial economically uplifting impacts of the Great Leap Forward led to a brief baby boom. As women entered the workforce in the booming years of 1957-1958, working families found it rational to produce more children. While the working

[308] Editorial Committee, *Shanghai Laodong zhi* (Shanghai Labor Gazetteer), Shanghai: Shanghai shehuikexue chubanshe, 1999, p. 371. Cheng Zhai, Shanghai Tongshi: Minguo jingji (A General History of Shanghai: Contemporary Society), Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1999, p. 248.

[309] The impacts of these policies were very extensive and enduring, since Shanghai added 1.43 million babies or 13% of the population between 1957 and 1961. See Wang Zhixiong ed, *Shanghai Lishi tongji ziliao huibian, 1949-2009* (Collected Materials on Shanghai Statistics, 1949-2009), Beijing: Zhongguo tongji chubanshe, 2009, p. 12.

[310] "Zhigong shenghuo diaocha cailiao," SMA C1-1-248. p.7.

population sampled by the Workers' Union increased 11%, their family population rose 15%. When the working families lost additional employment, the baby boom turned out to be an economic burden. Among the employees who saw their per-capita income fall between 1957 and 1962, 67% had at least one additional child between the five years. In contrast, only 24% suffered a fall in household income due to austerity. [311] Such findings furnished the empirical basis for a vigorous family planning program in Shanghai. Shanghai Municipal Government established a special administrative unit, the Commission on Population and Birth Control, to supervise a draconian policy of family planning. In the 1960s, the Commission worked closely with the factories and neighborhood organizations to promote family planning among female workers and homemakers, especially the use of portable oral contraceptives. The strictest policy of early marriage targeted the interns and trainees in the state sector, who could risk losing their jobs should they got married during their apprenticeship.[312]

The laid-offs were not the worst impacted among all the victims of the Great Downsizing. Compared with the sent-down families, the laid-off were still fortunate enough to have retained their urban household registration status. At least they still enjoyed the status of urban residents and were entitled to the secure, albeit dwindling food rations. If a family were selected for rustication, they would lose their food rations and had to feed themselves by farming in the countryside. At the expense of these sent-down families, the state reduced not only a financial burden but also gained new tax grain from their agricultural work. Between July 1961 and June 1963, the target group of the lay-off shifted from politically "unreliable" elements and newly

[311] Chen Xi, "Dayuejin yingxiangxia de chengxiang Renkou qianyi—Yi shanghai Wei zhongxin" (Urban-Rural Population Movement in the Aftermath of the Great Leap Forward: The Case of Shanghai), *Zhongguo jingjishi yanjiu* (Research in Chinese Economic History), 2016, No.2, pp. 50-53

[312] Guanyu jinyibu tichang jihuahsnegyu de baogao (A Report Regarding the Further Promotion of Family Planning), SMA B123-5-1335, pp. 1-5

recruited women workers to rural migrant workers with extended families in the countryside. An estimated 666,000 Shanghai residents were sent back to their hometowns in Jiangsu and Zhejiang in the space of two years. By summer 1963, Shanghai managed to turn back the clock of its urban population to the 1957 level. [313]

Besides the drastic reduction in household income and job opportunities, the urban standard of living also suffered from the falling supply of all basic family necessities. Like the impacts on employment and household income, the initial effect of the Leap between 1957 and 1959 was a moderate improvement in the household economy, as the supply of grain, meat, cloth, and other daily necessities food increased. The false report of bumper crops in 1958 and 1959 misled Beijing to requisition more agricultural products to improve the food supply for urban residents. Only the shortage of meat revealed the extent of the rural economic crisis. The communization of household livestock caused an immediate slump in meat production, as rural families slaughtered and consumed their livestock in a last-ditch resistance in 1958-1959.[314]

The supply of essential food from rural to urban areas also took a drastic downturn. In 1961, rural grain supply reached the historical nadir of 154 kg per-capita, whereas urban grain supply fell to 180 kg per-capita.[315] As the table below shows, although the shortage of rice in Shanghai only lasted a few months, it altered the essential diet among the Shanghainese in 1962, as wheat almost surpassed rice as the primary staple. In the meanwhile, the supply of oil and sugar, both staples in Shanghainese diet, was cut by half. The most severe shortfall was in the per-capita supply

[313]Chen Xi, “Dayuejin yingxiang xiade Chengxiang Renkou Qianyi: Yi Shanghai wei zhongxin" pp. 41-42

[314] Frank Dikotter, *Mao's Great Famine: The History of China's Most Devastating Catastrophe*, New York: Bloomsbury pp. 141-142

[315] PRC Ministry of Agriculture, *Zhongguo Nongcun jingji Tongji Daquan, 1949-1986* (Comprehensive Statistics of Agricultural Economy, 1949-1986), Beijing: China Agriculture Press, p. 576

of cloth which declined from 9 in 1958 to 1.8 meters in 1962. The only stable category on the dining table was aquatic products. Instead of a slump, the state raised its supply to urban residents to make up for the shortfall in other sources of protein.

Table 2-3 The Decline of Per-capita Food and Cloth Consumptions in Shanghai[316]

Year	1957	1958	1959	1960	1961	1962
Rice (kg)	139.2	290.6	143.2	143.1	87.9	72.1
Wheat (kg)	3.6	3.8	10.3	9.6	30.3	66.6
Meat (kg)	15.8	13.4	12.9	9.8	3.4	7.0
Fish (kg)	13.2	12.1	15.7	16.7	13.0	15.8
Oil (kg)	5.3	4.9	4.4	4.5	3.3	2.3
Sugar (kg)	2.1	1.9	1.6	1.4	1.0	1.0
Cloth (meters)	8.8	9.1	9.0	5.8	1.4	1.8

The acute shortage of food was felt in every corner of the society. Fu Lei, the famous translator of French literature and the father of Fu Cong, then a young pianist student in Poland, suffered the shortage of food. As a member of the cultural elites, he could have benefited from the special food rations available to leading intellectuals. However, since he became a rightist in the Anti-Rightist Campaign, he lost all his incomes and perks, including most of his royalties, the

[316] "Zhigong shenghuo diaocha cailiao," SMA C1-1-248, p.6

mainstay of his household income. Like other political pariah, he and his family had to survive on savings, reduced income, and the basic food ration.[317]. In 1959, Fu family suffered such a crisis of material supply that his wife, Zhu Fuyu, had to write to his son in Poland about the condition of malnutrition at home:

> "Your father never begs people for anything. In these two years, however, the scarcity of nutritious food here was beyond your imagination. He has developed a multitude of conditions lately: neurasthenia, deteriorating eyesight, arthritis, trigeminal neuralgia. All sorts of chronic diseases followed suite. Although he had a weak constitution, he should not have suffered so much if not for the malnutrition. Now he often laments his fast aging and uselessness. This is a painful sight. A few friends suggested to us: 'Why don't go to the restaurant?' Why don't you ask your son to send you some food? However, your father was adamant. He neither went out to dine or wrote to you about this."[318]

Fu family's letter hinted at the unprecedented scale of food scarcity and malnutrition in urban China. The family must know that transnational letters were under close surveillance of the government. Indeed, the parents might have hesitated to inform the son about the malnutrition crisis until they wrote the above letter. And this letters avoided any analysis of the crisis beyond the family and went straight into the concrete consequences on the family. As the Fu family's malnutrition situation suggested, the shortage was most acute in the sources of protein. As table 2-1 shows, the supply of traditional sources of protein such as meat and poultry on the Shanghai market decreased by 50%, while eggs almost disappeared from the market altogether in 1959. In response to the crisis, the government started to promote alternatives to agricultural products in 1959. By late 1959, the government began to promote a range of alternative food sources, such as home-grown chlorella, a form of algae, as a substitute for meat protein. Originally an alternative

[317] Ye Kai, *Fu Lei de Zuiyou Shiqinian* (The Last 17 Years of Fu Lei's Life), Beijing: Zhongguo wenshi chubanshe, 2005, p. 107

[318] Fu Min ed, *Fu Lei Jia Shu* (Collected Family Letters of Fu Lei), Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe, 2001, p.205

fodder for pigs, chlorella became a well-known substitute after Hu Qiaomo reported its miraculous effects to Mao. In 1960, at least 17 provincial governments advocated cultivation of this green ball-like fungus in their water tanks as an alternative to meat for urban families, leading to a temporary "Chlorella Boom" across urban China.[319] These substitutes, of course, could only serve as a palliative rather than a significant source of nutrition.

The rural families from Jiangsu and Zhejiang even abandoned their babies on the streets in Shanghai, thinking that the Shanghainese and the authority could make sure of their survival. Their calculation proved to be rational. Though the Shanghainese also suffered from malnutrition, their food supply was still more secure than that the surrounding rural regions. Moreover, the Shanghai authority would not allow the scene of abandoned babies to embarrass the great achievement of socialist China. In a mass demonstration of this folk wisdom, hungry peasant parents in Jiangsu and Zhejiang furtively abandoned thousands, mostly male babies on the streets of Shanghai, in the hope that some Shanghai residents would adopt them and provide enough food for their survival. Since the supply of grain in Shanghai rested on a strict ration system, Shanghai only served as a transit for the abandoned babies. Indeed, these babies were usually gathered and sent by the Shanghai government to food-surplus regions. These babies were eventually adopted by peasant families as far away as Inner Mongolia. They were known as "orphans of Shanghai."[320] While the name here is surely a misnomer, the mass abandonments of male babies on Shanghai streets show

[319] Gao Hua, "Dajihuang Zhong de liangshi shiliang zengliang fa yu daishiping" (The Methods to Increase Grain Consumption and Alternative Food During the Great Famine), *Open Times*, 2005, No.2, pp. 71-80

[320] "Xianwei renzhi: 60 niandai 50,000 jiangzhe guer beiciyu shanghai" (A Rarely Known Fact: 50,000 Orphans of Jiangsu and Zhejiang Abandoned in Shanghai in the 1960s), *Southern Weekend*, August 7, 2007

how the costs on urban residents in Shanghai was relieved by even higher costs, often in terms of lives, in other parts of China.

In sum, the distribution of the costs of the Great Leap was biased in terms of gender, class, residency status, and sectors of the economy. While the impact of malnutrition and famine was acute and intense, the acute food crisis mostly ended in 1962. The policy of "revolutionary" austerity, such as the lay offs, rustication, and hiring freezes, left an enduring impact on millions of families. The costs of the austerity disproportionately fell on urban women, informal sector workers, and recent rural migrants in the cities. While the famine and death of the peasants were unprecedented in modern history, the sacrifice of urban residents was also remarkable. Unlike the peasants, who often succumbed to the control of grassroots Party bureaucracy, the politically strategic urban residents could sometimes still find a way to negotiate the crisis. Their suffering was no less consequential politically, however, as their negotiations with the state and among themselves reshaped the tenor of everyday politics and livelihood in China in the coming decades.

The Great Downsizing as a Family Event

As a vital part of the austerity, downsizing happened not only at the level of elite politics and policy adjustment but also unfolded at the levels of family life. From the perspective of the state, the cost of the downsizing was felt in terms of numbers and popular sentiments. From the perspective of the families, the Great Downsizing was likewise both an economic and emotional event. The central task of Beijing was the balance between ideological and economic costs at the level of national politics and geopolitics, whereas the challenges to the families consisted of balancing their livelihood with political survival.

Straddled between urban Shanghai and rural Zhejiang, the Liu family inevitably faced the challenge of downsizing in the early 1960s, since at least two family members faced the prospect

of resettlement. At the beginning of the Great Leap Forward, the father, the Old Liu, a retired worker of a shipping company in Shanghai, was still an urban resident in Shanghai. Among his four children, the eldest two, a daughter and a son, both worked in Shanghai. Liu Xianfang was already married and had two children, whereas Zhiren, a clerk working in the People's Bank, was still a bachelor in his late twentieth. His younger son, Zhiyou, was a demobilized PLA soldier who returned to the home village as a village accountant. The youngest child of the family, a teenage daughter, was still living with her mother and brother in the countryside.[321]

The family letters between the two brothers, Zhiren and Zhiyou in 1961 and 1962, revolved around the issue of downsizing as a family decision. Since all the urban members of the family were recent migrants, they felt the intense pressure of austerity. Who shall return in the rural homes, the father, the elder brother, or both? Zhiyou's assessment of the family livelihood played a critical role in the family decision. Among all family members, he enjoyed the most intimate relation with his elder brother. Young and unmarried, the Sun brothers shared the hefty responsibility for taking care of the aging parents and the livelihood of the family in rural Zhejiang. Zhiren sent a substantial part of his salary as remittance to rural Zhejiang, while Bingyou took care of the household at the hometown. Should the father permanently return to the rural home, Bingyou faced a steep rise in his familial commitment and financial burden. Should the brother also return, he could perhaps share some of the difficulties, but the family would lose all the current and prospective benefits of an urban resident.

While Zhiyou still shared the sense of pride with his fellow commune members in his letters to his brother[322], he was desperate about the family's dire financial situation. In his letter to his

[321] These background information was based on various letters in the Liu family Letter Collection, curated at the Fudan Contemporary China Social Life Data and Research Center.

[322] Liu Zhiren to Liu Zhiyou, January 17, 1960.

brother on September 18, 1961, he reported a significant food shortage in the countryside, since there were only 110 *mu* for 120 people to survive and 50 labors to work within the brigade (village). But in his estimate, one person can manage at least 5-6 *mu* (3333-4000 square meters*)*. In the past, he recalled, there was still a chance for villagers to work part-time in the city and send remittance, so internal diversification of labor was possible. Moreover, all laborers received a guaranteed base work point no matter how productive they were. After the Commune took control of rural life, they abolished the "workpoint" [323]. Everyone had to till the land to earn any income.[324]

Even when the harvest was excellent, the Liu family could barely survive on the meager income. As Zhiyou subsequently spelled out the family's economic crisis:

> "Our family has long spent all our money because we almost have no income outside farming and can not do without the basic expenditure for a family. Of course, we tried to cut our expenditure whenever possible, but it was not quite enough. Due to material hardship, I have lost a lot of weight lately. Our mom was so bony that you would be frightened to see her. There is no means of livelihood to speak of since we have no guaranteed income. We can only rely on you (your remittance) to take care of our family. Of course, I will try my best. But there is no hope for the future. This month our maximum grain ration is only 14 kg. In July, the ratio increased to 17.5 kg, but it only lasted for two months. Now the government reduced it again due to our "overconsumption" in July and August. We call this act of the government as 'Eat Cold Rice', which means they deduce from current ration what you had already consumed earlier. There is no wonder that the villagers call the government a big liar. Given all these circumstances above, we are anxious that you might come back to live with us. Please don't even imagine the option. If you come back to share our money and food, our family's livelihood will be unthinkable!"[325]

While no letters from Liu Zhiren to Liu Zhiyou survived in the collection, we can deduce that Zhiren was also among the potential targets for mobilization, since he was a single younger

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[323] Base work points are the work points assigned to each rural labor regardless of their productive capacity. Since the work points were eventually convertible to money and grain supply, the base work points functioned as a guaranteed livelihood support. The workpoint system has a powerful mobilizing effect on rural families. See Myron L. Cohen, *Kinship, Contract, Community, and State: Anthropological Perspectives on China*, Stanford University Press, 2005, pp. 82-83; 94-96.

[324] Liu Zhiyou to Liu Zhiren, September 18, 1961.

[325] Ibid.

worker with most of his family members in the countryside. His profile fit the national standard of the “mobilized", which means that both the work unit and the grassroots bureaucracy could target Zhiren in an ideological mobilization, should there be a need to downsize the neighborhood population. Such potentials became a real possibility in early 1962 when the Great Downsizing came to a head in Shanghai. In an undated letter in January 1962, Zhiren wrote again to his brother urging him to stay in Shanghai, when they decided that at least the father must now retire to the countryside:

> “As for our father's return to live in the countryside, I think he should come back and live with us as he is now quite old. The rural area cannot compare with the city, as we completely lack any meat, sugar, and adequate cooking oil. But the father is entitled to 12 kg of rice, and there is a free market for cheap fish. In my view, our father's life won't be much worse once he returns home. I think grain should not be a big problem now. If the ration is not enough, we still have some surplus grain to make it up. In sum, it is not a big problem for people like us with an economy (*Jingji*)[326] to survive. But for sent-down people who need to earn everything from their labor, there is a problem for survival.”[327]

In the same letter, Bingyou also raises the issue of household registration status, which plays a crucial consideration in their family strategy:

> "As for father’s household registration, it is up to the brigade’s approval. There is no way if they won’t allow it. But I think father can get registered. I also have some room for maneuvering in this matter. As for the family plot, if they can make it up for sent-down people, father can also get it later. But if father does like to return and his life in Shanghai is not too miserable, let’s not force this on him. When he comes back, the best option is not to get him registered at first. If he sees that life here is good, he can get registered. If not, he can still go back to Shanghai. Brother, don’t even think about the possibility of coming back yourself. You can’t survive the rural hardship. I tell you the truth because I am your brother! My life experience in the countryside is profound and acute, so I know better. Also, please

[326] It is uncertain what "economy" means here. It likely refers to the newly instituted the "family plot" where rural households could grow their crops for the market and the newly opened, limited rural and township market economy for agricultural products. The assignment followed strictly an egalitarian principle so that per-capita land holding was roughly equal. These were the means for post-famine agrarian society to survive in the 1960s. The sent-down personnel and their families were also assigned a sizeable family plot, but not necessarily the skills and networks for market-based livelihood. For the family plot as a peasant means for survival, see *Kinship, Contract, Community, and State: Anthropological Perspectives on China*, p. 79.

[327] Liu Zhiyou to Liu Zhiren, January 19, 1962

tell sister and brother-in-law to stay in Shanghai at all costs."[328]

The letters of Zhiyou to Zhiren on the arrangement for their father shows how typical rural migrants to Shanghai, who formed the bulk of the labor force in early Maoist China, negotiated their life between state policy, the local condition, and family responsibilities. The return of a father in advanced age from Shanghai meant additional responsibility for the younger brother, but the burden is still manageable as long as they received remittance from the city. The return of his father, elder brother, and perhaps the elder sister would be disastrous for the family since Zhiren could only work under "sub-marginal" productivity given the overpopulated agricultural land as Bingyou well knew as an accountant.[329] Furthermore, the economic hardship of the family and the sacrifice of Bingyou naturally called for Zhiren and their sister to pledge financial support for the hungry rural family members.

It was also remarkable to note how much the state has lost its credibility even among its grassroots cadres in the aftermath of the Great Leap Famine. Zhiren's hometown in Ningbo, Zhejiang, was in fact among the least hit by the famine, with a death rate much lower than the national average.[330] Yet Bingyou could barely feed himself and his family as the brigade accountant, a lucrative position, when the famine reached its worst period in August 1961. Such a pang of hunger cannot leave the rural society unscathed. From his warnings to his brother and observations on the talk of "Eat Cold Rice", a local term for empty and deceptive words, the

[328] Ibid.

[329] Ibid

[330] Wei Guangyao, Zhengce diaozheng shijiaoxia 1959-1961 nian zhejiangsheng jihuang yuanyin fenxi (An Analysis of the Cause of Famine in Zhejiang From a Policy Perspective), MA Thesis, Zhejiang University of Finance and Economics, p.36

Communist state and its lowest bureaucratic structure had quickly changed into a target of fear and distrust.

Besides the financial burden from his rural family, Zhiren also faced the social and economic pressure to find a wife in Shanghai. Marrying local Shanghai women with a job during the austerity was not only a wise economic choice but also an additional insurance against rural resettlement since locally-based families qualified for special consideration. Zhiren had little chance in the Shanghai marriage market. The situation became desperate in 1964, when his younger sister started an intern job in Shanghai and relied on him for financial support.[331] He could only marry someone who had her own source of income, preferably a worker in a state factory. In 1962-1964, he dated at least four girls in Shanghai, but none of them resulted in marriage. There were at least two girls who left sincere letters, but none had a secured job in the state factory in the city area.[332] In late 1964, he had to end the relationship with a girl as she moved to the collective sector in the suburb.

Eventually, Zhiren decided to marry a Shanghai worker whom he had barely knew for a few months. The marriage did not bode well from the start. As Liu Zhiren's health deteriorated in the 1970s, the conjugal relations tumbled downhill as his wife refused to take care of him and forbade her mother-in-law to come to Shanghai so she could take care of her son. After their separation, she forbade the Zhiren's son to visit him so the father and son eventually drifted apart. Zhiren fought acrimoniously with his wife for reasonable terms of divorce throughout the 1970s,

[331] Liu Zhiyou to Liu Zhiren, July 10, 1964.

[332] Zhiren kept all these letters from his ex-girlfriends along with the letters he received from parents, an younger brother, an elder sister, a brother-in-law, a younger sister, a nephew, and many colleagues. Meanwhile, there was no surviving writings from Zhiren's wife. The only letter from his son was a cold request for money to attend college in the late 1980s. From Zhiren's letters to his sister, we can reasonably deduce that he could have discarded all the letters his wife sent to him, and his beloved son must have seldom written letters to the father.

and finally got the divorce in 1985.[333] The acute austerity of the 1960s casted a long shadow over the life of individuals like Zhiren through the unsavory and difficult choices it forced on individuals and their families.

A family of mid-level intellectuals, the Zhang family, had an even more complicated situation than the Songs when the downsizing came to their father in Beijing. A native of Zhejiang, Old Zhang, was a clerk at a ministry in Beijing. In 1961, the elderly couple lived in Beijing with their youngest son, Ruian, a student of a senior high school. The other three children lived in three places: the eldest daughter Ruiying worked as a primary school teacher in a small town in Zhejiang; the eldest son, Ruirong was a lecturer of physics in a university in Shanghai; the second son, Ruiquan, was a recent university graduate and started as a researcher in a PLA research institute in Hainan since 1964. When the work unit of the Old Zhang implemented the downsizing policy, he had little choice but to leave Beijing. Since he was near retirement and had a married daughter in Zhejiang, Old Zhang was among the first groups of the "sent-down" category. The choices for the Zhang family was thus much more limited than the Songs. The family's deliberation centered on negotiating better terms with the bureaucracy and the plan for their teenage brother in Beijing.

While old Zhang was among the first to be mobilized in June 1961, his years of service entitled him to enjoy "retained salary" commensurate with his pre-1949 earnings but also made him vulnerable to any political movement. Knowing his situation well, old Zhang decided to accept the mobilization on July 29, 1961. On July 31, he began negotiating with the department director on the dismissal compensation, a lump sum payment equivalent to five years of salary for the volunteered sent-down. Old Zhang wrangled with the bureaucracy and secured the 2,300 yuan lump sum payment for dismissal. Meanwhile, the old Zhang couple learned from their colleagues

[333] Liu Xianfang to Liu Zhigren, June 10, 1986.

about another option, namely a retirement with a monthly stipend. After negotiating with the director, old Zhang secured a monthly retirement salary of 37.5 yuan, around 30% of his current wage of 102 yuan. [334] In his reasoning with brother, Ruiquan laid out the Zhang family's deliberation:

> "At the beginning, the cadres (of the Ministry) said they calculated the compensation based on the father's current salary. Now they backed out, quoting the Ministry of Labor's new policy. Shall father retire or quit? We don't have enough time to consult you. But here is our reasoning. Should he quit, he gets an upfront payment of 2300 yuan. This sum is indeed good money. But that money is only one-time, and his relationship with the work unit ends. They would have used it up in due course. Also, our parents will have to bring along a large amount of cash to the Commune. The Commune leader will surely ask them to invest in the brigade enterprise. And our poverty-stricken relatives will also come to borrow from them since the wealth will be too conspicuous. Furthermore, our salaries are still too low (to support our parents) and will not increase in the short run given the national economy. The 2,300 yuan will thus not last. On the other hand, if the father retires, he can get a small monthly pension. If he gets sick, he still enjoys the insurance. To be sure, the retirement salary is low and insufficient for urban life. And he must support our younger brother's schooling. But as long as we both work, we will have a way out."[335]

The Zhang family decided to apply for early retirement with a monthly salary of 37.5 yuan and let their youngest brother continue his education in Beijing. Barely sixteen years old, Rui'an would need to stay in Beijing alone after the parents returned to rural Zhejiang. Should he drop out of school and move with the parents to rural Zhejiang? Should he move to Shanghai and stay with his elder brother? In that case, is it possible for Ruirong to find a place for the parents to stay in Shanghai? Should he move to Nanjing to live with their uncle? Should he stay in Beijing and apply for the Ministry's affiliated high school and People's Bursary?[336] After weighing all the options, the Zhangs could not reach a definitive solution, since they could neither afford to give up their brother's residency status in Beijing nor secure a household registration status for their

[334] Zhang Ruiquan to Zhang Ruirong, August 5, 1961
[335] Ibid.

[336] Ibid

brother in another big cities given China's stringent population control.[337] A letter from Ruian to Ruirong four years later indicated that the little brother was fortunate enough to enroll in a boarding school in Beijing, manage four years without his parents, and start working as a teacher in Beijing in 1965.[338]

As the Zhang family's strategy shows, the impact of downsizing could involve coordinated efforts of the whole family. When they can't resist the sent-down policy, the best plan for the family was to minimize the emotional and financial burden by negotiating the most secure arrangement. The choice of a meager monthly allowance rather than a lump sum payment demonstrated the Zhang family's understanding of the state bureaucracy and local society. The family could still negotiate with the bureaucratic machine of Beijing, but the grassroots cadres and local community would be even harder to handle. In Beijing, they can always argue for their legitimate interests according to the policy rules. Once back in their home town, they immediately faced the demand for money from the Commune leaders and the hunger-stricken relatives and friends. With little means but the retirement income, the old Zhang calculated that their best survival strategy was to remain affiliated with the bureaucracy in Beijing as a retiree. But compared with the Liu family, they were still among the lucky few among the urban elites who needed not worry about their livelihood.

Like any mobilization campaign in Communist China, some people accepted the order to leave Shanghai without much negotiating either with the bureaucracy or with family members, especially when they had no family members in town. Mr. Piao, an orphan who grew up in a state orphanage, was selected by his work unit to resettle from Shanghai to Zhejiang countryside in

[337] Ibid.

[338] Zhang Ruian to Zhang Ruirong, December 19, 1965.

1962 when he just joined work for a year. He soon accepted his new role as a farmworker. As he recalled, he knew there was no other choice when the mobilization began, since he grew up as the child of the state. Growing up in an orphanage in the city, he had many misconceptions about the socialist countryside. He even fancied that tractors rather than humans handled the farm works. The initial experience of a rural worker thus disappointed him. But the warm welcome he received from the peasants soon dispelled the disappointment.[339] When asked by a student fifty years later about his feelings at the departure, Mr. Piao recalled:

> "I have no thought whatsoever. At that time, if you are sent-down, you can only accept it as you are following Chairman Mao's call. But to speak the truth, I was not happy when I was supposed to go alone. The life condition was harsh, and there was no way back since they helped to move my household registration status to the countryside. But what else can I do? I can only accept my fate. Later, I set up my own family and settled down here. My life quality improved markedly. I don't have any other complaints. And I am not the only one who left the city. At that time, the Party's propaganda reached everywhere in Shanghai. Residents in big cities and small towns were all subjects of the policy. Everyone understood the state's rationale…" [340]

Mr. Piao reflected that he gradually adapted to life in the countryside and saw his quality of life improved over the years, as he became settled, built his family in the countryside, and joined factory: "Many people indeed felt distressed initially when they arrived at the farms. Then the distress evaporated as we were treated well by the peasants. Anyway, the negative feelings did not lead us into any resistance since we found the rule in the countryside that you got what you sowed quite reasonable. I worked for a few years on the farm. Then I got my family plots and started my family. Later, our sent-down cohorts scattered into different districts and villages. Now we have

[339] "Piao Xiansheng caifang" (Interview Transcripts with Mr. Piao), in Zhu Yu, *60nian dai Zhejiang jingjian Renkou wenti yanjiu* (A Study of the Problem of Downsizing in Zhejiang in the 1960s), Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2015, pp. 247-250

[340] Ibid, p. 250

all settled with jobs and families. I got my first salary in 1978, and upon retirement, I receive at least 1,500 per month."

Mr. Piao's work and family life could have colored his oral history narrative, but his experience was still relatable to sent-down workers of similar background. The sense of "no choice" exemplified the experience of many young workers who had little or no family burdens. Instead of experiencing family separation, he started a new family in rural China. If he were to remain in Shanghai as unemployed youths with no family support, he probably had little chance of finding a good match for marriage. In fact, should Mr. Piao remained in Shanghai as a poor bachelor, his life chance would not be better than Zhiren, who could still draw emotional support from family members in Shanghai and rural Zhejiang. The more prolonged life-course impact of the downsizing policy thus reached beyond the immediate loss of the benefits as urban residents to essential decisions of family life such as marriage and lifelong happiness.

Fixed Interest and Capitalist Families

In the 1960s, Shanghai still had a significant "capitalist" class in the sense that the former capitalist families received regular state compensation for the socialization of their capital stock. The redemptive interests (*Dingxi*, or fixed interest) was instituted by the government in 1956 to subsidize the livelihood of the capitalist families. Besides its immediate economic function, the redemptive interests also helped to subjugate the interests-receiving urban bourgeois to the Party who regarded the redemptive interests as a special favor and exercised strict control over its terms. According to the settlement in November 1956, the government would issue an interest payment equivalent to 5% of the nationalized capital stock for six years. According of official survey in 1956, 15,000 and 3,8000 Shanghai families had a capital invest above 10,000 and 2,000 yuan,

which translated into a fixed interest of 500 and 100 yuan respectively.[341] They constituted a small but strategic socioeconomic group thanks to their education, managerial expertise, and overseas connection. In 1957, a famous Shanghai capitalist, Li Kangnian, suggested that the government extend the payment period to twenty years. The government reacted vigorously by naming Li Kangnian as a rightist. Since then many capitalists decided to forego the redemptive interests and exchange economic benefits for political security[342].

In the late 1950s, the "bourgeois class" in Shanghai included a wide range of individuals from different income groups. According to the Shanghai Federation of Industry and Commerce (SFIC) survey, the majority of these "capitalists," especially those who had only moderate capital, still regularly received their redemptive interest as a form of subsidy in 1959. The wealthiest capitalists, such as Rong Yiren, remained the richest men in Shanghai with a staggering interest payment of 2.5 million yuan to his family. Meanwhile, the poorest among the SFIC members and their families earned only 20-30 yuan per month after giving up their redemptive interests. The average per-capita income of the capitalist families, which amounted to 200-300 yuan, however, still far surpassed the average household income of around 30 yuan.[343]

Meanwhile, the political status of most former capitalists and their families remained ambiguous, despite their membership as "nationalist capitalists" in the "ruling alliance." Given the

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[341] Zhongong Shanghaishi tongzhanbu (The United Fronts Department of the CCP Shanghai Committee) et al, *Zhongguo zibenzhuyi gongshangye shehuizhuyi gaizao, shanghai juan,* (Historical Documents on the Socialist Reform of China's Capitalist Industrial and Commercial Enterprises), Beijing: Zhonggong dangshi chubanshe, 1989, p.1555.

[342] Xiaohong Xiao-Planes, "Buy 20 Years: Li Kangnian, Class Identity, and the Controversy over the Socialization of Private Business in 1957", European Journal of East Asian Studies, 2004, Vol. 13, No.2 pp. 237-239

[343] "*Gongshanglian quanti Zhiwei dingxi gongzi jiating jingji yilanbiao"* (Comprehensive Table of Fixed Interests, Salaries, and Family Economy of the Members of the Executive Committees of the Federation of Industry and Commerce, SMA, No. C48-1-170, pp.1-4

consolidation of the Maoist ideology in the 1960s, their political identity and loyalty were increasingly under heavy scrutiny. An immediate casualty of such politicization was their children's chance for higher education and gainful employment. When urban employment plummeted, the children of the capitalist class were the first to suffer exclusion from jobs and school enrolment through the increasingly strict "political review" process. The children of the capitalist class thus faced a tough choice. Should they survive on their family's redemptive interests and inherit their parents' political status? Should they cut their ties with the family and "betray" their class of birth, so they can have a higher chance of political mobility and perhaps a more secure livelihood in the long-run? Even though their class status by birth as "capitalist" would create a disadvantage in their career and education under Mao, they can at least improve their political survival by putting up a performance to show their loyalty to the Communist Party.

Beyond politics and economics, there was also a concern for social prestige. In 1960s Shanghai, the former capitalists retained their hold in the popular mind as the example of the good life in Shanghai. Despite their dubious political status, their glamorous lifestyle still commanded the respect of average urban residents, even when the socialist education reached a new height in the early 1960s. As a former sent-down youth told me about Shanghai public opinion on the eve of the Cultural Revolution: "We generally looked up to our classmates from wealthy capitalist families and would love to visit their homes. Their houses were expansive, well-furnished, and supplied with fixtures of modern life like bicycles. Ordinary families would not have such desiderata until the 1970s. Everything was awesome and desirable in our eyes. This general sentiment lasted until the Cultural Revolution and even after the start of the sent-down movements in 1969."[344]

[344] Interview with a former sent-down youth, October 20, 2019.

In 1962, when the Youth League surveyed two Shanghai neighborhoods where many capitalist families resided, they were alarmed by the corruption of inherited wealth in the minds of other youths. The confidential report underscored the case of Zheng Haoying, a son of Zheng Zhongjin, a major ink merchant in old Shanghai, as a “typical problem." An heir to an annual redemptive interests payment of 16,000 yuan, the younger Zheng lived in a three-room western-styled room “painted milk-white”, bought a full set of luxuriant products, such as television and bicycles, and hired a proletarian women (*laodong dajie*) as his nurse. He once volunteered to serve in a Communist League reclamation project in Jiangxi in 1961 but soon sneaked back to Shanghai because of the unbearable living conditions Married in 1962, the Zhengs thrived on their inherited wealth and even toured around the Yangtze Delta Region. After surveying the situation in a few selected capitalist neighborhoods, the report noticed a dangerous trend of increase in such a "parasite lifestyle." It estimated that at least 20% of the youths from the capitalist families in Shanghai belonged to this category of “corrupted youth." [345]

The Shanghai Youth League also noted the effects of the inherited wealth of the bourgeois class upon youths of other classes. In Shanghai, there was a widely circulating saying: “The capitalists are indeed corrupt, but their redemptive interests are good.” Under the spell of economic austerity of the 1960s, the living standard of the capitalist families was so superior to the proletariats that many young women from working families wished to abandon their class identity and marry the heirs to capitalist wealth. There were also some notorious cases of corruption. Zhan Peiyuan, a son of a former machine-tool factory owner, used his share of the redemptive interests to bribe his superiors in his factory. At a time when even grain was in short supply, he treated

[345] “Zicanjieji zinu jicheng jieshou dingxi caichan de yixieqingkuang” (Some Conditions on the Situations of the Bourgeois Children's Accepting or Inheriting Redemptive Interests or Property), SMA C23-2-254, pp. 20-21

factory cadres with luxuriant items like high-price sweets, cigarettes, and meals in famous restaurants. The branch secretary and the factory director all succumbed to his charm offensive. In return for Zhan's favors and perks, the factory leadership elevated his technical qualification, raised his salary, and even intervened on his behalf in the legal battle with his elder brother for inheritance. [346] As the Youth League report noted alarmingly: "Since the inherited wealth of the capitalist class had begun to corrupt the roots of the Party bureaucracy, we need to address the matter urgently".

While the Party launched several rounds of socialist education in 1963-1965, the propaganda scarcely challenged the strategies of many capitalist families. In January 1965, the Office of Wage and Labor sounded alarms in its internal report, underlying the fact that the "situation of class struggle was especially acute in capitalist families since the economic austerity made the youths more dependent on their family wealth." For example, Yao Shi, a twenty-two-year-old daughter of a former owner of a big enterprise, never went to work or attended any political education classes after she graduated from high school in 1962. With an annual redemptive interest income of 40,000 yuan and per-capita living expenses of 600 yuan, the Yao family could afford to let their daughter continue her lifestyle as an heiress. "She often overslept", the report observes, "relied on the domestic servant to fetch her napkins, the washbasin, and breakfast." Already she was engaged with a young man of similar family background; she planned to live on such a happy lifestyle forever.[347] Another youth in the same neighborhood, Dong Ruiliang, practiced the same lifestyle after his capitalist parents migrated to Hong Kong and left him with all their redemptive interests.

[346] Ibid, p.27

[347] *Laodong gongzi qingkuang* (Newsletter of Labor and Wage Conditions), No. 6, February 25, 1965, A11-2-92, p.48

He lived in a well-furnished western-style house with attached gardens, watched television, and hired a working-class nanny to take care of his daily needs. When the cadres from the Neighborhood Committee tried to get him to volunteer to go to Xinjiang, he retorted: "I heard the military farms held morning drills. I won't get up for the drills as I usually stay up late."[348]

Not all "bourgeois" had so much money as the big capitalists. Most recipients of the redemptive interests were only small shareholders whose financial status was only slightly better than the average workers. Since the limited fixed interests they received were insufficient for livelihood, they need a more sophisticated strategy to balance livelihood and political survival during the revolutionary austerity. Zhang Liwen, an apprentice at the a department store, served as the Youth League secretary in his class when he graduated from high school in 1962. A son of a deceased shop owner, he survived on a meager inherited monthly redemptive interest of 9 yuan, an orphan subsidy of eight yuan from the SFIC, and an allowance from his uncle. When he began his career as an intern, he weaned himself off the family allowance but continued to receive the redemptive interest of nine yuan. When the representatives of the League came to educate him in 1963, he felt there were no conflicts between redemptive interests and his commitment to socialism, since he was legally entitled to inherit his father's wealth. The nine-yuan redemptive interest was not much, but it accounted for 20% of his monthly income as a shop assistant. He insisted on receiving the redemptive interests until November 1964, when the League sent him an ultimatum. He either had to leave the League and the Worker's Union. which means giving up all state welfare or forego the redemptive interests. He eventually decided to give up the redemptive interests.[349]

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[348] Ibid.

[349] "Zicanjieji zinu jicheng jieshou dingxi caichan de yixieqingkuang" (Some Conditions on the Situations of the Bourgeois Children's Accepting or Inheriting Redemptive Interests or Property), SMA C23-2-254, p.25

As Zhang Liwen's case demonstrates, for many capitalists' children, the decision to give up redemptive interests depended on the Party's pressure. Political calculus often predominated when there were only limited economic incentives.

For the family of Hua Hengfa, the decision on redemptive interests involved more complicated internal negotiations within the family. The Hua family's redemptive interests came from the fixed interests payments to Hua Hengfa, who had owned a skilled worker's 6,200 yuan capital stock in a small machine-tool factory before 1949. The redemptive interests amounted to only 310 yuan per year. In the 1960s, the work unit still classified Feng as a retired worker rather than a capitalist. A former capitalist who always called himself "an old worker" in his letters to the work units, Hua Hengfa were politically astute enough to know the political stake behind redemptive interests in the early 1960s, even as the state continued to allow capitalist families to receive the redemptive interests. Yet, as the head of a large family and a retiree, he could not ignore his family dependents, who relied on the redemptive interests a source of livelihood.

In 1965, Hua Hengfa finally resolved to sacrifice livelihood for better political security. In a carefully calibrated plea to the Four Clean-Ups Team, wreaking havoc in the factory in 1965, Hua underscored his class identity as a member of the proletariat class, while suggesting that the redemptive interests were not class markers but only a necessary means for family livelihood. On October 14, 1965, when the Four Clear-ups and the Socialist Education had already penetrated every corner of the Party bureaucracy and the economy, Hua decided to state clearly his position on the redemptive interests:

> "My dear comrades of the Four Clean-Up Team:
>
> I am a retired worker aged sixty-three. I have a complex issue to report to you. Please help me resolve the problem. I used to run a partnership with my friend to open a machine-tool factory in 1950. After the liberation, all the shareholders, including me, secured redemptive interests through the Public-Private Joint Cooperative Movement. Thanks to the justice and

> equality of the Communist Party, I received a yearly interest payment of 620 yuan. At that time, I had an extensive family—two elderlies, two sons, five daughters, and two grandsons---eleven members altogether. Books and school fees alone cost me more than 100 yuan. With a retirement salary of 107 yuan, my family economy faced grave difficulty. Also, since my understanding of socialism was inadequate, I thought I could still receive the redemptive interests as a supplement to my family's livelihood. As the Four Clean-Movement was in full swing, my class consciousness rose quickly. Now a fierce struggle between the proletarian and capitalist classes is going on in our country. As a member of the working class, how careless am I in continuing to receive the redemptive interests for my private interests! Am I not making myself a member of the exploitative class? The Socialist Education Movement was a clarion call for me. I felt ashamed and guilty. Since I am determined to pursue the socialist road, I will give up my redemptive interests from the third quarter of 1965. Now that my children and grandson has grown up and joined the workforce, my burden is also relieved. Therefore, I want to state clearly my attitude to give up the fixed interests to the leadership…"[350]

Hua Hengfa's hard choice between political security and economic interests suggested a common survival tactic among the former capitalists in 1960s Shanghai. When the revolution was not in full swing, he retained the redemptive interests as a subsidy; when the political risk became prohibitive, he reversed the bet. His change of strategies came at a rather tense moment of Mao's ideological campaign against the "creeping bourgeois" during the economic austerity. By deploying "class consciousness" as a gradual process of awakening, he could rationalize his earlier tactics as a lack of "consciousness" rather than a rational choice. In 1965, most capitalist families who did not depend on the redemptive interests for survival must have voluntarily surrendered their interests and traded the limited benefits of membership in the "capitalist class" for the political security of membership in the proletariat. In 1966, when the Party finally decided to suspend the reimbursement of the redemptive interests, the recipients must have been a minority, as the most rational actors had already chosen political security over economic interests. When the Red Guards broke into their homes to confiscate all their property, even the mere mention of the redemptive payments could bring disasters to their families.

[350] Hua Hengfa to Shanghai Shipbuilding Factory, October 4, 1965.

The Replacement System and Working Families

Between 1962 and 1968, while revolutionary austerity impinged on family life, urban Chinese workers stood to benefit from an institution arrangement known as replacement (*Dingti*). Under the replacement policy, work units could hire direct relatives of old workers near retirement. While the approval procedure involved certifications from hospitals, schools, neighborhoods, the work units, and the higher administrative units in Shanghai, the request for replacement was usually granted within a few weeks. Since the bureaucratic process took place in the small world of the work units, the applicants could even negotiate the term of their retirement and their children's jobs. Like the fixed interests, the replacement system served as an institutional link between urban families and the Communist state in a time of economic uncertainties.

An informal welfare scheme of hiring family members of deceased or retired workers in urban factories since 1957[351], the replacement policy in the 1960s was a pragmatic measure to counter the negative impacts of the Great Downsizing. In the context of massive lay-offs, urban factories lost a large share of young recruits from the countryside amid a rapidly aging workforce. The loss of secure income to some class and a crisis of subsistence among many working families also required an urgent redress. After the Great Downsizing reduced urban population, the Party could not afford not to provide for the remaining workers and their families with an urban household registration, whose longstanding urban, workers identities meant that they were a highly

[351] Zhou Enlai first suggested that work units should give preference to direct relatives of old workers when hiring new workers on the government report on the Third Plenary Session of the Eighth Party Congress on 24 October 1957. See Zhongyang zhuanfa Zhou Enlai Tongzhi zai bajiesanzhong quanhui shang Guanyu laodong gongsi he laobaofuli de baogao (Comrade Zhou Enlai's Report on Labor, Wage, Social Insurance, and Welfare for Workers on the Third Plenary Session of the Eighth Party Congress CCP Central Committee), in All China Federation of Trade Unions et al. *Jianguo yilai Guanyu gongren yundong de wenjianxuanbian* (A Collection of Selected CCP Central Committee Documents on Labor Movement since 1949), Beijing: Gongren chubanshe, p. 1989, p. 608

strategic population. While certainly not a fair policy for all workers, the replacement system met these needs. The pragmatists thus found in replacement an efficient way to reconcile politics and economics of the austerity.

The replacement system was in operation from 1962 to 1968. On October 2, 1962, the CCP Central Committee and the State Council stated in a joint policy guideline regarding public work that a child of a retired older worker could replace the parent upon the latter's death, disability, or retirement.[352] In terms of coverage, around 23% of all Shanghai workers could potentially benefit from the scheme[353], though the ways they utilized the policy would depend on their household economy rather than age.[354] The application typically specifies a few conditions, such as economic difficulties, minimum age, and satisfactory evaluative reports from the school, a hospital, the neighborhood and even the police station about the child's political performance and moral conduct. Most procedures were perfunctory enough to guarantee most applicant families a place in the work units.[355]

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[352] Cai Fuhong, *Shenfen jicheng yu zhiye zaizao: zinu jieban zhidu yanbian guocheng yanjiu* (Identity Inheritance and the Reproduction of Workers: A Study on the Evolution of Replacement System), Ph.D. Dissertation, Shanghai University, pp. 59-61.

[353] 23% Shanghai workers and employees were above 50 in 1962. See Editorial Committee, Shanghai Gongyun Zhi (Shanghai Labor Movement Gazetteer), p. 366.

[354] Here I use fifty as the age threshold for any worker to claim that he or she was physically unfit for work in 1960s Shanghai. In practice, of course, workers would adjust their retirement age for their family needs, since the legal age of 60 was not strictly enforced before the 1980s. Among all the applications reviewed by the First Commercial Bureau, most workers applied for replacement before 60 on grounds of their physical conditions to secure a place for their sons or daughters. However, there were a case when an old worker chose to work beyond retirement and died on duty at 70 so he could earn enough to feed his grandchildren, since his eldest son was sent to a labor reform camp and his daughter-in-law was unemployed.

[355] My survey over all such application files under the First Commercial Bureau finds that these conditions seldom became a problem for working class children to replace their parents until the 1965. All applicants filed "economic difficulties" and the work units never questioned their authenticity. Most children filled in their age between 14 and 20. The application package typically included all these

Though the government made the capitalist families eligible for replacement, the system was undoubtedly biased towards workers for obvious political concerns. Some application cases show that the policy did not apply to former capitalists, since "household economic difficulties", the reason that most workers cite as the ground for replacement, were often insufficient to justify replacement. For example, in 1965, when Chen Renda, a shop attendant of capitalist family background, died of brain infection, the bureaucracy rejected the family's requests to replace Chen with his fifteen-year-old son and provide relief to his ten-year-old daughter. The Chen family was in serious financial difficulty. Although Chen's widow, a high school teacher of bourgeois background, earned 74 yuan per month, she had a chronic mental illness that developed into mild schizophrenia after her husband's sudden death. Furthermore, since Chen Renda earned 112 yuan per month and received an unspecified amount of redemptive interests, the family used to pay 20 yuan rent for a secluded flat for his mentally ill wife. The loss of the lion's share of the family income dealt a deadly blow to the household economy.[356]

Chen Renda family tragedy evidently arose the sympathy of neighbors and co-workers, but their class status was a hurdle for the family's replacement. Although Worker's Union interceded on behalf of the family by laying out the unique circumstances, the Shanghai Textile Bureau still rejected the request by citing the son's young age and the family's financial situation as "insufficiently difficult." Given the zero rejection rate among underage sons and daughters from

reports but review was perfunctory. From 1965 to 1968, the application process became incrementally more difficult until the review for replacement hire stopped for good.

[356] "Shanghai diyi shangyeju Guanyu zhigong yin siwang tuixiu zinu dingti de laiwang xinjian" (Collected Application Letters Regarding the Job Replacement of Deceased or Retired Workers under the First Bureau of Commerce by Their Children) SMA B123-8-15, p. 169.

workers' families,[357] the rejection of Chen family's plea stands out as an exceptional case. The real reason for concern was likely political rather than economic, since the ideological imperatives of "revolutionary austerity" assumed the socialist transformations of the former capitalists. The "special consideration" for the offspring of a capitalist family with a per-capita income of 24 yuan was thus insufficient to warrant an otherwise fair consideration. [358] Like any other policies under the revolutionary austerity, the class background of the family was an important factor when the government decided on the distribution of benefits and life chances to urban residents.

The replacement system continued to function until the early years of the Cultural Revolution, but the rate of success fell significantly, even for poor working-class families. In 1965, the First Commercial Bureau approved 33 out of 35 or 94% of all applications. The two rejections involved two exceptional cases when the applicant's children were registered as rural residents. In 1966, as the administrative work almost stalled due to the disruption of the Cultural Revolution, there were only six applications and five approvals.

Among these six applications, there were two cases of death related to the Cultural Revolution. In one case, a manager and former capitalist died of a heart attack during the early months of the Cultural Revolution in June 1966, most likely due to the violent stories he heard about fellow former capitalists. In another case, a middle-age shop assistant of a clothing shop hung himself in July 1967 after a struggle session by the Red Guards.[359] The Bureau approved

[357] My survey of 35 applicants in the file B123-8-15 finds that the First Bureau of Commerce only rejected two applications, including the Chen family's. In the other six cases where the applicants were below the legal employment age of 16.

[358] Collected Application Letters, SMA B123-8-15, p. 169.

[359] Ibid, p. 157.

both applications, citing the extraordinary circumstances and dire poverty befalling the two families after the death of the breadwinner[360].

The revolution did have some impact on the review process as the bureaucracy tightened its grip on the application procedure. Compared with the 35 application files in 1965, the 60 application files in 1966-1967 usually contained a complete set of reports from the hospitals, schools, and especially the neighborhood, indicating mounting pressure from the top to scrutinize the applicants for their political attitudes.[361] The criteria for consideration also extended from the household economy to the moral and political conduct of the applicants. Due to tightened scrutiny, only 50-60% of applications secured the final approval in 1967.[362]

While the approval process was gender-neutral, gender clearly entered the decision making of the families. The most typical form of family replacement strategies in the Shanghai First Commercial Bureau replacement files was father-to-daughter rather than father-in-son replacement. Among the 95 cases on record, 51 cases were father-to-daughter replacements. In comparison, there were only 31 cases of father-son replacement. Several cases indicate that the preference for daughter was probably a calculated response to the inherent gender bias of the austerity policies. As discussed, the enterprises under austerity were more likely to hire and retain male workers. A few examples could possibly illustrate this concern. In April 1965, the Shi family had a daughter and a son who were both high school students eligible to replace their deceased father. The family chose the daughter, who was two years younger and still in junior high school,

[360] Ibid, p. 161.

[361] All applications filed after August 1966 contain some form of political evaluations from the school or the neighborhood, See Collected Application Letters, SMA B 123-8-15, pp. 141-299.

[362] They were calculated based on all cases of the First Bureau of Commerce filed in 1967.

over their age-wise more eligible son.[363] In November 1966, the Chen family had a daughter and two sons in high schools. The family decided to let the twenty-year-old eldest daughter instead of the eighteen-year-old eldest son take the quota, even though the job involved manual labor in a storehouse.[364] In April 1967, the Lu family had a son and a daughter who were both eligible when the father died. The son was two years older than the daughter. The family decided to let the daughter get the job. It seems that the son, who was already in a commerce school, could more suitably take up the shop assistant job, the family decided to give the chance to the daughter, a high school graduate awaiting state job assignment.[365] Across all these cases, the family concern for their daughter's future job security possibly played a role in their decision making. While working-class families did favor the job security of their daughters, they also left the chance of career development to the sons.

While the neighborhood review for work replacement was usually perfunctory, the grassroots bureaucracy could intercede decisively to protect working class children in the neighborhood. Yang Jinxiu, the daughter of Yang Deyuan, was among the last successful applicants in 1967, when the review process became stricter after the outbreak of the Cultural Revolution. The old Yang died of a heart attack in October 1966, when the Cultural Revolution just started, leaving behind Jinxiu, her stepmother, a younger brother, and two elder sisters. The elder sisters had moved to other parts of Shanghai, while the brother was still in school. Jinxiu's relationship with her stepmother had never been harmonious since her father's remarriage in 1965. After her father's death, their relationship deteriorated further as the stepmother plotted to throw her out of the home.

[363] Ibid, p. 104.

[364] Ibid, p. 108.

[365] Ibid, p. 291.

An unemployed high school graduate without a proper home, Jinxiu had no other ways to find a job save the work replacement option. When the work unit repeatedly turned down Jinxiu's demand, suggesting that Jinxiu could rely on her elder sisters and brother in Chongming, an island outside Shanghai's urban area, the neighborhood committee found an occasion to appeal:

> "Her two sisters were married to families in Chongming. Now her brother Mingfang also lived with her sisters. There were only Jinxiu and stepmother at home. Her stepmother spent the whole day outside and cared nothing about the family except the daily meals. She spread among the elderly and the children in the neighborhood the rumor that Jinxiu was a hooligan. The children in the neighborhood gazed at Jinxiu and shouted, "the hooligan comes, the hooligan comes home" once they spotted her in the alleys. This rumor makes the little girl unable to live at her home. From 1964, the state has already implemented the policy of family-based job succession (父死子承). From December 23 onwards, Jinxiu has called upon your work units many times without making any progress in her application. Chairman Mao taught us: 'Our responsibility is to account for the people. Every action and word needs to serve the interests of the people. If we make a mistake, we must correct ourselves immediately. This policy is what "account for the people" means. Regarding the unemployment issue of Yang Jinxiu, our opinion as neighbors is as follows: since old Yang has died, as the persons-in-charge of the work unit revolutionary committee members, you need to solve the problem for his daughter."[366]

The Yang family's application case provides a rare glimpse into the potential mediating role of the neighborhood between family livelihood and state ideology. Thanks to the timely, forceful intervention from the neighborhood community, Jinxiu was granted a job as an intern in her father's work unit. The result was quite remarkable since the approval rates had fallen from over 90% to below 60% in early 1967, and her family's financial status was not worse than others.[367] The neighborhood found it necessary to clarify that Jinxiu's moral conduct as worthy of the proletariat

[366] Ibid, p. 256.

[367] The First Commercial Bureau approved 15 of 25 applications received between April and November 1967. The Yang family was not in dire poverty if the salaries of their elder brother and sister could support Jinxiu. But the neighborhood's information on their separate household finance in Chongming supported Jinxiu's urgent need for employment.

class, likely because they had watched the girl grow up. The invocation of the folk understanding of replacement as "family succession" reflected a moral interpretation of the state employment policy in the grassroots mindset. This "family succession" reasoning reduced the official policy of replacement to a deeply-rooted popular understanding of the state as upholding a widely-recognized social norm, which even the Cultural Revolution failed to challenge. The neighborhood committee also knew how to enlist the Maoist rhetoric for practical purposes.

The Yang family was among the fortunate when all pragmatic policies to aid urban livelihood was abolished as the Cultural Revolution moved on. As the Shanghai Revolutionary Committee asserted its control over the city as a successor to the toppled Shanghai Municipal Government, it became increasingly difficult for the neighborhood and grassroots bureaucracy to make a case for any work replacement. The replacement policy, an arrangement of the pragmatists to cope with the economic fallout of the austerity, naturally fell victim to the new order of strict adherence to Maoist principles. In the first half of 1968, only two of the five applications were successful. Beginning in August 1968, there were no longer any applications recorded in the Shanghai First Bureau of Commerce files.[368]

After a hiatus of several months, Mao ordered all eligible high school students who graduated after 1966 to receive "revolutionary education" in the countryside, kicking start the decade-long sent-down youths movement in December 1968. As urban families lost the last institutional channels to pass their livelihood and class status to the next generation, the Maoist state obtained a direct monopoly on livelihood and class status of the youths.

Epilogue: The Revolutionary Austerity and the Cultural Revolution

[368] The last appeal to the Shanghai First Bureau of Commerce for replacement was on August 17, 1968. The system likely disintegrated since September 1968.

The fragile alliance between pragmatic austerity and Maoist ideology began to fall apart in late 1965 when Mao decided to get rid of the pragmatists by rallying support from his loyal allies in the military and the propaganda system. After a few months of political struggles behind closed doors, the political tension between Mao and the pragmatists flared up into open confrontations. Yao Wenyuan fired the first salvo in the Shanghai-based *Wenhui Bao* criticizing *The Dismissal of Hai Rui*, which aroused widespread bureaucratic sympathy for Peng Dehuai, the leading critic of Mao's Great Leap in 1959. At first, Peng Zhen, Liu Shaoqi's right-hand-man in Beijing, held off the publication and circulation of the article. But soon the PLA Daily under Lin Biao circulated the article, following by all the major dailies and reluctantly, the Party's paper, *The People's Daily,* still under the control of the pragmatists, had to give in.[369]

After the first salvo, the Cultural Revolution quickly escalated into a full-scale political movement. In early 1966, the Beijing Party leadership bore the brunt of the attack from Mao's ideologues in Shanghai. In May 1966, Mao stepped up the attack by openly calling to arms against the "the capitalist headquarters" in Beijing by siding with student rebels. From August 1966, the Red Guards stormed the Party and state bureaucracies across the country.[370] By late 1967, the leading pragmatists in Beijing, including Liu Shaoqi, Deng Xiaoping, Peng Zhen, and Chen Yun, were either toppled or sidelined by the rebels. Liu Shaoqi, the standard-bearer of Chinese revisionism and the political weight behind the pragmatic policies, was overthrown in March 1967.[371]Cultural Revolution swept aside all the pragmatic policies of the 1960s for good. The

[369] Bu Weihua, *Zalan jiushijie wenhua dageming de dongluan yu haojie (1966-1968)* (Smashing the Old World: Havoc of the Chinese Cultural Revolution 1966-1968), Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2008, pp. 7-20.

[370] *Ibid*, pp. 204-223.

[371] Ibid, pp. 470-473.

universal sent-down policy in 1968-1970, the signature Maoist policy, perfectly combined ideological rigor and fiscal austerity.[372]

The revolutionary austerity of the 1960s also created the grassroots political condition for the Cultural Revolution. The different treatments of different working groups, such as the retaining of old workers and dismissal of newly recruited workers, contributed to sharp and growing "internal contradictions" in the 1960s. In 1963, there were already a lot of complaints from the sent-down workers. As their former co-workers who remained in the city benefited from the economic recovery, the rusticated workers complained about the injustice of the system. In May 1964, the Shanghai Office of Labor and Wages reported that such grievances among the sent-down workers has escalated into large-scale petition at the work units.[373]. During the Cultural Revolution, some rusticated workers in the suburbs joined hands with the low-paid temporary workers in urban Shanghai to launch an open rebellion in the name of continuous revolution. Accused by their rivals of "economism," the disadvantaged workers' cry for livelihood mounted a significant challenge to the Maoist orthodoxy in the early phase of the Cultural Revolution in Shanghai.[374]

The Cultural Revolution was indisputably the most extensive political mobilization after the Great Leap Forward. For most urban families, the long-lasting impacts of the Cultural Revolution were on their household economy rather than political life. As all productive activities yielded to

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[372] The redemptive interests and work replacement system were all gone by September 1968. Rural markets and family plots likewise suffered a crackdown. Revolutionary sacrifice, as exemplified by the Daqing oilfields and Dahari village, became the economic model for the country. But the collapse of the Party bureaucracy meant less state capacity to police the black market and the behavior of households. As such, the crackdown of the free market was never entirely successful in both rural and urban China.

[373] *Laodong gongzi qingkuang* (Newsletter of Labor and Wage Conditions), No. 15, May 15, 1964, A11-2-92, p.91.

[374] Wu Yiching, *The Cultural Revolution from the Margins*, Cambridge, M.A: Harvard University Press, pp. 101-104

political mobilizations, economic stagnation again became the norm as unemployment rose and wages stagnated. Equally importantly, it marked the severing of state-family synergy. By 1968, as both the replacement system and the redemptive interests ceased to function, all forms of institutional continuity in early Communist family-state relations had disappeared. In the aftermath, the state extended unprecedented control over the material and spiritual life of the youths regardless of their class and gender.

The pragmatic revolutionary austerity of the 1960s ended in a decisive Maoist victory in 1968. In retrospect, however, the triumph of Maoist ideals sowed the seeds for their decline in the 1970s. While Mao succeeded in getting rid of all the pragmatists in the name of anti-revisionism, he could not do away with revolutionary austerity. Indeed, the 1970s merely moved the austerity to an "idealist" stage, after the national economy suffered destruction in the early days of the Cultural Revolution. Whereas the pragmatic austerity sought in vain to balance ideology and family economy, the idealist austerity forced the family economy to conform to ideology at all costs. This critical reversal unwittingly put all components of family life into an unmitigated confrontation with official ideology and the state bureaucracy in the 1970s, as the economic and emotional sacrifice of the sent-down policy put the commitment of all urban families to the litmus test of prolonged family sacrifice. Will the Maoist ideology triumph again in the 1970s over the economic rationale and popular values? As I shall discuss in Chapter Three, the ordeal proved to be too much for urban families of all classes, especially after China's domestic politics and geopolitics experienced an architectonic shift.

Chapter Three

Unsustainable Sacrifice: The Economic and Emotional Costs of Family Separation during the Sent-down Decade, 1969-1979

"We have not told you all our difficulties. This time I will tell you the full story, so you can settle your mind on receiving your education from the peasants without ever thinking about coming back. We hope our Tiemei[375] will be motivated to work harder after hearing about the family's revolutionary struggles. The trousers, worn successively by your mom, your younger sisters Xiuling and Xiudi, had forty-one holes. But Xiudi still needs to wear it for years to help us cope with financial difficulties. She and your younger brother had to sleep on the floor every night since we had sold our old wooden bed to pay off our debts for you to go to Jilin. The frame of the wooden bed was broken by your mischief when you were a child. You promised to pay it back then. But where is the money now? I have to wear the old cotton coat that I had worn for twelve years to brace the winter chill. I will at least have to wear it for another three to five years. To pay off the debts, our whole family needs to muster the revolutionary spirits ----'First, fear not a fatigue. Second, fear not the sacrifice' [376]----to overcome all these financial difficulties. This Spring

[375] Li Tiemei (the given name literally means "iron plum") is the heroine of the Story of Red Lantern, a revolutionary Beijing Opera piece and one of the eight "Model Plays" in the Cultural Revolution. The daughter of a working couple who died in a strike, Tiemei was adopted by Li Yu and Grandma Li, who worked as underground agent and cover for the Communist Party. As the story goes, Grandma Li energized her revolutionary zeal in a stormy night by telling her the story of her parents, the adopted father, and the family's revolutionary struggles. After both Li Yu and Grand Li died for the revolution, Tiemei became the symbol of hope for the revolution. Li Tiemei became a household name in the 1970s, since the story was played *ad nauseam* in theatres, radio and everyday life.

[376] This quote is taken from *Mao's Little Red book*. The official English translation is "Give fully play to our style of fighting—courage in battle, no fear of sacrifice, no fear of fatigue, and continuous fighting". Originated as Mao's exhortation to the People's Liberation Army, the slogan has taken life of its own in the propaganda and daily language in 1960s and 1970s China, especially in the context of revolutionary austerity. For the original translation, see Mao Zedong, *Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-tung*, Beijing: China Books & Periodicals, 1972, p. 96.

Festival, our family only bought 500 grams of pork and a small fish as the New Year's meal. That is our way to welcome the year of 1971."[377]

A few days after the Chinese New Year of 1971, Hua Zhongmin revealed to his eldest daughter the desperate state of their household economy in Shanghai. At the time of the letter, his eldest daughter Hua Xiuzhen was a sent-down youth wintering in a hamlet in a makeshift farmhouse along the Sino-Korean border, where she had worked as a "new peasant" since March 1969.[378] Rather than a typical New Year greeting, the letter reads like a mixture of revolutionary slogans and a bitter retelling of the economic suffering of the family. The parent even regretted sending a Dacron shirt as a gift to his daughter in December 1970, on the eve of her twentieth birthday, since "this act failed to place politics ahead of economics by fostering your revisionist habit." According to the political language of the day, "revisionism" was associated with the rightist opportunism of Liu Shaoqi, who preferred material incentives to revolutionary sacrifice as motors of economic development. In contrast, Mao's strategy was "to turn the spiritual into the material and vice versa, so that revolution and production." In the last lines, he callously cautioned Xiuzhen with the following harsh lines: "Work hard. If you starve because of idleness, you deserve that fate".[379]

The Hua family's livelihood had declined steadily since they began to prepare for Xiuzhen's departure to Jilin in April 1969. By 1971, they owed 470 yuan to various friends, relatives, and

[377] Hua Zhongmin to Hua Xiuzhen, February 9, 1971, in the Hua Family Letters Collection, The Center for Data and Research in Contemporary Social Life (CDRCSL).

[378] Xiuzhen was thus an early participant in the the Sent-down Youths Movement (1965-1980). Initially intended as a voluntary project for the unemployed urban youths in China's coastal regions to work on frontier military farms, the movement developed into a compulsory requirement for all urban high school graduates since December 1968. Before it was officially ended by the government in 1980, the movement eventually involved 1.27 million Shanghai high school graduates and their families.

[379] Hua Zhongmin to Hua Xiuzhen, February 9, 1971.

companies. Most of the debts were to pay for the separation of their two daughters from the family in Shanghai: Xiuzhen's travel costs to Jilin and her first home visit, the preparations for their second daughter Xiudi's departure to Jiangxi, and the gifts to other sent-down families. The parents had a nervous breakdown on the eve of the Spring Festival 1971, when they received Xiuzhen's letter from Jilin, urgently requesting her parents buy her a set of winter coats and vegetables unavailable in the frigid winter season.[380] The purchase of clothes will further strain the heavily indebted family economy. But how could they leave their eldest daughter without proper winter clothes in the frigid Jilin countryside a thousand miles away from home? The Huas held a family meeting. They read the "self-reliance and arduous struggle" section of Chairman Mao's Little Red Book together. They decided to prioritize Xiuzhen's pressing need over the family's repayment of debts[381]. This harshly toned letter must have been part of the deal. As the head of the household, Hua Zhongmin conveyed the urgency of the situation to his eldest daughter and demanded rigorous financial discipline in return: "You must work hard in the countryside and contribute the family's debt repayment."[382] After the daughter left home for Jilin for two years, the father found she had developed a "revisionist" bend in prioritizing her material comforts over the family's financial interests.[383]

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[380] Ibid.

[381] The Hua family studied the following quote from Mao's *Little Red Book*: "On what basis should our policies rest? It should rest on our strength, and that means regeneration through one's efforts. We are not alone; all the countries and people in the world opposed to imperialism are our friends. Nevertheless, we stress regeneration through our efforts. Relying on the forces we organize, we can defeat all." Chinese and foreign reactionaries. It was from Mao's speech "The Situation and Our Policy After the Victory in the War of Resistance Against Japan" (August 13, 1945), excerpted from Mao's Selected Works, Vol. IV, p. 20.

[382] Hua Zhongmin to Hua Xiuzhen, February 9, 1971.

[383] Ibid.

The Hua family's financial problems were typical of the over a million Shanghai families with at least one sent-down children.[384] While the Hua family letters were replete with revolutionary optimism and Maoist vocabulary, their central concern was a crisis of their household economy in the context of a nationwide crisis[385]. The massive unemployment in urban China in the aftermath of the early phase Cultural Revolution had both its long-run and short-run causes. In the long-run, such unemployment was the natural consequence of the Maoist political economy and population control, which always prioritized maximum production over full employment. In the short-run, the violence of the Cultural Revolution had disrupted the routines of schools and factories, delaying the graduation of students and breaking down the already fragile balance between available jobs and graduates. By 1969, there was a backlog of 460,000 students waiting for work assignments in Shanghai alone. [386]

As discussed in Chapter Two, the work replacement system, which played a crucial role in the reproduction of social order in urban China in the early 1960s, ceased to operate in the second half of 1968. The sent-down years marked a significant departure from this model of state-sponsored reproduction: the factory revolutionary committees no longer guaranteed employment and social security of urban youths in the cities. The sent-down youths found a new means of

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[384] A survey on the staff of Department of the United Fronts suggests that each household had on average 1.4 sent-down children in August 1974. But this tends to be an underestimate, since the workers and cadres in the Department tended to be better educated and have smaller families than Shanghai's urban working population. See "Tongzhanbu zinu shangshan xiaxiang qingkuang diaocha" (Investigations into the Situations of the sent-down Children of the Department of United Fronts), Shanghai Municipal Archives (SMA) A33-4-141, pp. 1-2.

[385] Refer to Appendix B and C for a description of the austerity policies, the sluggish job supply, and stagnant wages in Shanghai during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976).

[386] Editorial Committee, *Shanghai Laodong Zhi* (Shanghai Labor Gazetteer), p. 142

survival in the countryside and the frontier military farms[387], while the urban families had to shoulder most of the costs. Such costs came in three forms: household economy, emotional ties, and reproduction. In the case of the Hua family, most of the debt was of the material and emotional nature: the home travel expense for Xiuzhen, the preparation for Xiudi's travel to Jiangxi, and the gifts to the sent-down youths in the neighborhood. But in additional debts, there was also the loss of potential income in urban factories and fall in the standard living suffered by sent-down youths like Xiuzhen, Xiudi, and the Hua family, proportionate to the "difficulties" of the location of rustication. In other words, ordinary families like the Huas had to shoulder the economic costs of the Cultural Revolution and the fiscal imperatives of China's Cold War.

The universal sacrifice of urban families was justified by a mass ideological mobilization at a critical juncture when Maoist ideology reached its maximum levels of penetration into the everyday. As shown in the last chapter, urban Chinese youths and their families had internalized much of the Maoist rituals and rhetoric throughout the early 1960s. At the level of family life, even the everyday language of the household economy adopted the anti-revisionist discourse of the early 1960s. Such discourse gained momentum when China's clash with the Soviet Union, the Socialist Empire of Revisionism, reached a new height in 1968-1969. The ideological radicalism is evident in the letters by Hua and other families in the early 1970s. In Hua's letters to his daughters, he frequently referred to the Maoist revolutionary vocabulary and linked the political events to his family issues.[388] The power of the ideological mobilization lay in its ability to

[387] In the first years of the movement, sent-down youths either went to countryside or frontier military farms. Except for those who ended in the fertile military farms in Heilongjiang, most sent-down youths could barely make their end meets and their productivity in the rural area was too low.

[388] As we shall analyze later, in the letters from Hua Zhongmin to his two sent-down daughters in 1969-1971, he frequently used the vocabulary of anti-revisionism, cited the *Little Red Book*, and urged his daughters to bear the difficulty for the sake of revolution.

"translate" real-life situations into the Maoist visions for continuous revolutions. In Hua's family letters, for example, the pursuit of material comfort was equated with revisionism and the courage to tackle material hardship with upbeat revolutionary spirits.

The sent-down decade of the 1970s marked the climax of the Maoist experiment to mobilize the reproductive sources of urban families for the country's paramount goals of "revolution and production" (抓革命、促生产). On the conceptual level, the experiment aimed to strengthen class solidarity as the new base of socialism by mixing urban youths with the peasants. On the practical level, the movement sought to economize on resources and unleash the human resources to build socialism in the countryside. In terms of its impacts on family life, however, the most striking effect of the sent-down policy was not a continuous revolution in the rural area but the end of the revolution in urban China. In the beginning, the movement destroyed the old household economy by turning the children of urban families from potential wage-earners in urban factories to a new type of "revolutionized" peasants separated from their families. But as the movement progressed, the financial and emotional sacrifice it imposed on urban families proved too much for the families. By the end of the 1970s, the movement had ended the unintended effect of undermining the widespread support for a Communist future. This chapter will assess the material and emotional costs of the sent-down movement against the historical contexts of the Cold War and the Cultural Revolution. I will also examine urban family's reproductive planning in Maoist Shanghai in the 1970s as part and parcel of a significant shift in urban value and lifestyle during a period of ideological mobilization and family separation.

The Politics of Family Sacrifice

In the first two years of the Cultural Revolution, massive political upheavals and physical violence against the enemies of the people---pre-communist elites, intellectuals, cadres, and rebels in the

early phase of the revolution---destroyed countless families. The economic costs of the Cultural Revolution on urban families were no less consequential than the political violence. For urban working families, the toll on the families took the form of lost current and future income due to the disruption of the national economy and the employment system.

In Shanghai, the Cultural Revolution caused a sharp economic downturn. The total domestic product fell by 8.5%, from 37.2 to 34.1 billion yuan between 1966 and 1969. The most significant decline was in fixed capital formation, from 2.48 to 0.76 billion yuan, as new industrial projects all but stalled. Labor productivity declined from 2,703 to 2,339 yuan per-capita, most likely due to the disruptions of the political struggles in Shanghai factories. While unit labor productivity recovered after 1967, per-capita wage briefly increased from 710 to 736 from 1966 to 1967 and then entered a decade-long period of decline until it reached 623 in 1977.[389] These trends indicated an economic recession on a smaller scale than the post-Great Leap Forward recession.

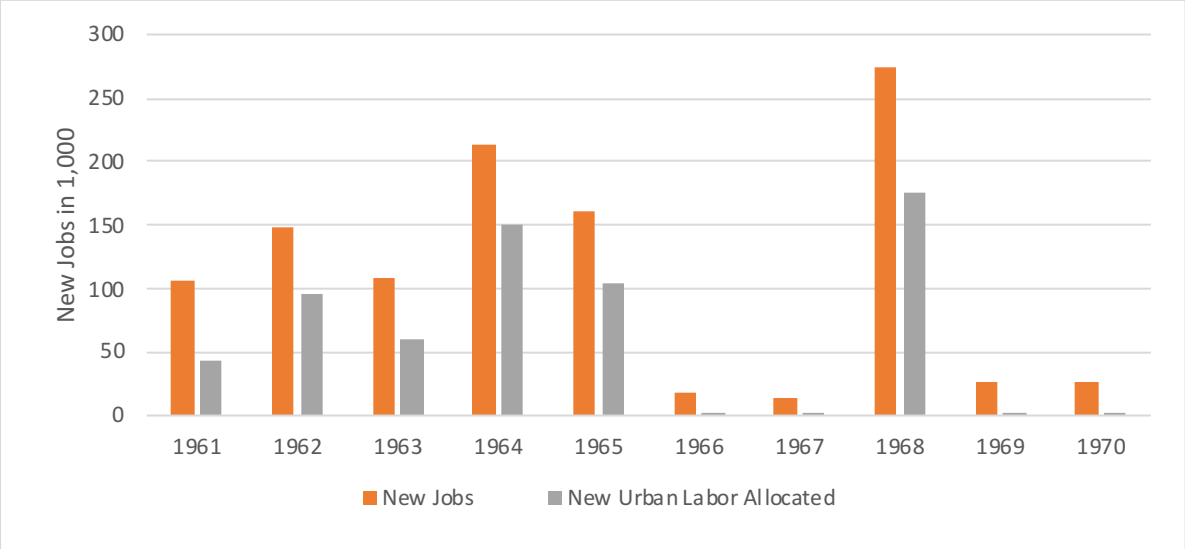
The labor allocation system also suffered irreparable damage during the Cultural Revolution. As an immediate consequence of the investment slump, newly available jobs fell precipitously. In the early 1960s, the Shanghai economy added, on average, 150,000 jobs and absorbed on around 40,000-150,000 urban labor force per year. But in 1966-1970, except for 1968, the newly available jobs have declined to 14,000- 26,500 between 1966 and 1970.[390] In a regular market or socialist economy, similar levels of labor surplus could have induced a Keynesian-style state intervention. But the average wage labors in the Chinese urban economy in the 1960s were already near subsistence levels and barely covered the costs of household subsistence. The only option left was

[389] Shanghai Bureau of Statistics, *Shanghai Guomin jingji he shehui fazhan lishi tongji ziliao* (Statistical Materials on the National Economic and Social Development in Shanghai). Beijing: China Statistical Press, 2015, pp. 55-60.

[390] Ibid, p.48

a temporary freeze on hiring, thus shifting the burden of livelihood from the state welfare to the families of the unemployed urban youths, typically the formerly Red Guards, who followed Mao's call to spearhead the anti-establishment rebellions in 1966 and 1967.

Figure 3-1 New Jobs in Shanghai, 1961-1970



Sources: Shanghai guomin jingji yu shehui fazhan lishi ziliao

The economic calculus of the sent-down policy served the interests of the socialist state mired in financial problems since the Great Leap Forward. The state could pay a lump-sum cost to send millions of youths in exchange for wage payments for an indefinite number of years in the future. In Shanghai, the subsidy for each sent-down youth in 1970 was 400 per person, plus the allowance

for clothing and travel expenses.[391] In 1973, the government raised the basic subsidy to 480 per person for the destinations in the South, 500 per person for the North, and 550 per person for Xinjiang.[392] As the Hua family's evidence suggests, this subsidy only accounted for part of the costs of resettlement. The families themselves would have to make up for the shortfall. In the Hua family case, the full resettlement cost for the eldest daughter to Jilin was around 800 yuan, equally shared between the state and the family, amounted to the typical wage of a senior worker in Shanghainese factories.[393] From 1966 to 1972, the annual expenditure for sent-down movements was between 4.6 and 7.2 million yuan.[394] If each sent-down youth mobilized between 1969 and 1971 stayed in the countryside for five years rather than earning an entry wage as a worker in the state-run manufacturing and service sector, this would have saved a total wage receipt of 200 million yuan. [395] However, as we shall discuss later in this chapter, the state calculus missed two important factors. First, the state subsidy was far from sufficient to cover cost of sent-down and the invisible costs of family separation so the urban families had to make up for the rest. Second, most sent-down youths were hardly self-sufficient in the countryside and continued to rely on their families several years into the movement.

Figure 3-2: The Share of Total Wage (Household Sector) in the Shanghai Economy, 1957-1979

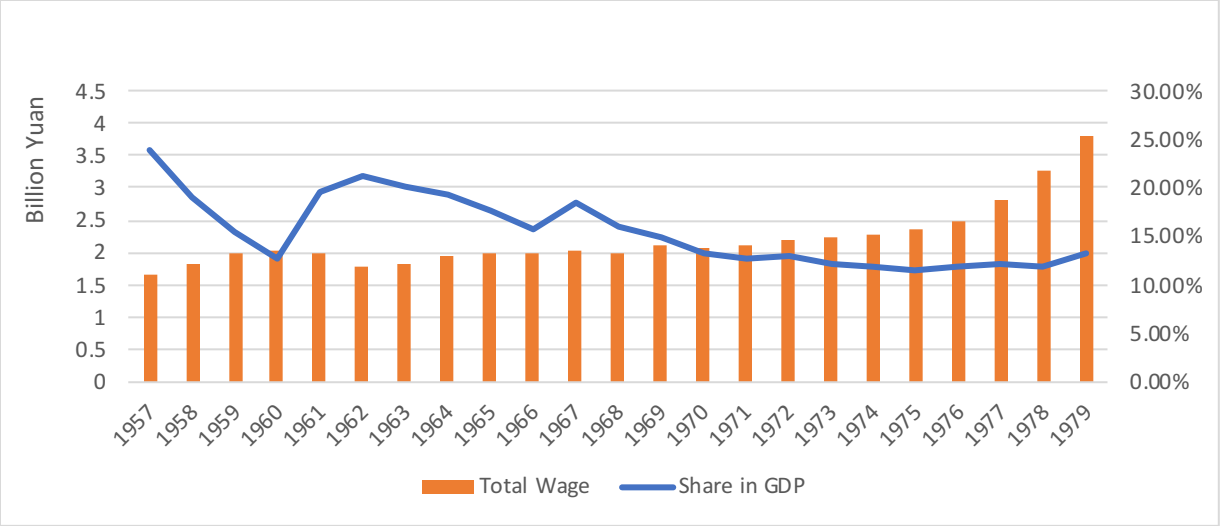
[391] For example, a similar crisis in the Soviet Union would have been solved by overmanning, a state policy of forced full employment between War World II and the late 1970s. See: J.L. Pocket, *Work, Employment, and Unemployment in the Soviet Union*, London: Palgrave MacMillan, 1989, pp. 36-39.

[392] Wu Xun, *Zhongguo Zhiqing zong jishi* (General Veritable Record of Chinese Sent-down Youths), Beijing: Wuzi chubanshe, 1998, p.110.

[393] According to the *Lishi Tongji ziliao,* the average wage rate was 72 yuan for workers in Shanghai.

[394] Editorial Committee, *Shanghai caizheng shuiwu zhi*, 1995, p.230

[395] The calculation is based on a fixed entry wage rate of 40 yuan per month.



Source: *Shanghai Lishi tongji ziliao huibian, 1949-2009*

In the political economy of state socialism, the sent-down policy amounted to shifting the financial burden from the state budget to the youths and their families. It helped to keep the share of the household sector, measured in the total wages in the gross domestic product, at an extraordinarily low level of 10-13% for a decade by denying works to a generation of youths and keeping inflation-adjusted urban wage at almost stationary, subsistence level (see figure 3.2). Should the youths refused to resettle in the countryside despite the mobilization drive, the financially depressed urban household sector could not indefinitely feed these grown-up high school graduates. For one thing, such inter-generation dependence was economically infeasible, given the subsistence wage rates of the parents.

At the political level, the mobilization of the sent-down movement was also a strategy to remobilize the students in urban schools, when the youthful revolution spirits gave way to indiscipline and even delinquency after the heat of the early Cultural Revolution. In January 1969, Ma Xingdi, a teacher at a high school, noticed a dangerous wave of "liberalism" and "anarchism" in his school after it reopened in late 1968. Among the students, there were those who disregarded Workers Propaganda Teams and flaunted their authority by staying away from struggle sessions

and brawling with team members. Some showed signs of discontent and apathy. The most dangerous of all, in Ma's view, were pockets of students who indulged themselves in the "bourgeois" lifestyle, strolling around the city, wearing bourgeois-style cloths, and engaging in illicit sexual relations.[396] Such developments stimulated a sense of crisis in Ma's mind and confirmed the rationale of the sent-down policy as a "continuous revolution" in the countryside.

While the unique economic and political conditions of the early Cultural Revolution gave the military government the necessary ground for sent-down policy, the massive mobilization of seven million youths over three years would not have moved on so fast without a historical opportunity that created an imperative for military-style mobilization in urban China. In the case of Shanghai, where urban families were still relatively better off than other cities, the decision to send teenage boys and girls to military farms still required much stronger justification beyond everyday economic concerns. The national emergency in the aftermath of the Sino-Soviet confrontations in 1969 provided precisely such an impetus.

When Mao's plan for the Cultural Revolution was brewing in Beijing and Shanghai, the Sino-Soviet Split quietly escalated, and the specter of a total war with the Soviet Union entered the strategic calculations of the military planners in Beijing. In March 1966, the Party refused to send delegates to the 23rd Party Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), cutting off all official exchanges between the two largest Communist countries of the world.[397] Two months ago, Brezhnev made a state visit to Mongolia and signed the Soviet-Mongolia Pact,

[396] Ma Xingdi Sixiang biji (Ma Xingdi's Thought Essays), Jan. 1969 to June 1969, CDRCSL, B15003A, p.8.

[397] Shen Zhihua, Yafeng Xia (trans), *A Short History of Sino-Soviet Relations*, London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2016, p.309

paving the way for a Soviet military build-up on the Sino-Mongolian frontier.[398] On February 4, 1967, the Soviet leadership decided to station more motorized units in Mongolia to prepared a war with China[399]. According to the Chinese military intelligence in the 1970s, the Soviet Red Army stationed at least 54 divisions and 1.2 million soldiers east of the Urals. Among these were the crack motorized divisions stationed along the Mongolian frontier. At 560 km from the Sino-Mongolian border, Beijing was well within the operating range of the planned first-strike of the Soviet tanks. [400]

After a brief period of economic recovery in the early 1960s, the Cultural Revolution left China's urban centers exhausted with violent struggles and physical destruction. Amid all the domestic woes, the Sino-Soviet confrontation flared up again after the Soviet military suppression of the Prague Spring in August 1968. The Soviet brutal intervention into a brotherly socialist state evoked in Mao and his strategists a gruesome prospect of a total war with the world's leading military power. In the wake of Prague, the Chinese leadership stepped up war preparations on the border and ideological mobilization across the country.[401] From March 2 to 17, 1969, the Sino-Soviet hostilities on China's northeast-Siberia frontier escalated into a series of skirmished known as Zhenbao Island incident, leaving hundreds killed and wounded, with neither side gaining any

[398] Sharad Kumar Soni, *Mongolia-Russia Relations: Kiakhta to Vladivostok*, Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2002, p.143

[399] Sergei Radchenko, "New Documents on Mongolia and the Cold War," *Cold War International Project Bulletin No. 16*, p. 346.

[400] Wang Zhongchun, "Zhongmei zhengchanghua Jincheng Zhong de sulian yinsu, 1969-1979" (The Soviet Element in the Normalization of Sino-American Ties), *Dang de wenxian* (Party Literature), 2002, No.4, pp. 51-52

[401] Sun Qimin, *Zhongsu guanxi Shimo* (A Chronicle of Sino-Soviet Relations), Shanghai: Shanghai Renmin chubanshe, 1998, p. 596

significant advantage. The Soviet response was a flurry of diplomatic announcement and military deployment. They signaled to the Chinese a calculated, if not immediate, multi-pronged plan of attack. In response, the Party and the PLA stepped up ideological and military preparations. On the political report to the 9th Party Congress of the CCP on April 1, 1969, Mao's heir apparent, Lin Biao, delivered a fiery speech. He announced to the world that "China will return tooth with the tooth, the eye with the eye" should either the Soviet revisionist or the American imperialists started a war with China.[402]

In the context of immediate wars in late 1968 and early 1969, the high tide of sent-down mobilizations became parts of Mao's vigorous economic planning for a Soviet-style Blitzkrieg spearheaded by tank divisions and air strikes—the "deep operation"[403]. According to Mao's defense strategy, China would evacuate big cities like Beijing and Shanghai and wage a "People's War" with the Soviet army by moving its industrial centers, food production, and vital human resources to the "rear" of the critical operational theatres. Following such a strategy of national defense, Mao launched the "Third Front" strategy to anticipate American airstrikes and then a Soviet blitzkrieg, moving considerable industrial facilities and workers from coastal to new industrial complexes in China's western regions. In provinces along the Sino-Soviet border, sent-down policy was part and parcel of the military preparations. On January 1, 1970, the Heilongjiang Provincial Revolution Committee ordered the urgent mobilization of the "educated youths" to countryside along with other six types of strategic populations (cadres, school teachers, industrial

[402] Lin Biao's Speech at the 9th Party Congress, See English translation: https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/lin-biao/1969/04/01.htm

[403] For a discussion of the operational aspects of the "deep operation" strategy, see Colonel David M. Glantz, *In Pursuit of Deep Battle: Soviet Military Operation Art*, London: Francis & Taylors, 2012, pp. 81-85

workers, housewives, retirees, and political criminals) who must resettle in the countryside in anticipation of a total war.[404] Another emergency measure entailed the creation of military farms under the PLA's "Production and Construction Corps" systems in China's frontier regions. From 1968 to 1971, the PLA built twelve such provincial-level Production and Construction Corps across the country's northern, western, and southern frontiers. The mobilization of high school graduates in Shanghai and other cities to the military farms served to fulfill this strategy. [405]

The mobilization process took at least one and a half years between Mao's instruction on December 22, 1968 and June of 1970. For many revolutionary youths, the movement was simply a voluntarist act to show their commitment. On October 23, 1968, the school released the work allocation plan for Zhou Meile's class. It immediately arose intense discussion among the students who were still engaging in revolutionary activities. According to the Bureau of Education's allocation plan, most of students would be sent to the countryside and military farms in Heilongjiang, Jilin, Xinjiang, Jiangxi, Yunnan and Inner Mongolian. For revolutionary zealots like Meile, rustication was the moment of truth, when everyone's faith to the revolutionary cause was put to a harsh test. Some of her classmates resisted the plan, while others even asked their parents to negotiate with the school. Even Meile, a zealot, had some reservations at the beginning. She repeated ask herself in the diary: "Can I feed myself in the countryside?" She made it a priority to choose places with "a strong political atmosphere".[406]

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[404] Heilongjiang Provincial Revolution Committee, "Guanyu zuohao Chengshi Renkou shusan de tongshi" (Notice on the Work on the Evacuation of Urban Populations), Ha'erbin Municipal Archives, XD 012-012-0319-02.

[405] Wu Xun, *Zhongguo Zhiqing zong jishi* (General Veritable Record of Chinese Sent-down Youths), Beijing: Wuzi chubanshe, 1998, p.527

[406] Zhou Meile Diary, October 23, 1968, CDRCSL, B14016B, p. 65.

Although most youths required some form of mobilization to leave their homes, their parents were more easily persuaded by the moral reasoning of debt repayment to Chairman Mao. As a high school teacher and a revolutionary activist, Ma Xingdi preoccupied himself with mobilizing students during most of 1969. He spent most of the time organizing study sessions, visiting homes of the students, and arranging for the finance of the resettlement. The ideological weapon he found useful was the logic of reciprocity and the invocation of the bitter experience of older workers who were parents of his students. Madame Xu, the mother of a student, recounts her painful experience of being sold three times as bondservants. Mao's communist liberation was a transformative experience that the benefactors must repay with absolute obedience and sacrifice.

The logic of debt repayment worked well with most urban workers, who felt obliged to fulfil their repayment for the good life that the Communist Party and especially Chairman Mao had provided for the workers in the 1950s. Mr. Dong, the father of Dong Longyu, told his story as a young refugee from the hunger-stricken countryside in North Jiangsu who survived in Shanghai by pulling rickshaws, selling cigarettes, and sleeping on the streets. Since he considers that his family owes a stable life and his children's education to Mao and the Communist Revolution since 1949, he declares a steadfast commitment to Mao's sent-down decision. Ma found these families to be easy to mobilize, if he could make a breakthrough by motivating the sense of reciprocity of the parents.[407]

Not all parents were as motivated as Mr. Dong and Madame Xu. In Ma's diary, a significant minority of parents answered with scorn and contempt.[408] While the prevailing logic of reciprocity

[407] Ma Xingdi Sixiang Biji (Note of Thoughts), Jan 1969 to June 1969, p.51.

[408] Ibid, p. 68.

between the family and the nation was deeply ingrained, some workers still wanted to justify their resistance and doubt of the policy by evoking similarly compelling moral arguments of filial piety and practical concerns of real-life difficulties. In Ma's thought diary, he found two critical issues. First, some students find it hard to go to the countryside after their sacrifice of their parents for their studies. Second, some students need to take care of my aging and frail parents, or their younger siblings at home. For the first concern, the teacher would argue that they represented remnants of the "revisionist" thoughts of Liu Shaoqi, namely, the meritocratic values of bourgeois society. For the second concern, the teacher would say that it was wrong to put family interests ahead of national priorities, namely, anti-revisionism and a possible war with the Soviet Union.[409]

In April 1970, the Shanghai Revolutionary Committee stepped its effort to mop up the last resistance of unemployed school graduates still in the city. Eventually, even the most resistant elements in a working-class neighborhood could not resist the sent-down mobilization any longer. Hua Zhongmin's letter to Xiuzhen on June 5, 1970, described in detail such an instance in his community, involving coordinated "mop-up" operations of propaganda teams and grassroots cadres in every corner of the working neighborhood:

> "Our neighborhood's Mao Zedong Thought Propaganda Team, consisting of neighborhood factory workers, surrounded the homes of high school graduates from the classes of 1966, 1967, and 1968. On the night of June 3, the loud din of gongs and drums shook the ground of the No.4 neighborhood of the 4th Laoshan New Village. The 'class struggle meeting' for the parents lasted from noon until 10:30 pm. Some parents were still reluctant to let the children leave (for the countryside). On the early morning of the second day, the gongs and drums returned with vengeance in the same neighborhood. Under this fierce offensive, an intransigent worker's family on the tenth lane caved in and allowed their two children to be sent to Heilongjiang and Huaibei, but the most recalcitrant parents still held out for four days and four nights."[410]

[409] Ma Xingdi Sixiang biji, Jan. 1969 to June 1969, p. 26.
[410] Hua Zhongmin letter to Hua Xiuzhen, June 5, 1971.

At this stage, it would be hard for individual families to resist the send-down mobilization. A sense of shame at being backward elements and a holdout of a community was unbearable even for the most independent thinking youths and the most supportive families. Yu Yunhua, the head of the Zhaotong Neighborhood, for example, focused her mobilization effort on the poorest families in the neighborhood who resisted sending off their children. By invoking the compelling logic of reciprocity, the propagandists wanted to make a breakthrough with the poor families first, so other better-off families would feel ashamed to resist the movement on ground of economic difficulties. In March 1970, when the mobilization reached its first height in the Zhaotong Neighborhood, she and her colleagues worked around the clock to persuade each family still holding out against the mobilization. They focused their thought work on the parents, but more often they held meetings with the youths. Once the youths from these recalcitrant families volunteered, they would be named “activists” and asked to attend mobilization sessions for other resistant families.[411] Since the work teams and the cadres knew well the economic situations of each family, it would be futile for any family to conceal any information from the community and exaggerate their difficulties. When the mobilization was its height, the neighborhood teams would visit each family several times a week to persuade them to "volunteer[412]

The popular understanding of sacrifice as debt repayment was not the only motive of the send-down. Behind the forced family separation and all its costs, there was also a lingering hope among the working class in Shanghai that the movement was not all but a helpless repayment of debts through labor. They also understood it as a temporary phase in China's industrialization. As

[411] Yu Yunhua, Zhaotong Neighborhood Committee Work Journal 1969-1970, pp. 8-9

[412] Yu Yunhua, Zhaotong Neighborhood Committee Work Journal 1969-1970, p. 12

Hua Zhongmin confided to one of his best friends, he believed that China would eventually achieve both the objective of the Communist Revolution and the Industrial Revolution under Chairman Mao's leadership:

> "My daughter Xiuzhen had worked in Jilin for three years. Now she was taking a rest as there was no work in this season. Her physical condition was fine, but her mind was unsettled. I tried to persuade her to wait patiently, and she would certainly be transferred to the factories. Our country has 600 million peasants. What to do with so many poor people? We must industrialize first. Otherwise, our navy will fall behind (the imperialist powers) for another century. How to develop a prosperous country? We need to dig out underground natural sources, catch up with the West industrially, and become a mecca of world revolution. And we will certainly become an example for the world!" [413]

For many average workers, the send-down mobilization derives its meaning not just from repayment of debts but also a new utopian revision for the future. Even as urban China has experienced the Great Leap Forward failures, many urban residents still remembered the Great Leap days as a transformational experience of industrialization and harbored a hope that good life could be achieved after a brief period of send-down pain. Although they hardly understand the geopolitics and ideology of revolutionary austerity, they still found a way to bridge their family interests and the state propaganda. Contrary to their expectations of a quick return to prosperity, however, the austerity this mobilization imposed on the ordinary people eventually proved too much even for the most loyal supporters of the Maoist ideals of a Communist industrial utopia.

The Emotional Toll of Separation

The family is both an economic and an emotional unit. Family separation took an emotional toll on both the parents and children. The economic costs were sometimes relieved by the state, the work units, and relatives, but the emotional costs could only be borne out by the families themselves. For many Shanghainese families, family letters served as a medium for alleviating the

[413] Hua Zhongmin to Liu Changgeng couple, September 15, 1970.

emotional toll. As I have discussed in the introduction, the constant communication by family letters was emotional labor to overcome the distance for the members of families. Letters served two functions: the exchange of information and communications of emotions. Some families tended to stress the first functions, while others prefer the second.

An alternative to letters was a home visit. For Shanghai youths sent to the countryside between 1969 and 1972, only a small fraction could afford the option of regular home visits. The parents in a better-off financial condition can support multiple trips of their sent-down children, if their locations were not too far. The Wu family is a case in hand. The family had three daughters: one was sent down to Anhui; one studied in a vocational school in the suburb; one was attending a nursing school in the city. The father, an engineer and mid-rank cadre, worked not far from the tea plantation in Anhui where his daughter worked. The mother, also a former cadre, stayed at home on medical leave after she was released from investigation and manual labor in the early years of Cultural Revolution.

The monthly expenditure for the sent-down family could engulf a large share of their household budget, especially if there were regular home visits and packets sent to the countryside. In the Wu family's letters on June 16, there was a tally of monthly expenses for May to June 1975. During May and early June 1975, the eldest daughter, Wu Zhen, made a short home visit, and the second daughter did not return home. According to the record of Zhou Shimin, the mother of the family, she sent a packet of snacks to her eldest daughter Zhen via an acquaintance on May 9 and then via the post office on June 3. On May 13, she sent Yemeni 20-yuan worth of snacks, books, and beddings. On June 14, when Zhen made her way back to Anhui after a home visit, she packed her sack with 11 yuan’s snacks and books. If we include the travel cost from Anhui to Shanghai of 30 yuan, the Wu family’s monthly expenditure for two sent-down daughters’ home visit was

around 86 yuan, close to a low-rank cadre's monthly income. Such hefty expenditure was a considerable cost to family finance. Even though the Wu family likely earned more the average, the financial burden was perhaps only barely manageable. On the same scrap paper, Yu Limei noted a total monthly expenditure of 122 yuan and a debt payment 33 yuan to the work unit, which suggested that the economic costs of the home visits might have exceeded their monthly income.[414]

The Hua family, whose financial condition was much more precarious due to its larger size and a single breadwinner, naturally prioritized their financial security and resisted home visits. As a strategy to tackle the emotional pain, the family not only subscribed to the Maoist ideology also utilized the rituals and slogans to boost their morale in the struggle with material deprivation. Moreover, they also focused more on the facts rather than emotions in their letters. On March 14, 1969, Hua Zhongmin saw off his eldest daughter Xiuzhen at the Shanghai Railway Station. Upon arrival, Xiuzhen immediately sent a greeting letter back home. A member of his work unit's Worker Propaganda Team, Hua wrote his first reply letter to her daughter with revolutionary enthusiasm:

> "Our whole family was thrilled upon receiving your letter on the 24th. Since your letter arrived late, we were initially very worried. Your mom was sleepless for several days. Also, please write longer and more detailed letter next time. You can communicate your situations and practice your writing skills. This is to kill two bird with one stone. 'A family letter is worth ten thousand gold'. We all read your upbeat message about your revolutionary struggles in the countryside. Even Teacher Hong came to read it. She wanted to paste your letter on the school's billboard to further the mobilization of youths in our neighborhood. There is another batch going to Jilin on the 27th. Please answer the following questions….."[415]

The concerned father then listed twenty questions of various lengths, from the condition of the luggage to the weather, from the composition of daily meal to the housing arrangement, from

[414] Yu Limei's monthly expenditure records for May/June 1975, Wu Mingren family letter collections, CDRCSL, X201504D
[415] Hua Zhongmin to Hua Xiuzhen, March 24, 1969.

the availability of leather shoes to the condition of her utensils.[416] On April 6, the father wrote another follow-up letter, bombarding Xiuzhen with ten questions on everyday life from eating habits to labor conditions. In the letter, the father also proudly mentioned that the daughter's enthusiastic first family letter was now pasted on the billboard of the neighborhood committee.[417]

The Huas, due to their substantial indebtedness, often dissuaded their two daughters from the annual home visit, even during the New Year Festival. Hua Zhongmin also praised his daughters "revolutionary spirits" in relieving family finance by avoiding a home visit.[418] But this did not mean that the parents did not care about their children's well-being. When they could not see their daughters, they attached even more importance to the weekly letter exchanges between father and daughters.

An intellectual family, the Zhus recorded a more emotional moment of separation in their letters. The father, Zhu Chengyi, was a translator and editor affiliated with a leading publishing house in Shanghai. Like most "bourgeois" intellectuals, he was dismissed from office and sent to labor in the May 7 Cadres' School, a *de facto* labor reform camp for the cadres, in his hometown in Qingpu, 20 km from Shanghai. Compared with the Huas, the Zhus were better educated and more delicate in the expression of intimate feelings. Either due to fear of further persecution or the family's political culture, the Zhus were reticent on political matters. For the Zhus, the sent-down movement was a bitter pill they must swallow. Their intellectual background made the father susceptible to "bourgeois influence" and vulnerable to political persecution. Besides, the two eldest

[416] Ibid.

[417] Hua Zhongmin to Hua Xiuzhen, April 6, 1969.

[418] Hua Zhongmin to Hua Xiuzhen, March 7, 1971.

children had already allocated works in Shanghai. The only option left for the youngest son was to join the sent-down movement.

Zhu Weiguo left Shanghai by train on August 2, 1970. From the hour of his departure on August 16, his parents had been worried about his life in the countryside. They sent at least four letters, dated respectively, on 8, 11, 13, and 14 August, even before they received anything from their beloved son. In the first letter, the father wrote: "We haven't received your letter yet. When you left, your stomach was unwell. We are extremely worried. So, we are sending you this letter before hearing from you. The moment your train left the platform, your mom began to cry loudly. I am also sad. But I comfort myself by thinking that you can now train yourself in hardship and that you would only develop bad habits, if you stay too long at home. I felt better in this way. But I am still concerned about your travel and life in the countryside." The father went on for another three pages, asking about every detail about his life in rural Anhui, from his living quarters, labor schedule, neighbors, daily meal, bathing, to the condition of his stomach." [419]

On September 10, 1970, Zhu Weigum's mother attached a brief note to the weekly father-son letter exchange. Written in an ungrammatical and awkward style, her simple style and missing characters carried no less emotional weight that her husband's:

> "My son! You departed just a month ago. But in month, mum missed you on every single day. We don't give much care to you when you are home, but it is still better when you are my side. Now you must be doing manual labor every day and sweat a lot. Without (bathing) your body must be very (dirty). My boy, your physical (condition) is not good but you have to work three (missing characters). If you are not eating meals regularly, your body will be bad. (Since) You have been there for a month, not a year; you should work slowly. Don't compete with the peasants. Their physical constitution is stronger than yours. If you want to learn, learn slowly. Pay attention to food and nutrition. You said in letter that you are too busy to cook. But do you drink hot water at work? Don't drink cold water. It will be too horrible to imagine if you get the blood-flukes." [420]

[419] Zhu Chengyi to Zhu Jianguo, August 8, 1970, The Zhu Chengyi family collection, CDRCSL, X201409E

[420] Mother to Zhu Jianguo, September 10, 1970.

All family letters in the early years of the sent-down decade expressed acute concerns with their children's safety. The hazards of water, fire, disease, and even everyday labor conditions could become life-threatening. In a tea plantation in Huangshan, eleven Shanghainese sent-down youths between 19 and 22 years old perished in a flood when they were holding their hands on a march to save public property. They were awarded martyrs of the revolution and received various accolades from the authority.[421] However, what could the loss mean to the parents and relatives beyond the posthumous fame?

Sometimes, a death-threatening emergency can arise from negligence. An interviewee tells me a memorable event in the rural area of Tonghua, Jilin in 1970:

> "I once served as a representative of sent-down youths on an investigation board to study the livelihood of the sent-down youths in Jilin. One day, when we visited a house of the youths, we were invited to dine with them. A young man from Shanghai was responsible for chopping the firewood. Still clumsy in his work, he accidentally hit a main artery with the blade of the ax. Blood spilled upward like a fountain. It so happened that one of our team members was an experienced doctor and a headmaster from Jilin Medical School, so he immediately came to aid, stopped the bleeding, and bound his leg. We spent the next one and a half hours moving him to the township clinic. He was really lucky. He would surely have died of bleeding if we weren't there."[422]

These accidents in faraway rural areas were both life-threatening and financially ruinous. In August 1974, a cadre named Jiang Heng working in the United Front Department reported his daughter's experience in Heilongjiang and requested an urgent subsidy. In May 1974, a fire broke out in the bush near the small wooden house where his daughter and her roommates stayed. Fortunately, her daughter quickly dashed out of the room and managed to carry a trunk with

[421] Zhu Huizheng and Jin Guangyao, *Zhiqing buluo, Huangshan jiaoxia 10000 ge shanghairen* (The Tribe of Zhiqing: the 10000 Shanghainese on the foot of Huangshan Mountain), Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2004, pp. 216-220.
[422] Interview with a former sent-down youth, October 28, 2019.

underwear and simple clothes. All the winter clothes and the beddings burnt to ashes. The Jiang family, with a per-capita income of 14 yuan, immediately fell into insolvency. The Department later approved a temporary monthly subsidy of 30 yuan.[423]

The examples of serious accidents and sudden death befalling the sent-down youths were innumerable. These stories must have heightened the anxiety of parents and siblings at home. The constant fears of dangers were part of the everyday life of Shanghai parents during their separation from the children. These emotional pains and worries were the first immediate costs of family separation. But the emotional toll was far from the only type of costs. For many families, the sent-down policy also entailed a substantial financial loss and a hard constraint for the youths' marriage and childbirth decisions. In the mobilizing millions of youths for revolution, Mao unwittingly initiated a process that ultimately proved fatal for the revolutionary cause in urban China.

The Financial Burdens

In the moral economy of family life, the costs of the sent-down policy to the urban families fell into two categories: a one-time "fix" cost for the relocation and an annual "variable" cost for maintenance of everyday life in the countryside. The destinations determined the fixed cost: the more distant and difficult the geography, the higher the costs. The variable costs depended on the economic and emotional strategies of each family.

The Hua family's experience provided a vivid example of fixed costs incurred by families of sent-down youths whose destination was far and difficult. Even before the departure of Xiuzhen, the household economy was in a precarious state. In 1969, Hua had to feed a wife, three daughters, and a son on a 70-yuan salary. There were only two options: marry off Xiuzhen, who was near nineteen, to a relatively well-to-do peasant family in Zhejiang, where they had local connections,

[423] "Tongzhanbu zinu shangshan xiaxiang qingkuang diaocha" (Investigations into the Situations of the sent-down Children of the Department of United Fronts), SMA A33-4-141, p. 21

or sent her to Jilin. Neither the father nor the daughter was in favor of an arranged marriage at an early age of 19.

Xiuzhen was so fired up by the revolutionary education that she received in school that she volunteered to join the sent-down youths movement. In April 1969, the Huas all thought they made the right choice: according to Xiuzhen's letters, rural Jilin was a grain basket, and she can earn an extra 300 yuan, in addition to feeding herself. [424] Also, more secretly, Hua Zhongmin believed that the sent-down measures were only temporary. In the long term, as he confided to his closet friend, he thought the government would "launch a mass recruitment drive like the Great Leap Forward" so all the children can come back to work in the factories.[425] For families in delicate financial situations like Hua, the decision was both a political and economic investment that seemed to pay off in the beginning.

In anticipation of their daughters' departure, the Hua family did careful financial planning (see Table 4-2). In March 1969, on the eve of Xiuzhen's departure to Ante County, Jilin Province, Hua Zhongmin drew up a detailed budgetary plan that listed 106 items under five major categories: beddings and shoes, books, daily utensils, clothing, and others, mostly food. The most expensive items were those prepared for Jilin's cold, windy climate: a winter coat of 20.40 yuan, two sets of cotton fillings of 13.10 yuan, and a pair of Gabardine trousers of 15 yuan. On 9 February 1971, the Hua family had spent at least 100 yuan for the resettlement of their eldest daughter. Given Hua's salary was the only source of income, the family most likely had depleted all their saving in 1969, when they prepared the items for the eldest daughter's departure to Jilin in March.

[424] Hua Zhongmin to Fan Xunmei, 6 April 1969

[425] Hua Zhongmin to Hua Lifang, 3 April 1969

Table 3-1 The Hua family packets for their eldest daughter to Jilin[426]

Items	Examples	Costs
Bedding and shoes	Cotton, quilt, mosquito net, rubber shoes, slippers	92.29
Books and prints	Mao's selected work, map, Mao's Little Book, Mao's icons, pens, letters and envelops	16.01
Cloths	plait coat, cotton coat, summer shirts, underwear, sweater	128.89
Daily Utensils	thermos, washing basin, toilet papers, towels, socks, glove, soap	123.96
Others	Biscuit, sweets, apple, dates, cash (30 yuan)	49.80
Total	410.95	

In comparison, the Hua family spent more than average urban Shanghai families in 1969. The average sent-down youths typically could get 100-200 from their families when they first left Shanghai for the countryside. Some of the better-off families could easily afford it but most families would have to withdraw their saving or even incur debts.[427] The net saving of families declined by 370 million, and the saving rate declined to the historical nadir of -1.8% in the first three years of the sent-down youth movement (See Table 3.1). Given the harsh condition of livelihood in the Jilin countryside, the Hua family's preparations for their eldest daughter were naturally more expensive than most sent-down youths. The costs were even more burdensome

[426] "Hua Xiuzhen Zhinong Feiyong Tongji" (Total Expenditure for Sending Xiuzhen to Support the Peasants), 14 March 1969.
[427] Interview with YBX, 27 August 2018; Interview with BJG, 7 August 2018; interview with LJS, 17 August 2018.

considering that the Hua family barely survived on 840 yuan a year even before and during the first years of the sent-down youths movement.[428]

Table 3-2 Shanghai Household Sector in Early Cultural Revolution

Year	Total Wage Income in Billion	Total Household Saving in billion	Average Income	Average Saving	Net Saving	Saving Ratio %
1964	19.04	8.34	790	346	1.32	6.9
1965	20.07	9.48	829	392	1.14	5.7
1966	19.74	10.19	814	420	0.71	3.6
1967	20.22	10.12	827	414	-0.07	-0.3
1968	19.75	10.03	796	404	-0.09	-0.4
1969	21.06	9.66	836	383	-0.37	-1.8

Sources: *Shanghai Guomin jingji he shehui fazhan lishi tongji ziliao*

The Hua family had to resort to debt finance to pay for the rustication of two daughters, as Xiuzhen's resettlement cost of 410.95 yuan most likely depleted the family's saving. In 1970, the family borrowed 200 yuan for Xiudi's resettlement to Jiangxi and another 100 yuan for Xiuzhen's first home visit. Their total borrowings reached 410 yuan in 1970. Their financing depended primarily on extended family. The most important sources of debt finance were Hua's work unit and his father-in-law, followed by an aunt, a cousin, and friends (Table 4-3). In the "debt repayment plan" dated January 16, 1971, the Hua family listed three sources of debt repayment: Hua Zhongmin's salary, Xiuzhen's, and Xiudi's irregular remittance[429], and new savings from a

[428] Hua Zhongmin's draft budget for the family's debt repayment in 1971, March 1971

[429] Although daughters sent money to home from time to time, they were far less than the family's financial support. Between 1969 and 1972, Xiuzhen received more than 500 but contributed 100 yuan, whereas Xiudi received 450 but contributed 400 yuan.

thrifty way of living. Such a repayment plan required immense financial discipline. Even as they were extremely frugal throughout the early 1970s, they could not pay off all the debts in 1975. The Hua discussed the debts for the last time in his letter to Xiuzhen on 6 May 1975, when the father reported a significant improvement in family finance and reminded them that there was an outstanding debt of 200 yuan. [430]

Table 3-3: The Sources of Financing for Hua daughters for the sent-down movement[431]

Creditors	Relations to Hua family	Amount in Yuan
Worker's Union	Work Unit	175
Aunt Yao	Friends	50
Father side's aunt	Relatives	50
Tianjin Cousin	Relatives	30
Elder Sister Li (friend)	Friends/Neighbor	10
Xiao Lifang (friend)	Friends/Neighbor	15
Father-in-law in Jiading	Relatives	140
Total		410

The moral imperatives to pay off debts required more than financial discipline at the Shanghai home. It also the limited capacity to offer financial assistance to the extended family. In Hua's letter to Xiuzhen on 20 June 1971, he expressed sincere regret for not being able to help his

[430] Hua Zhongmin to Hua Xiuzhen, 6 May 1975.

[431] Hua Zhongmin, Huanzhai Qingdan (List of Debts to be Repaid), 16 Feb 1971.

late elder brother's childless widow, whose savings were "running out" in a few months and future subsistence relied on the Hua siblings. Despite their financial difficulties, the Hua family pledged 2 yuan per month. This minor spending left the Hua Zhongmin family with absolutely no money left for the minimal expense of Hua's widowed mother and his unemployed younger sister as her care-taker. The rest of the Hua siblings supported their daily expenses. [432]

The Hua family's parent-child ties, already strained by difficult household economy, flared into open confrontations in 1972, when the eldest daughter made a surprising jump of faith by dating with a local youth and accepting his marriage proposal. In February 1972, her promotion to a worker in a local factory[433] signaled a long-awaited glimpse of hope for the household economy, since the income and welfare of a factory worker was much more stable than a peasant. While her starting pay was only 25 yuan, the parents were thrilled at the prospect of her regular monthly contribution to the family's debt repayment. Most unexpectedly, she wrote to the parents to announce her engagement in late February, adding new uncertainties to the household economy.

In Hua Zhongmin's letter to his second daughter, Xiudi, he was exasperated at Xiuzhen's unruly decision to marry herself and its far-reaching consequences on the household economy in early 1972, when the household economic situation was just beginning to improve:

> "Our family's economic situation would have improved after Xiuzhen's entry into the factory. But she arbitrarily engaged herself to a north-easterner, even before she becomes a formal state factory employee! Your mom is now so angry that she can't sleep. She has written to Xiuzhen to end their relationship as mother and daughter. Your mom is now in total despair. The ungrateful No.3 (Xiuling) and Jianguo (the youngest son) said they would rather go to Yunnan as sent-down youths take care of us. Your mom flared up and bit him. Our family is now in chaos. Your mom said, since none of the children would take care of her, she will drown herself in the Huangpu River. Anyway, Xiuzhen is the trouble maker. To send her to the countryside, we have accumulated 400 yuan of debts. When we are struggling with

[432] Hua Zhongmin to Hua Xiuzhen, 20 June 1970.

[433] Hua Zhongmin to Hua Xiuzhen, 8 March 1972

> debt repayment, we still have to send packets to Jilin and pay for your return visit. How could I afford this with only my meager income? I can't rob or steal. The only way ahead is to economize on everything. But how could I do this without your elder sister's helper? She indeed sent us 85 yuan recently, but the packets we sent already worth 74 yuan (she demanded them herself). We only received a net payment of 11 yuan. And yet she is engaged! That's why I wrote to her demanding her pay us 500 yuan. Then I will let her have her way and forbid her coming back since she has her in-laws to rely on now! Your mom has seen through all these. She said: 'There is no hope for our family to get rich. Don't dream of that. We need to study Mao Zedong Thoughts, overcome difficulties, and strive for victory."[434]

As the letter between the father and the second daughter indicates, the financial burden and insecurity verged on destroying the intergenerational ties between the daughter and the parents. These economic burdens on Xiuzhen had probably motivated her to seek marriage as an outlet. To the family, marriage to a local was not only insubordinate and irresponsible but a risky option. But their opposition was in vain since they could do little than protest in letters and cut her funding. The latter option meant little for the daughter once Xiuzhen became a financially independent factory worker in a land far from home. The dependence reversed as the family would need Xiuzhen to repay the debts. The father exercised restraint in the letter to the elder daughter and vent his bitterness in the letter to the younger daughter. Xiuzhen's choice indicates that family separation constrained parental authority.

Furthermore, the material deprivation described in the letter to Xiuzhen at the opening of this chapter had taken its toll on the two younger children's attitudes to the family. Two years into the sent-down movement, they must have known that Yunnan was a hard place to survive. But the economic situation at home and the prospects of relative financial freedom still made them fancy Yunnan as an escape. Even the submissive, filial second daughter was reprimanded because of her

[434] Hua Zhongmin to Hua Xiudi, 11 March 1971.

excess travel expenses. With the children all harboring alternative plans, the dream of a well-coordinated, centrally-managed family finance has indeed come to an end.

Why did Xiuzhen still long for her Shanghai home when her plan to visit home was disruptive to family finance? As Hua Zhongmin knew well, the situation in the Jilin countryside was challenging for any youths growing up in Shanghai. Besides the burden of daily manual work, the boredom and lack of food made life in the Jilin countryside unbearable, especially in the winter months. As a Shanghainese sent-down who lived close to the North Korea border recalled to me his experience in the early 1970s:

> "In the winter, when the outside temperature fell below minus 30 Celsius degrees, there is nothing to eat but salted cabbages. There was nothing to do but chat with your friends in the heated room. So, most sent-down youths went back to Shanghai. The long winter night is the most difficult time for me. In the summer, you at least worked long hours. It makes you eat and sleep soundly. In the winter, you had to find a way to endure the boredom and the food. One way to dispel boredom was to recall the happy days. We took turns to talk about the best food in Shanghai we had tasted in your life: the biscuits, the cakes, the shrimps, the soup dumpling, etc. We chatted about and dreamt of all these exotic things. There is nothing in our mind but the determination to return home one day and taste those things again. Then we became motivated again. Once we were back in Shanghai, we did take turns to eat the best dished at each others' houses and dine at the restaurants."[435]

The Hua family's economic fortune only began to turn for the better by the end of 1973. On 12 December 1973, Hua Zhongmin proudly informed Xiuzhen that the third daughter, Xiuling, was assigned to work in Shanghai Light Industry Factory as an apprentice. While the starting pay was a meager 17.8 yuan, Hua's wife was thrilled to receive the first 8.9-yuan fortnight income from her daughter. The Hua family understood this happy news as the fruits of the two eldest sent-down daughters' sacrifice, since the state policy would exempt high school graduates with two or more sent-down siblings from the same fate by guaranteeing them a place in Shanghai factories.

[435] Interview with a former sent-down youth, 29 April 2019

As Hua Zhongmin remarks to Xiuling: "Never forget your debt to your elder sisters!"[436] The government's labor allocation policy inadvertently produced a new debt obligation between the siblings within the urban family.

The Hua family's financial situation provided a rare glimpse into a crisis of urban household economy in the 1970s when the Cultural Revolutionary regime shifted the economic burden of generational transition from the state to the family by the sent-down movement. In his late 40s, Hua has three daughters aged above twenty, another daughter aged above sixteen, and one son aged around fourteen. In the 1950s and early 1960s, this type of household usually saw an increase in combined household income, took care of the daughter's marriage, and greeted the birth of their third generation, as the eldest children joined the workforce and got married.[437] By de-territorializing urban families, the sent-down movement made this "standard procedure" impossible.

Though the Hua family's financial burden was more than the average, they were not exceptional. In August 1974, the Shanghai United Front Department organized a survey of the family conditions of its cadres and workers. Of all the 29 families and 92 children surveyed, 26 families had at least one and at most three children living in the countryside or military farms by July 1974. In total, 36 children of the Department's workers and cadres were sent-down youths in 1974. Among these youths, 20 were in the country and 16 in the military farms. In comparison, there were only eighteen children assigned a job in Shanghai. In the Department's review for the reimbursement of family subsidy, they picked five out of the 26 families as meeting the criteria.

[436] Hua Zhongmin to Hua Xiuzheng, 4 December 1973
[437] Interview with a former sent-down youth YBX, August 27, 2018

Table 3-4 Recipients of the Department of United Fronts Subsidy for Sent-down Families with Financial Difficulties[438]

Family Surname	No. of People	Per-capita Income	No. of Children and their locations						
			Total	Rural Area outside Shanghai	Military Farms outside Shanghai	Working In Shanghai	High Schools	Primary Schools	Pre-school age
Zhang	6	18	4	1	1	1	1	0	0
Hu	6	24	3	0	1	1	0	1	0
Lu	5	19	4	1	1	1	1	0	0
Jiang	7	14	5	1	1	1	1	0	1
Sun	9	17	3	2	0	0	1	0	0

By analyzing the household economies of these families, we can find a close parallel between Hua Zhongmin and Sun family's situation in 1974. With a son and a daughter in the countryside, Sun family in 1974 survived on a per-capita income of 17 yuan, much below the 30 yuan average in the work unit but well above the official base survival income of 10 yuan.[439] After the youngest daughter went to work in 1974, their household economy would be similar to the Lu family, with a daughter working as an intern in a Shanghai factory and a per-capita income of 19

[438] Tongzhanbu zinu shangshan xiaxiang qingkuang diaocha" (Investigations into the Situations of the sent-down Children of the Department of United Fronts), SMA A33-4-141.

[439] Tongzhanbu zinu shangshan xiaxiang qingkuang diaocha" (Investigations into the Situations of the sent-down Children of the Department of United Fronts), SMA A33-4-141, p. 29.

yuan.[440] Sun and Lu were the poorest among the Department of United Fronts, but the Department generally fared better than ordinary factory workers. Anyway, Hua's experience was a bit worse off than the Shanghai average but did not diverge widely from the average experience.

The Impact on Reproduction

The separation of children and parents, as the Hua family's conflicts show, had adversely impacted the parents' ability to discipline and control while increasing the freedom of the children on their own life choices. To be sure, the sent-down children still relied on the parents for their everyday life. But they had much more leeway life decisions. In other words, parental authority has become too costly to maintain and enforce. Under state-sponsored family separation, the vertical parent-child authorities collapsed into a horizontal partnership, as each member of the family owed their material means of existence to the state, even as the family had to cooperate to maintain financial viability. The pivotal event in the Hua family was Xiuzhen's decision to marry locally. Initially, her parents were furious at her irresponsible choice. From the parents' view, Xiuzhen's decision to marry into a local family in Jilin was tantamount to severing her bond with the family regardless of her debt obligations. However, the marriage proposal was in fact a good deal for the daughter, since that the state policy seemed to demand her to resettle permanently. Even if Xiuzhen later repaid the debts, the physical separation between Jilin and Shanghai meant that she would drift away from her Shanghai home. In the end, even her parents had to concede their defeat and reconcile with the daughter. As the household economy and social status of Xiuzhen's nuclear family became solidly rooted in the local community, her parents in Shanghai

[440] Ibid, p. 31

came to appreciate her choice. A new model of the family economy was coming into shape in the Hua children's individual response to the household economic crisis,

Not all Shanghai families experienced the same tribulation as the Hua family. Location was the decisive factor for the income of sent-down youths. Shanghai youths were in Heilongjiang, Jilin, Inner Mongolia, Xinjiang, Anhui, Jiangxi, Yunnan and Shanghai's rural regions. More distant areas meant higher fixed costs of resettlement and variable costs of travel. The Northeast regions (Heilongjiang, Jilin, Inner Mongolia) were rather exceptional in that they also had fertile land and generated more income. In comparison, sent-down youths in Jiangxi and Anhui could hardly be self-sufficient many years after their resettlement, since land tended to be less fertile.[441] Therefore, the Hua's were not exceptionally burdened, since their eldest daughter at least could feed herself.

The Hua family's concern about their daughter's marriage was not limited to its potentially disruptive effects on their precarious household economy. It also arose from a concern about the new nuclear family's reproductive future. Their letters showed a strong willingness to conform to the national policy of family planning. Their own negative experiences with early marriage and multiple children and the vivid memory of the economic woes in their youths played a critical role in their outlook for their children's future. When the father first heard about Xiuzhen's engagement, he did not list the household economy as the primary factor of concern. Instead, the father tried to use his own experience to persuade the daughter to delay her marriage, by citing the financial ruins early marriage could impose on the future family:

> "We suggest you overcome your passions, exercise your reason, and save enough money to create the material basis for your marriage. The wedding should take place three years after

[441] Qu Bingxiang toWu Mingren, 16 July 1976. In this letter, two old colleagues of Wu Mingren asked him if it was possible to transfer their children from Jiangxi countryside to a factory in Anhui under the Three Front Administration since they still needed the families' support to survive, 6-7 years after the resettlement.

> your engagement. You will also alleviate the economic difficulties of parents on both sides. Please reply to us in your letter. Marriage is your right, but right and obligation conflict. By getting married, you enjoy your right. But the result is that you will bear children, nourish them, and provide for them. You will be devastated materially and spiritually. This decision is not only bad for your study and work but will also cause you to quarrel and create anxiety. So, our country's new policy of late marriage is entirely justified. As your parents, we got married when we were only 23 and 22. Now we regret bitterly of such an early marriage. If your mom and I had married two years later, she would not have lost her job and she could now make 68 yuan as a worker in a state factory. Since we were only allowed to perform the sterilization operations after we had four children[442], we ended up accumulating so much debts due to having many children…"[443]

When he received another letter from Xiuzhen asking permission for engagement, Hua Zhongmin changed his tones from admonition to threat. His reply shows that he had little trust in his local in-laws who might be "plotting" against him by taking advantage of Xiuzhen's separation from parents. Since Xiuzhen was far from home, Hua Zhongmin reasoned, the Ma family could persuade her not to take any bride price in the Shanghai-style, which could be unaffordable for the Mas. Moreover, the father suspects they could maltreat Xiuzhen without fearing the watch of her Shanghainese parents and relatives. They were furious that their eldest daughter, to whom they had devoted so many resources, could easily be attracted by a stranger's family. In the last resort, Hua warned that he could even write to the Antu authorities to denounce their violation of the national policy of the late marriage.[444] The threat proved to be credible and effective. After a few heated exchanges with her parents in Shanghai, Xiuzhen persuaded her fiancée to follow her parent's plan to delay their marriage to late 1974. When they finally got married in October 1974, Xiuzhen's husband in Jilin was promoted to be the vice-director of the factory workshop. They could

[442] Hua Zhongmin's three daughters and the son was born between 1950 and 1961, when China adopted a Soviet-style pro-nativity policies.

[443] Hua Zhongmin to Hua Xiudi, March 11, 1971.

[444] Hua Zhongmin to Hua Xiuzhen, March 8, 1971

contribute 20 yuan to the family economy.[445] When they were planning their wedding trip to Shanghai in November 1974, the Hua family had fully reconciled with their daughter and in-laws and invited them to visit Shanghai in 1975. [446]

When the second daughter Xiudi came of age in 1974. She had the opposite problem of her elder sister: she hesitated to find a boyfriend and even considered celibacy as an option. She reasoned that she could not survive on a mere 28-yuan monthly wage, let alone start a family. In response to such pessimism, the father tried to elevate the daughter's hope for a bright future, drawing upon the example of revolutionary heroes. Soothing the pessimism of his daughter and other sent-down youths, Hua expressed confidence in the Party and the government's action to coordinate and take care of their livelihood:

> "Think about the old generation of revolutionaries. Amid the enemy's search and arrest and under the "white terror" of the reactionary regime, they still got married and became revolutionary couples. As children of the Mao Zedong times, the idea of celibacy was too passive. Many of those educated youths who worked in Shanghai rural farms formed their families even though they are only making 24 yuan a month. If you don't marry when you reach thirty, you are violating the objective rules of nature. My daughter, you will surely be selected to work as a factory worker, and then you can consider forming your own family."

The case of the Hua family shows how sent-down policy helped to enforce family planning without any other incentive or coercion. The Hua family's ideal marriage plan followed closely the national policy guidance in 1965 that defined the best marriage age at 25 and the best number of children to two. Such instruction was not merely a coincidence. For the typical urban family with sent-down children, the priority was to secure a stable political and economic basis so their daughters could benefit from the state's protection, even if this meant factory job in a distant land. In comparison, the in-laws were reliable. The Hua sisters were not the only ones to have delayed

[445] Hua Zhongmin to Hua Xiuzhen, November 13, 1975

[446] Ibid.

their marriage. In ten largest military farms in Heilongjiang, 85% of the Shanghai sent-down youths who arrived in the late 1960s and early 1970s remained single until 1978, when their age was likely around 30, well above the officially "advised" marriage age of 25. [447] Among the few married, Shanghainese young women, like Hua's eldest daughter, were much more likely to marry local men than Shanghainese young men. Few Shanghai men married local women.

The gendered difference in marriage patterns was largely due to gendered conditions of work. The harsh working condition had a more significant impact on women, who earned fewer work points and found it hard to survive without family support.[448] The low marriage rate was also a function of the youth's determination to return to the city since marriage and childbirth was a constraint on educated youth's mobility. As most Shanghainese youths in the Jilin countryside realized at that moment, it would be much harder to move back to the city, once they marry a local. When there was any chance of marriage, they tended to marry their fellow Shanghainese sent-down youths and opted to settle locally. Most sent-down youths in the remote province eventually chose to delay their marriage in the hope of returning. Although they eventually "won the bet", they were most in their late twentieth and early thirtieth when returning to Shanghai as an entry-level worker in a state factory or a neighborhood workshop. As they built their family in the early 1980s, the priority was to work hard and get married without even asking any questions about the

[447] Incidentally, this period also saw draconian efforts in Shanghai and other cities to impose the 25 rule on all eligible youths. See Wang Zhiwen, Zhidu yu Renkou: Yi Zhongguo lishi yu xianshi weijichu de fenxi (Institutions and Population: An Analysis Based on China's), Beijing: Zhongguo shehuikexue chubanshe, 2015, p. 117

[448] Liu Xiaomeng, Xiaxiang nvzhiqing Hunyin poxi (Analysis of Marriages of Female Zhiqing), in Liu Qingfeng ed., *Wenhuagageming: shishi yu yanjiu* (Cultural Revolution: Historical Facts and Research), Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 1998, p. 153

One Child Policy. As one returned youths told me: "The One Child Policy were so so natural and made so much economic sense that we don't even give a second thought. "[449]

Sent-down youths in Yunnan had similar experiences when material difficulties and physical separation erected an insurmountable hurdle to marriage. A young man from a typical working family in Shanghai[450], Lu Rong, was sent to work ion a rubber farm in Sipsangpana in 1969 and stayed there until February 1979, when he was already thirty years old. When he began to think about leaving Sipsangpana in 1978, he had dated another Shanghai youth for over six years. Since they lived in two distant regions in Yunnan, they could barely meet once every two years, when both had the opportunity to undertake the trip back to Shanghai in 1973 and 1976. They dared not think about marriage, let alone childbirth, since it could create an unbearable emotional and economic pains if they had to live and work in different places in Yunnan. After lengthy discussions, they could only delay their marriage for another two years, until Lu Rong's family could return to Shanghai by taking her mother's factory job via the replacement system after it was restated in 1978. [451]

The impacts on reproduction affected everybody in the family. In 1970s Shanghai, married children generally contributed to the extended families' finances, including regular subsidies to

[449] Interview with sent-down youths LJS, 17 August 2018.

[450] Lu Rong's family consisted of his parents, a paternal grandmother, and two brothers in 1970. The size was larger than the average size of 4.7 but still typical of Shanghai working family. His father worked in a factory, while his mother worked in a neighborhood production workshop.

[451] Lu Rong, Jin Dalu ed,. *Yige shanghai Zhiqing de 223 Feng Jiashu* Lu Rong (A Shanghai Send-down Youth's 223 Family Letters, abbreviated as SHZQJSL), Shanghai: Shanghai shehuikexue chubanshe, 2006, p. 412-413

their parents and younger sent-down their siblings.[452] The sent-down movement thus drained resources from all the nuclear families in their early childbearing years. At least one former sent-down youths suggested that the financial burden was so great that his elder sister decided not to have a second child due to her monthly financial contributions to the family, even while this was still allowed under the prevailing birth policy.[453] In another case, a mother of a sent-down youth had limited time to take care of the sons of her elder daughters because she had to continue working in the neighborhood workshop beyond the average retirement age to support the family with extra income.[454]As discussed in Chapter Two, the burden on the family was accentuated by a shortage of daycare, kindergartens, and other social services after the Great Leap Forward. The Great Leap era facilities were never revived in the 1970s, as the government did not invest in public services essential for social reproduction. The lack of support did not improve until another aggressive campaign constructed such amenities based on work units in the 1980s.[455]

The only lucky ones in Shanghai were only children, a small minority in Maoist Shanghai. When asked about her experience of the 1970s, an interviewee who was a single child of an intellectual family remarks that it was the best time in her life. In sharp contrast to the multiple-child family, the experience of the single-child family foreshadowed the widely-shared understanding of urban Chinese families under the One Child Policy:

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[452] All of the extended families covered by the letters and the interviews followed this principle to varying extents. The only exception was a well-to-do cadre family, whose grown-up daughters did not contribute to the family finance but continued to receive *ad hoc* support from their parents even when they joined the workforce.

[453] Interview with BJG, August 17, 2018.

[454] Interview with YBX, August 27, 2018.

[455] *Shanghai Laodong Zhi*, pp. 370-371.

> "The 1970s is a good time. I was the only child, and my family was well-to-do. Both my parents worked and made 150 yuan a month, which was a great deal in those days. My father went to Shanghai from the Zhejiang countryside to study at a university and worked as a researcher. His (political) background was good. Because he suffered poverty in his childhood, he lavished all the good things around in those times on me. Since I am the only daughter, my father didn't follow the common principle of favoring sons over daughters (*zhongnan qingnü*). I had my first wristwatch when I was starting junior high school. I could wear the most beautiful Dacron skirts and dresses. You know, there was this policy that the only child alone stayed in Shanghai. Unlike everybody else, I did not need to go to the countryside and went to a state-run factory after graduation. That is the best time of my life! I only regret that I did not apply myself hard enough and study for the college entrance examination in 1979. My life would be much better if I could have made good use of the good time."[456]

The Turning Point

The economic difficulties of sent-down youths and their families eventually reached Beijing and touched Mao's desk. On 6 June 1973, the Central Committee of the Communist Party forwarded a policy circular to all the provincial Party Committees, demanding all the branches of the Party to study a set of two letters between Mao and Li Qinglin, a teacher in a commune school in Fujian.[457] Mao's reply, dated on 25 April, not only promised a general solution to this issue but enclosed 300 yuan for Li's family.[458]

Li Qinglin family's situation exemplified the sent-down policy's ruinous financial impact on poor families. Most of these families were illiterate and silent. Li Qinlin was the exception to

[456] Interview with YXl, May 16, 2019. The 1970s had an enduring influence on the interviewee. As the factory closed down, YXL had to retire early in the 1990s and thus missed much of the fruits of China's economic reforms. But she was contented, as she understood it as a cosmic balance of fortunes: one can only have limited days of good luck. Perhaps as compensation, she invested heavily in the education of her only daughter, who eventually went to study and live abroad.

[457] The Letter from Li Qinglin to Mao Zedong", CCPCC (1973) No.21, June 6, 1973, See "Cultural Revolution Source Database" https://ccradb.appspot.com/post/747.

[458] Ibid

the norm, as he was sent from the county to the rural commune as a teacher. A teacher who suffered a demotion during the Great Leap Forward, Li Qinglin made an impassioned appeal to Mao to save his son from material deprivation. His eldest son, Li Liangmo, worked at Qiulu Commune as a high-school graduate in 1969. During the first 11 months of his sent-down experience, he barely survived on the monthly state stipend consisting of 18.5 kilograms of grain and 8 yuan of personal allowances, with the family covering only the medical costs and vegetables. In 1971, when Liangmo had to work in the countryside, his living standard further plummeted due to several factors. First, the grain allocated by the collectives was insufficient even for survival due to infertile land and unfavorable climate. So, the family had to make up the shortage by purchasing from the black market. Second, he could not afford necessary living expenses, such as medical and clothing costs. Third, the peasant host family chased him out when they needed to prepare for their son's wedding. In 1973, Li Qinglin's second son was also about to graduate and go to the countryside. He was so desperate that he could not imagine how the family could afford it.[459]

Li Qinglin also complaint about the "backdoor" phenomenon, which had become too evident to ignore in the countryside. As he noted, some sent-down youths relied on their families' political influence on open "backdoor" when there were opportunities for schooling, factory work, and cadre recruitment. Since all the processes of recruitment went through recommendation and official evaluation, well-connected families quickly found a way for their children to leave the countryside on the pretext that "revolutionary" cadres were "preferred" when there were opportunities. At the end of the letter, Li justified the sent-down policy as a "necessary step to strengthen the life skills of our children" but beseeched the Chairman to "find a solution" to the

[459] Ibid

material difficulties of the sent-down youths so they can find a way to be "self-reliant.[460] While there was no national data on the "back doors," Li's observation accorded with a contemporary survey in 1973 that found the children of cadres obtained 42% of all exemptions from the sent-down mobilizations.[461]

Li Qinglin's letter was a vivid sample of the economic difficulties of the sent-down youths and their families in the early 1970s. Extensive investigations into the livelihood of the sent-down youth ordered by Beijing later verified his descriptions. We might compare Li's son with Shanghainese youths in the rural, ethnic-minority region of Yunnan. A survey of livelihood in Menghai County of Yunnan by Shanghai's Sent-down Office in 1975 found that none of the 87 Shanghai youths had achieved self-reliance six years after they first arrived in Menghai. There annual income amounted to a meagre 60-210 yuan or 5-17.5 yuan per month. Only 25 of the 87 youths earned more than 150 from their farm income in 1975; 29 made between 60 and 150; 33 earned less than 60. As many as 62 of the 87 youths surveyed needed family support between 40 and 180 yuan per year; 33 of the youths had already returned to Shanghai.[462]

Why did Mao, the supreme leader, care to answer a petition letter from a mere school teacher from a Commune school? Thousands, if not tens of thousands of parents must have written to Beijing for help before Li Qinglin. Even if none of these letters reached Zhongnanhai, Mao, an avid reader of internal reports, must have known the consequences of his policies much earlier

[460] Ibid.

[461] Michel Bonnin, *Génération perdue. Le Mouvement d'envoi des Jeunes instruits à la Campagne en Chine, 1968-1980,* Paris, Éditions de l'École des Hautes études en Sciences Sociales, 2004, p. 120

[462] Yunnan Party History Research Office*, Yunan zhishi Qingnian shanshang xiaxiang yundong* (The Sent-down Movement in Yunnan)*,* Kunming: Yunnan University Press, 2016, pp. 169-170.

through these secretive reports[463]. Although Li was skillful enough to navigate his letter to Mao[464], his family's case was too commonplace to warrant a top-level intervention. Mao's decision to publicize the letter with his note indicated a more profound change in Mao's ideological stance across a broad range of issues.

Eighty years old and in poor health, Mao might have written his reply to Li Qinglin with a sense of resignation in 1973, as the political situation forced him to turn away from his more radical visions. The demise of Li Biao and the destruction of his clique had taken a heavy toll on the older man's health. He was diagnosed with congestive heart failure and almost died in January 1972[465.] In 1972, he took decisive steps on two significant fronts. On the international front, he sided with Zhou Enlai and the pragmatists to re-establish diplomatic ties with the United States and Japan, receiving Richard Nixon and Tanaka Kakue at his private resident in Zhongnanhai. On the domestic front, he repaired his relationship with the old cadres and rehabilitated several pre-Cultural Revolution veterans. [466] Mao was forced to make these adjustments in response to shifting political forces. His revolutionary luster suffered an irredeemable setback in the aftermath of Lin Biao's ignoble end, while the scenario of an impending Soviet invasion eventually led him to side with the United States.

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[463] Yin Yungong, "Mao Zedong Neican pishi yanjiu, 1949-1976" (A Study of Mao Zedong's Instructions on the Internal Reports, 1949-1976), *Zhonggong Dangshi yanjiu* (Research in CCP History), 2019, No.3, pp. 11-19

[464] Contrary to popular imagination, Li was a political savvy primary school teacher. He sent his letter to Wang Hairong, the Assistant Minister of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, who had regular personal contact with Mao since he "always saw Wang accompanied Mao when receiving a foreign visitor." See: Huang Zhixiong, *Zhiqing jiazhang Li Qinglin* (Li Qinglin: The "Parent" of Zhiqing), Beijing: the Party School Press, p.33

[465] Alexander Pantsov, Steven I. Levine, *Mao: The True Story*, Camp Hill, PA.: Simon & Schuster, pp. 553-554.

[466] Ibid, p. 560.

During Mao's meeting with the Mexican President Luis Echeverria on 20 April 1973, he began to show his sense of resignation at global trends. He related his life experiences as a student, a revolutionary, and as a fighter. Contrary to his usual revolutionary voluntarism, Mao talked like an older man, reflecting on every turn of his career as a response to circumstances, from the cruel repression of Chiang Kaishek to the invasion of the Japanese imperialists:

> "Look, I was originally a teacher, a primary school teacher. I knew neither Marx nor the art of war. It was the circumstance that drives people. The world does not turn around my will. In the past, the circumstance used to force me to read Marx and fight wars. Now the circumstances forced me to make a right turn to opportunism by inviting Nixon and Tanaka to this place. Then my reputation suffers. Who knows if I might I have to lean to the left one day? I am afraid I have no chance. I am eighty years old. The world does not follow my will. I have to rely on circumstances, follow the trend, and not oppose it."[467]

What was the trend of history that bent Mao's mighty will, even if it was only meant to be a tactical retreat? Amid recent domestic political setbacks and geopolitical realignment, even the Great Helmsman realized that he could not sail against the current. By conceding to the forces beyond his control, Mao effectively initiated a reorientation of the sent-down movement in the new contexts of self-proclaimed "rightist opportunism." In the Maoist discourse, such rightist opportunism denotes economic concessions to pre-Communist values, which naturally includes the household economy.

The geopolitical imperatives were not the only force that Mao realized was beyond his control. Equally significant were the necessary concessions to his old "revisionist" colleagues. As a tactical alliance with the former cadres became inevitable, the family issues of these cadres offered an opportunity for reconciliation. Most prominent among these issues was the future of

[467] Mao Zedong, "Mao Zedong hujian mosige zongtong aiqieweiliya de tanhua (Mao's Conversation with Mexican President Luis Echeverria), in Song Yongyi ed., *Jimi dangan Zhong Xin fa xian de mao Zedong Jianghua* (Newly Discovered Mao's Speeches in CCP Secret Archives), New York: Guoshi chubanshe, 2018, pp. 286-289

their children. The cadres were seeking a preferred route to superior social and political status through enlistment in the army, enrolment in college (reopened in 1970), and allocation into good jobs. Once rehabilitated, they began to exchange favors by giving the children cadres "back doors" or privileged access to such positions. Tactically allied with his more conservative colleagues, Mao condoned the "back doors" of the returned old cadres, especially his trusted PLA generals and top Party leaders. [468]

Deng Xiaoping, who was sent down to work in a machine tool factory in Jiangxi during the evacuation of late 1969 in anticipation of a possible Sino-Soviet war, wrote several letters to Mao through his chief bodyguard, Wang Dongxing. The central theme of the letters was his family's needs. Soon after the downfall of Lin Biao, Deng, like many old cadres, sensed an opportunity to improve his political standing and family situation. The first letter, dated in late 1971, celebrated the fall of Lin Biao and probed the possibility of a return to Beijing. The second letter, dated in January 1972, asked the Party to let his two youngest children attend college so they can be useful workers. In a third letter, dated on April 22, 1972, he asked the Party to solve his family problems:

> "Comrade Dongxin, I haven't written to you for long. Thanks to Chairman Mao's grace and your help, my two daughters have been admitted to college. Maomao entered Nanchang University; Feifei enrolled Nanchang Technical University…..... Please convey my heartfelt gratitude to the Chairman and the Party. Our family's situation is as usual. My stepmother will leave for Tianjin to take care of my pregnant stepsister and her children. Having toiled for my household for years, she is now seventy and in bad health. So, I let her leave for Tianjin to have a rest while helping my stepsister and her children. After she goes, there will be my wife and me alone at home (her health is also bad). And we needed to take care of my disabled eldest son[469]. Therefore, I can't work in the factory these days. We want to hire a cook to prepare a meal and take care of my son. I have applied to local leaders, but

[468] Yang Jisheng, *Tianfan difu: Zhongguo wenhua dageming lishi* (A History of China's Cultural Revolution), Taipei: Tiandi Books, 2017, p. 537.

[469] Deng Xiaoping's eldest son jumped down from a classroom at Tsinghua University and became permanently paralyzed when the Red Guards pursued and beat him in the early days of the Cultural Revolution.

the salary of the cook will cost 30 yuan a month[470]

This plea for official family assistance is one of the numerous letters Deng wrote to Mao for his family problems during the Cultural Revolution. Commenting on the latter, Deng's youngest daughter recalls that her father rarely wrote any letters before the Cultural Revolution. During the decade, he wrote many letters of request as a father devoted to the health, education, and marriage of his four children. In her words, "he always felt guilty that his family and children suffered humiliations and misfortune because of him. He always tries his best to do everything for his children and family. He never asks for any return. This sacrificial love is the simplest form of love." According to Maomao, these Cultural Revolution letters "far exceeded all the letters he wrote in other periods of his life"[471].

Deng's plea offers another window to Mao's response to Li Qinglin and the series of friendly decisions in the early 1970s. The situations in the Cultural Revolution demanded absolute sacrifice from the family of elites and the masses alike. For the elites, it was a political punishment with economic and emotional tolls. For the ordinary families, it was a financial and emotional sacrifice couched in political languages. But in 1972-1973, both forms of sacrifice were materially and politically untenable. Mao's concession to Li Qinglin and Deng Xiaoping both reflected such a strategic moment.

Intended as a political balancing act between revolutionary ideal and political reality, Mao's concessions inadvertently initiated the demobilization of the movement. After the rehabilitating of Deng and the Li Qinglin letters, the government began to make exceptions to the cadres and offer financial assistance to ordinary families. From 1972, Shanghai Revolutionary

[470] Deng Rong, *Wo de fuqin Deng Xiaoping: wenge suiyue* (My Father Deng Xiaoping: The Cultural Revolution Years), Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 2010, p. 85

[471] Ibid, p. 83

Committee started to relax on the terms of sent-down mobilizations. In 1973-1978, most of the sent-down youths ended in the military farms in rural Shanghai rather than countryside and the army farms in distant provinces[472]. Meanwhile, many youths sent to the countryside moved to a local factory or schools. Based on official statistics, around 40% Shanghai sent-down youths in the countryside managed to find a work in a nearby city in 1974-1978[473.] Since the transfer was based on both personal merits and political decisions from the Party, the children of the cadres had the upper hand.

From the senior leaders to the mid-rank Party apparatchiks, the returned cadres began to take their children home. In the Department of United Fronts alone, we can see how cadres' children had a favorable position in the process based on their better performance or connections. Among all the 14 children of cadres[474] sent to the countryside outside Shanghai, 12 secured a transfer by August 1974. Among the twelve children of the cadres, ten had already found their ways from the country to the factory, and two had enrolled in local schools. Those who left the countryside were either Party members or members of the Youth League. In the meanwhile, only 8 of the 33 children of the workers had experience such a transfer.[475]

The Decline of the Movement

[472] *Shanghai Laodong Zhi* (Shanghai Labor Gazetteer), p. 117

[473] The Department of Social Statistics of National Bureau of Statistics, *Zhongguo laodonggongzi tongji ziliao*, 1949-1985 (PRC Statistical Materials on National Labor and Wage Rates), Beijing: Zhongguo tongji chubanshe, 1987, pp. 110-111

[474] Cultural Revolution era official tables usually did not note people's status as "workers" and "cadres". However, we can still make the rough distinction based on their salaries, since the salary ranks remained unchanged since 1963. The threshold salary of the cadres was 99 yuan (Administrative Level 17).

[475] Tongzhanbu zinu shangshan xiaxiang qingkuang diaocha" (Investigations into the Situations of the sent-down Children of the Department of United Fronts), SMA A33-4-141, p. 1-2

When the top-level political calculations leaned towards to the right, the ideological steam for the sent-down movement was also running out. As Mao had implicitly conceded in reply to Li Qinglin, there was a limit to voluntarism when survival was at stake. As the experiences of the Hua family shows, the vision of a socialist utopia in the countryside had disappeared. Most youths saw a world of material hardship a few years after they arrived in distant provinces. The wheels of mobilization had lost much of its inertia by 1973. In April 1974, when Lu Rong, a propagandist at the platoon level, prepared for a new round of political education classes for the "backward" brigades, he feared that most political meetings in recent years had become a matter of formality. In his letter to his family on 11 April 1974, he hints at two factors: the "mental burden" of leaders and the "inner thoughts" of the youths.[476] Two months later, he noted in another letter that political education reduced the risk of an angry outburst but failed to address social disorder in the aftermath of the declining morale among the youths: "The government has lately intensified the political re-education of sent-down youths. The cases of the rampage, looting, and robbery dropped to near zero. Instead, burglary has become a problem of the day. Every time we watch films, something got stolen. Numerous items were stolen. All these have upset people and disturbed social order. Even if we had found the perpetrators, the punishments tended to be perfunctory. We found it hard to deal with it. Now the victims have formed this mentality: you are simply unlucky if your things got stolen."[477]

Meanwhile, the rural Communist utopia has become a dystopia in some places. In rural Anhui, the sent-down youths from Shanghai still had to live on subsidy from their Shanghai parents

[476] Lu Rong's letter to father, 11 April 1974. In *SHQNJS*, p. 249.

[477] Lu Rong letter to father, 26 June 1974. In *SHQNJS*, p. 258.

in 1975.[478] The local leaders' abuses of the powerless sent-down youths, especially sexual assault of young women, became a frequent occurrence under the dictatorial rule of military officers and local cadres. The officers at military farms were often the worst perpetrators of such violence. In Yunnan Production and Construction Corps, the commander of the first platoon of the first division raped more than 20 female sent-down youths and beat another 70 youths without any daring to resist.[479] In the 66 Regiment of Heilongjiang Production and Construction Corps, the regiment commander ganged up with the chief of staff to rape over 50 female sent-down youths under their administration. [480] In the military farms in rural Shanghai alone, there were 487 cases of reported rape in 1973-1974.[481]

Family letters offer many details on the everyday sufferings of the youths, but we have reason to doubt that these accounts were silent on the circumstances. The filial children might want to conceal the worst experience from their parents and alleviate their worries. Also, they feared political persecution if the letters were intercepted. Lu Rong's letters were silent on at least two episodes that still lingered on the memory of his former coworkers.

Zhen Zhihua recalled their bitter experience with the military officer in charge of the farms in the early 1970s in 2006. In 1972, Lu Rong obtained the official permission for his first home visit to Shanghai. But he would need a travel permit to leave the farm and take a ship to Jinghong,

[478] Hua Zhongmin to Wu Yanxiang, September 15, 1975.

[479] Shi Weiming and He Lan, *Zhiqing beiwanglu: jianglai lishi jiyizhongde shengchan jianshe bingtuan* (Zhiqing Memorandum The Production and Construction Corps), Beijing: Zhongguo shehuikexuie chubanshe 1999, p. 237.

[480] Cai Tianxin, "Li Qinglin shangshu yu Zhiqing zhengce tiaozheng" (Li Qinglin Petition and the Adjustment of the Sent-down Policy), *Zhonggong Dangshi Yanjiu* (Research in CCP History), 2003, No.4, p.32

[481] Shanghai Shenpan zhi Editorial Committee, *Shanghai Shenpan zhi* (Shanghai Court Rulings Gazetteer), Shanghai Shehui kexue chubanshe, 2003, p. 191.

the nearest county seat, before making his way home. When Shen and Lu trekked through the jungles and arrived late in the night to ask the military staffer for a travel permit to Jinghong, the sentinel refused to wake up the officer in charge. Lu Rong begged in tears, but the officer still would not listen. Shen was exasperated and accused the officer of irresponsibility as a Party member. Even before he could finish his words, the officer struck him down. [482]

On another occasion, Lu Rong and his brigade members stewed pork on a make-shift pot. It was a joyous occasion, since a pock stew was the only meal with any meat available for the whole year. There was only one piece of pork chop available for each person. The director of the farm and PLA officer, who saw the pot as a possible dangerous fire hazard, walked straight into the crowd and kicked over the pot, leaving the sent-down youths shocked and shivering.[483] Lu Rong's letters to parents never talked about these emotional experiences. Therefore, the narrative of the ideological decline and social disorder in Lu's letter thus likely reflected an understated version of the real crisis in 1978.

These unfolding crises formed the background to Mao's letter to Li Qinglin and stimulated a series of policy responses. In 1973-1974, a series of policy responses significantly improved the livelihood of some sent-down youths and their families. On 19 August 1973, the Shanghai Revolutionary Committee affirmed that four classes of children obtained exemptions from the sent-down policy: the sick and the disabled, the only child, the only child left behind, and Chinese children of foreign parents.[484] Among these conditions, only "sick" and "disabled" was a new

[482] *SHQNJS*, p. 457

[483] *SHQNJS*, p. 458
[484] *SHZQJSL*, p.165

legitimate condition. The condition would soon become a most popular channel to return for many urban Chinese families.

Meanwhile, the Revolutionary Committee began to take over the burden of unemployed youths from urban families in Shanghai. On July 1, 1973, the Shanghai Labor Bureau suggested a new policy towards Shanghainese youths who resisted the sent-down policy from 1968 to 1973. After five years of continued dependence on their families, the 90,000 remaining youths who refused to participate in the "voluntary" sent-down movement were finally allocated temporary jobs in the neighborhood production teams. Among these were 47,000 former sent-down youths who stayed home due to disability or health reasons.[485] In 1975, the exceptions would become an institutional loophole that allowed hundreds of thousand Shanghainese youths to return. They were signs of hope for many who wanted to return home. Between January and April 1978, there were only 338 applications for sick leave for a month, but in May the number jumped to 958[486].

A critical threshold for the sent-down to become "new communist peasant" was marriage and reproduction in the countryside and military farms. Most of the youths from Shanghai bade their times like Hua Xiudi and Lu Rong, a small proportion of the youths decided to marry among themselves and settle in the countryside, military farms, or local towns. In Xuanke County of Heilongjiang, for example, there were 2254 male and 1504 female sent-down youths from Shanghai. Only 222 or 6% of the Shanghai youths in Xuanke were married by December 1974. Of these about half, or 108 youths married among themselves. Among marriages between Shanghainese and locals, the overwhelming majority were between Shanghainese females and local males: 95 Shanghai women or 6% of the population married local men, while only 12

[485] Editorial Committee, *Shanghai laodong zhi* (Shanghai Labor Gazetteer), 1998, p.117

[486] Shanghai Sent-down Office, *Qingkuan fanying* (Bulletin of Current Situations), SMA B228-2-182

Shanghai men or 0.5% of the population married local women.[487] The majority of the youths married for economic difficulties. In the political sense, those youths who willingly settle and have their children were among the minority of the most devoted students of Mao. But they also had to face the reality of inadequate medical facilities and high infant mortality rates For Shanghainese sent-down youths in Yunnan, the traumatic moment of Qu Linxian's death epitomized this crisis of the moment.

Qu Linxian, a native of Nanhui county at suburban Shanghai, came to work at the 7th farm of the Oliver Bank Military Farm in 1970. As a model sent-down youth and a devoted wife, she was promoted but gave up the opportunity to move to the cities so she could be reunited with her husband and comrades. On the very day of her delivery, she still toiled at the farm's pig stalls with her husband. Everything seemed fine until the day of delivery when a terrible medical accident took her life. After giving birth to a healthy baby boy at 3:37 pm on 12 November 1978, Qu suffered a hemorrhage and bleeding shock as the placenta failed to fall on time. The doctor of the No.7 Military Farm, Chen Guoquan, was not at home. When Qu's husband found him, he lay drunken at the wedding banquet for the daughter of the farm's vice-director. After hours of arduous labor, the exhausted Qu gave birth to a healthy boy. But the placentae failed to come out and Qu's bleeding did not stop. The half-sober doctor was unable to recognize the seriousness of this typical case of post-partum hemorrhage. When he realized the fatal risk hours later, it was already seven in the evening. Only then did the doctor realized that his ill-equipped farm clinic could not conduct blood transfusion. Though her colleagues quickly rushed her to the central clinic of the Olive Bank

[487] *SHZQJSL*, pp. 219-220.

Military Farm, she died on the ferry at the young age of 24. Upon hearing her death, Qu's husband immediately fainted and did not wake up until the next day.[488]

Qu Linxian was a household name in the Olive Bank Farm. In the eyes of her colleagues, her death was due to her exemplary devotion to the cause of the sent-down policy and her family. A diligent worker, Qu was promoted to squad leader and then platoon leader. In 1974, based on her outstanding performance, she was selected to study at the Qujing Hydropower Polytechnic School and offered a coveted job at the Hydraulic Bureau of Qujin, the capital city of Sipsangpana. But under the strict work-allocation system, such a life-changing opportunity meant the permanent separation from her boyfriend, who still worked at the Olive Bank Farm. To everyone's surprise, Qu volunteered to return to the military farm as a hydraulic technician in the No. 1 farm and married her boyfriend. She subsequently reunited with her husband in the No. 7 Farm, the newest and the least well-equipped branch of the Oliver Bank Farm system, attending on the vegetable fields. Qu's death was a sober reminder to the rest of the sent-down youths that the state could not provide even the minimum guarantee for the safety of its most devoted soldiers and their families. What was the point of all the personal sacrifice, if death was the return to their sacrifice?

In Qu Linxian's funeral speech composed collectively by the sent-down youths of the 7th Branch of the Oliver Bank Farm, her coworkers recalled her sacrifice for the farm and the family and conveyed their deep respect:

> "People say that you have a lofty spirit. Every one of us has seen this. From 1974 to 1976, what has happened to the thoughts of young people in our fall? Those more cynical have already forgotten you; those who shared your spirit also say you will leave and never come back. But you never forgot us, your co-workers. You have settled your home here, at the bank of the Langcang River, so lightly, as if you were coming back to your parents' home or visited a new place. People praise you for the pure love of a farm worker with the lofty spirit of ordinary Chinese youth. We say your action was more than about a youth's value of love.

[488] *Ibid*, pp. 462-463.

> It was the decisive expression of your lofty ideals."[489] The ending of the speech contains the promise of Qu's cohort to raise her motherless child. "Comrade Qu Linxian, please rest in peace. Your child is also our child, our class' collective child. We will nourish and bring him up like our children. We will tell him how her mother had spent the prime of her youth in the countryside. We will tell him that his mother was a good worker, a good mother, and a proud member of the Communist Youth League." [490]

The class-solidarity championed in the funeral speech further boosted the rebellious spirits of youths from Shanghai and other cities in Sipsangpana military farms. They started to organize strikes, petitions and, mass protests in a bid for their return to the cities. On October 18, at the Jinghong Military Farm, Shanghainese sent-down youths posted the first Big Character Poster, laying down the real grievances of the remaining youths, who had become disillusioned, and desperate. The obsession with home return was a sharp contrast to Qu's continued faith in the ideals of "new peasant." The speech not only recognized Qu's selfless devotion to the nation, the family, and the community, it also marked the lost dreams of the sent-down youths. Qu's premature death was symbolic of the sent-down movement, as it was called into question by the majority. As such, the collective voice of the sent-down youth in the No.7 Olive Bank Farm was the affirmation of the utopian inspired by the Maoist ideal society but merely the praise of Qu's everyday virtue.

When the news of Qu's death reached the farm, the restless sent-down youth community moved into action. For many Shanghainese sent-down youths in Yunnan, Qu Linxian was the perfect victim of the sent-down policy as a bankrupted project. Her fate could be the fate of any young worker, even if they had performed roles by the Maoist ideal. In the recollection of Tan Jintang, then a worker in the 7th Farm, the night marked a moment of reckoning for all the sent-down youths and galvanized a series of actions:

> "At midnight, we were all sleepless. When we could not fall asleep, we woke up and gathered around. Gradually, the entire brigade was gathered, talking about the death of our

[489] *Ibid*, pp. 465
[490] *Ibid*, pp. 465

> sister Qu Linxian. In our conversations, we learned about what happened. First, there was a grievance. Then it developed into a rage. There was this thought: 'Dr. Chen Guoquan sacrificed the life of Linxian for a wedding banquet! And Lixian died in excruciating pain!' The event was unfortunate and woeful. Who knows that this fate would not befall on anybody? Comrade Qu's death was a case of the senseless killing due to the negligence of medical personnel. What's more, the incident epitomized in the strongest terms our decade of suffering in the military farm!"[491]

The death of Qu Linxian coincided with a critical moment in the sent-down movement in Yunnan when the sent-down youths in Sipsangpana were launching strikes, petitions, and demonstrations. Several thousand of sent-youth, mostly Shanghainese, carried Qu's body in protest of the poor medical conditions and the unjust fate suffered by one of their star co-workers.[492]A memorable episode in the unfolding Zhiqing protest in Yunnan, Qu's story symbolized an ultimate failure for the state-imposed family sacrifice in the 1970s.

Epilogue: Domesticating the Revolution in the 1970s

In 1973, while the class struggle and world revolution were still the dominant voice in official media, Hua Zhongmin quietly returned to the folk wisdom about suffering, happiness, and family welfare. In his letter to his daughter Xiuzhen on 25 April, he discussed the crisis of their household economy in the contexts of the family's history since 1949. A member of the worker's propaganda team, Hua was so steeped in the "eating bitterness" techniques that he readily applied the revolutionary vocabulary to his own family's experience in the letter to Lifang:

> "Our household economy after 1949 was relatively well-off. In a decade, however, we had a succession of children. In addition to the financial burden to support them, we had to send off two daughters to the countryside. Our life quality is getting worse every day. What about our two daughters? They embraced the revolution and toiled on the rice paddings. They were also eating bitterness. Indeed, we are all eating "bitterness." But this bitterness is not like the bitterness of the old society when we underwent the cruel exploitation of landlords and

[491] *Ibid*, pp. 466

[492] Shi Weiming and He Lan, *Zhiqing beiwanglu: jianglai lishi jiyizhongde shengchan jianshe bingtuan* (Zhiqing Memorandum The Production and Construction Corps), Beijing: Zhongguo shehuikexuie chubanshe 1999, p. 410

> capitalists. There were now neither landlords nor capitalists. Since the proletariat is in power, our hard work serves to construct socialism and support the world revolution. We taste bitterness today, so tomorrow, we will enjoy blessing (*xiangfu*). Happiness begins where bitterness ends (*kujin ganlai*)." [493]

Hua's narrative of household economy nicely captured the grassroots historical narrative that is this dissertation's focus: the post-war economic stabilization and family-building in the 1950s; the send-down movement as an extension of the post-Leap crisis; the costs of the policy on urban families in the early 1970s. Even his prediction of the household economy turned out to be the reality: his family finance did improve after 1973, as we have discussed earlier. Implicit in this discourse was also the reasoning of Maoist birth control, since "too many children" were the beginning of all woes. The story was notably devoid of all revolutionary tropes except "eating bitterness," which ran throughout the Hua family letters in the 1970s.

However, the meaning of bitterness was no longer coherent with the socialist campaign for class struggles for working families like the Huas. In the 1950s and the early 1960s, as we have discussed in earlier chapters, the ideological technique of "eating bitterness" proved a successful measure for revolutionary mobilization. Urban workers could attribute their historical sufferings to the old ruling classes and their stable livelihood to the Party. In 1973, even as the Shanghai Revolutionary Committee organized year-round study sessions for workers to engage in the criticism of Lin Biao and Confucius[494], ordinary workers like Hua Zhongmin began to express their theory and techniques of everyday life. They persuaded themselves that the current bitterness was the only temporary price they pay for the future happiness of their family.

[493] Hua Zhongmin to Hua Xiuzhen, 25 September 1973.
[494] Shanghai qunzhong wenhua zhi (Gazetteer of Popular Culture in Shanghai), Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe, 1999, p. 544

Hua's interpretation of material deprivation restored the traditional way that the Chinese had always understood sacrifice and happiness. In the past, people have always understood life as a bitter struggle through the popular Buddhism concept of *Ku* (Sanskrit: *Duhkha*). In the Chinese folk interpretation of the Buddhist worldview, suffering was the vehicle for future happiness. In today's Buddhist proselyting, "bitterness ends where sweetness begins" is still the standard way to introduce lay people to the fundamental concepts of Ku (*Dukha)*.[495] In their creative cross-cultural appropriation, early Communists translated the secularized Christian vocabulary of European Communism into the familiar concept of *Ku*.[496] In the revolutionary mobilization in rural north China, the telling bitterness meetings (*sukuhui*), during which the peasants attributed their sufferings to concrete or imagined class enemies rather than their own bad karma, played a pivotal role in making the peasants into a collective political subject. [497] This model of political awakening based on a narrative of bitterness once successfully inspired the urban working class in Shanghai in the 1950s. By the 1970s, they were turned into a political liability, as the youths and their families either returned to an earlier conceptual framework or traced their bitterness to the state's policy failures.

The return to *Ku* as personal suffering marked the ebbing tide of the Communist Revolution. At the heydays of the revolutionary austerity, ordinary workers like Hua used to take sufferings as

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[495] Abbot Sheng Yan, *Fojiao rumen* (Introduction to Buddhism), Taipei: Dharma Drum Publishing House, p.283

[496] Li Fangchun, "Cong 'Les Damnes' dao Shoukuderen: Guojige shouju hanyi de lishi yanbian" (From the Damned to the Sufferer: The Historical Evolution of the First Line of the Internationale), *Open Times*, 2008, No.4, pp. 31-40

[497] Gu Yuhua and Sun Liping, Suku: Yizhong nongmin guannian xingcheng de Zhongjie jizhi (Telling Bitterness: The Mediating Mechanism in Peasants' Conceptualization of the State), *Zhongguo xueshu* (The Chinese Academy), 2002, No. 12, pp. 49-65.

both repayment for the debts to the Party and an investment for a future of Communist salvation. Through the techniques of "telling bitterness," the Communist Party inaugurated class struggle as the new struggle and substituted Communism for religious salvation in its early years. For decades, the understanding of *Ku* (*Dukha*) as class struggle and collective sufferings for Communism maintained the link between everyday life experience and the political project of Communism.[498] However, the unsustainable sacrifice of the sent-down movement turned ordinary urban families back to this folk wisdom. While urban families still invested meaning in suffering, the end was no longer a Communist future but the good material life of the family. Instead of creating a Communist new man, the sent-down policy reinforced the popular conception of family happiness as the most important thing in life.

[498] Ann Angnost, *A National Past Time: Narrative, Representation, and Power in Modern China*, Durham, SC.: Duke University Press, 1997, pp. 4-6

Chapter Four

A Bitter Homecoming: Family Strategies and Everyday Politics in Shanghai, 1975-1982

The sultry summer of 1978 must be one of the most eventful in the post-1949 China. While the Cultural Revolution had officially pronounced ended, the Hua Guofeng's government had yet to give a clear signal of the way ahead amid power struggles. Plagued by internal political tension and struggles, the Hua Guofeng years were teeming with uncertainty as newly promoted reformers, rehabilitated cadres, and the stake-holders of the Cultural Revolution order contended for power. In family-state relations, the most significant change has been the return of high-rank cadres, intellectuals, and former capitalists from political exile. The process that started in the last days of Mao became institutionalized after the fall of the Gang of Four. But for ordinary urban families, there was still little change, since the sent-down movement was still ongoing. Disaffection was building up, but the prospect of the family reunion was still far away.

Meanwhile, literary works and private memoirs began to take stock of the damage the Cultural Revolution had on family life in 1978. On August 11, *Wenhuibao*, Shanghai's most widely-read paper, published in full the short story *Scar* by Lu Xinhua, a first-year student of Chinese Language and Literature at Fudan University. In plain language and a revolutionary style, the story features a daughter of a cadre family's overdue reunion with her mother in the aftermath of the Cultural Revolution. The only child of a school headmistress, the heroine sincerely believed in the false accusation made against her mother, disavowed all her connections with the family, and volunteered go to rural Heilongjiang in 1969. When she finally came back to Shanghai upon hearing of her mother's rehabilitation in January 1978, she missed the final chance to see her, as the mother had succumbed to the physical abuse suffered during the Revolution. Fortunately, her

boyfriend of similar background had accompanied her mother for the last few days of her life. In the ending scene, the heroine and her boyfriend sublimated their grief into a revolutionary zeal for the future of the nation.[499] Despite the scars of the Cultural Revolution years, the children of cadres and old elites saw a bright revolutionary future ahead.

The *Scar* was an instant success among the *Wenhuibao* readers, as its traumatic story resonated across various levels of intellectual and political elites. Ma Da, the editor of *Wenhuibao*, recalled the emotional impacts he felt when reading the draft. As an intellectual and a Party cadre, Ma was labeled as a traitor and persecuted severely in 1967. His 14-years old daughter stood by her father, and bravely defended him in the "political struggle session." Like the heroine of the *Scar* story, she went to work in a military farm in Heilongjiang and returned in 1977. The *Scar* story brought the bitter memory of persecution and family warmth to life. After giving it some thought, Ma recommended the story for publication.[500] His feelings reflected the widely-shared sentiments of family reunion among the persecuted cadres and intellectuals. The mailing office of *Wenhuibao* received more than 2,000 letters in two months, overwhelmingly approving the story[501]. In due course, the *Scar* would enter the cannons of contemporary Chinese literature as the first work of the "scar" genre.

At about the same time, *What if I Were for Real*, a six-scene play written by an established playwright, Sha Yexin, was performed in a small makeshift theatre in a Shanghai factory. The drama tells the aftermath of the Cultural Revolution from ordinary people's perspectives. In the

[499] Lu Xinhua, "Shangheng" (Scar), *Wenhuibao,* 11 August 1978, p.4

[500] Ma Da, *Ma Da Zishu: Ban shengya 60 nian* (Sixty Years as a Newspaperman: An Autobiography of Ma Da), Shanghai: Wenhui chubanshe, 2004, pp. 64-65

[501] Ibid, p. 66.

opening scene, the hero, a sent-down youth of average working class background, relates his desperation in front of a theatre. Separated from his pregnant fiancée in the city, he was in a frenzy to find a way to return home. Mistaking him for the visiting son of a general in Beijing, the theatre managers greeted him with favors, pecks, bribery, and invitations. At one point, a local cadre even tried to marry his daughter to the promising princeling from Beijing. In the end, the young man was arrested and sent to jail, once his true identity was revealed. His last word before the trial was, "What if I was for real?"[502] While the performance was deliberately kept low-profile for fear of its political repercussions, the premiere was an instantaneous success. However, the biting social critique of the corruption at the grassroots bureaucracy soon alarmed the Party's leadership. It was officially suspended for performance due to "bad political influence" by none other than Hu Yaobang, the top liberal and the Head of the Propaganda Department, though Hu was sympathetic of the hero and protective of the playwright.[503]

The two stories speak to two different experiences of Chinese families in the aftermath of the Cultural Revolution. They relate to the experiences of two classes: the rehabilitated cadres and intellectuals and the ordinary people. The scar genre is typical of the high and mid-rank cadres' family experience, whose family suffering consisted in the political persecution and betrayal during the early years of the Cultural Revolution. By 1978, as the old elites were rehabilitated, there were little obstacles for their children to return to cities and hope for a better future. This narrative evoked the shared memory of Chinese elites and a minority of the people who suffered

[502] Sha Yexin, "Jia ru woshi zhende" (What if I Were for Real), in Sha Yexin Xiju jingping ji (Selected Plays of Sha Yexin), Hong Kong: Tianyuan Books, 2013 (1978), pp. 99-123.

[503] Sheng Ping, Wang Sipeng, *Hu Yaobang Nianpu ziliao changbian* (Extended Chronicles of Hu Yaobang), Hong Kong: Times International Publishing House, 2005, p. 158.

during the early phase of the Cultural Revolution. A prelude to the trial of the Gang of Four, the story played a decisive role both in the "rectification" narrative of the post-Revolution transition by vindicating the return to the "norm" of socialist legality and political justice.[504]

The story of *What if I Were for Real*, on the other hand, presents the post-Revolution everyday experience of ordinary families, especially those who had difficulty negotiating with the cold bureaucratic machinery. Unlike the cadres and intellectual elites, the children of the average working-class suffered relatively less political persecution during the Cultural Revolution. Their moments of bitter suffering began in the later phase of the Cultural Revolution, especially during the family separations of the sent-down movement and the subsequent emotional and economic crisis of the family. Their moment of political awakening was in the struggle to reunite the family when their legitimate effort to bring their children and loved ones back home came up against official corruption, "back doors," and other institutional obstacles. Urban youths and their families who lacked access to the Communist state and its bureaucratic machinery would find the story appealing to their personal experiences. However, even top Party liberals like Hu Yaobang lacked the stomach to fully embrace its biting cynicism and subversive undertones.

The dominant narrative of the post-Cultural Revolution urban family life put emphasis on the rehabilitated intellectual elites. Having lived through the prosecution of the Cultural Revolution, they typically focused on the inhumane treatment. Some saw a silver lining in post-Mao era of reform and opening, while others completed repudiated the Chinese Communist Party. The misery of the Cultural Revolution years reached the world via the émigré writers. In the English language literary scene, the bestselling stories of the Cultural Revolution and its aftermaths, by authors such

[504] Alexander C. Cook, *The Cultural Revolution on Trial: Mao and the Gang of Four*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016.

as Cheng Nien, Ningkun Wu, and Rong Chang's[505], all featured members of the elites and their sufferings.[506] In the scholarly literature of recent history, the most detailed study of personal experience likewise focuses on the elites. Alexander Cook's *Revolution on Trial*, focuses on the experience of intellectual elites, such as Ji Xianling, Yang Jiang, and Dai Houying, who coped with the aftermaths of their bitter experiences after the end of the Cultural Revolution with their narratives.[507] Joseph Esherick's story of the Ye family story likewise revolves around the experience of a leading elite family after the Cultural Revolution.[508] The heart-wrenching accounts of the sufferings and the reflections of the elites offer valuable insights into the political brutality of the Cultural Revolution, but they did not exactly capture the moods among ordinary families who did not directly participate in the political struggles.

What if the suppressed voice of average working families is the story that most people were eager to tell and share? What if political cynicism, rather than hope for a new political future, was the dominant sentiment among the urban reading public? According to an internal report submitted by *Wenhuibao* to the CCP Shanghai Department of Propaganda, the cynical were in the majority. After analyzing 422 submissions to the papers' most widely read short story column, the editorial office found that 177 of the 325 readable drafts were sarcastic pieces about the returned "old

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[505] Cheng Nien, *Life and Death in Shanghai*, Greenwich, CT: Diane Books, 1986; Jung Chang, *Wild Swans: The Daughters of China*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 1999; Ningkun Wu, *A Single Tear*, New York: Back Bay Press, 1994 (reprint).

[506] All these authors came from elite backgrounds and suffered from their high social and cultural status during the Cultural Revolution. Cheng Nien was the old elites of pre-liberation Shanghai. Ningkun Wu was a university professor at Beijing. Jung Chang was the daughter of the Director of the Department of Propaganda of Sichuan Province.

[507] Alexander C. Cook, *The Cultural Revolution on Trial: Mao and the Gang of Four*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016.

[508] Joseph W. Esherick, *Ancestral Leaves: A Family Journey through Chinese History*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA.: University of California Press, 2011, pp. 278-317.

cadres", compared with only 93 stories on the trauma of the Cultural Revolution. In these critical stories, the typical cadres "pursued material comforts, competed for public housing, and busied themselves with their children's future career"[509]. In "Wake Up, Comrade," the rehabilitated Director of the Public Security behaved in the same way as the cadres in *What If,* as he devoted all time and energy to securing high positions and arranging his daughter's work and marriage.[510]

Even if popular fictive narratives like *What if I Were for Real* exaggerates the degree of bureaucratic corruption on the ground[511], the cynicism and disillusionment these stories embody did reveal a potent social sentiment among the non-elite families in the late 1970s. Since the likely writers and readers of popular literature in the 1970s and early 1980s were either the sent-down youths or their siblings, it is worthwhile to study how divergent family history of reunion might have informed this prevailing cynicism and distrust of the public authority. Their stories raise the question of the 1979 transition in the history of urban families. What did the end of the Maoist era mean for urban families torn apart by the revolutionary austerity?

This chapter focuses on the family strategies and feelings of ordinary Shanghai families in their effort to achieve reunion in the late 1970s and early 1980s. As the Cultural Revolution came to an end, the sent-down youths returned to Shanghai through various institutional and personal means. Drawing on family letters and archival sources, I shall focus on the micro-level interactions

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[509] *Sixiang Dongxiang* (Thoughts Monitor) No. 64, 30 November 1979, SMA A22-4-121

[510] Ibid.

[511] On September 12, 1979, the Department of Propaganda received a letter denouncing the story of the *What If I Were for Real* as a work of "class enemy" that misrepresented the Communist Party cadres and the sent-down youths. In this letter, a anonymous author argues that the "What if" story provides an unnecessary pessimistic portrayal of most sent-down youths, citing his observations on the youths in a military farm in the Shanghai countryside. The author also urges the Propaganda Department to ban the play for its "bad influences" among some minority of the youths. See *Sixiang Dongxiang* (Thoughts Monitor) No. 61, September 16, 1979, SMA A22-4-121, pp. 1-2.

between families and grassroots bureaucracy, foregrounding the strategies of four Shanghainese families and the work replacement system at a typical Shanghai factory in 1978-1979. The four case studies in chapter focus on three sent-down youth from distinctive class backgrounds and a family of mid-aged professionals separated by the Cultural Revolution. By examining the ways these families dealt with the reunion process in the contexts of their family lives and the historical forces of post-Mao China, the chapter explores the widespread sympathy behind the *What If* story and the political sentiments of ordinary families in post-revolutionary Shanghai. Also, this chapter will shed light on the different emotional experiences of family separation and reunion across class and professional backgrounds.

By analyzing these institutional processes and individualized channels of work transfer to Shanghai, I argue that the process of family reunion marks a turning point in family-state relations in socialist China. During this process, urban families mobilized personal resources, deployed individual techniques, negotiated family strategies, and joined protests movements in the currents of momentous political transformations. They collectively ended rustication as a national strategy, forcing the state to make concessions on replacement policy and the labor markets. The bitter experience with the bureaucracy turned urban families away from politics and reinforced their faith in family ties. In contrast to the revival narrative in the trauma genre, the widespread disillusionment destroyed the Communist ideology in urban China and led to pervasive cynicism. In this sense, the reunion process completed the ideological demobilization of the Communist Revolution in the late 1970s. It set the stage for the new ideology of *xiaokang* in the early 1980s.

The Institutional Procedures of Political Demobilization

The political climate of the Hua Guofeng era is crucial for understanding the end of the sent-down movement and the Communist Revolution in China. Broadly conceived, the sent-down movement was the last major project of Mao's Cultural Revolution. In 1976-1979, Mao's doctrine of Communist self-cultivation and class solidarity could still hold after the downfall of the Gang of the Four, as Hua Guofeng affirmed his absolute obedience to Mao's teachings in the doctrine labelled as two "whatevers"[512], which made him the target of Party theoreticians in the ideological struggle in early 1978[513]. Despite the extreme material difficulties of sent-down life and the pains of family separation, Hua's adherence to "whatever" made the idea of ending the sent-down youths program unthinkable. In July 1978, when Beijing reevaluated the sent-down policy, the Zhiqing (Sent-down Youths) Office of the State Council allowed more room for factory hiring the rusticated youths while affirming the general direction of the plan.[514] Even as news reports of protests accumulated daily, the Zhiqing Conference held in November to December 1978 still upheld the general policy guidance without ordering a general demobilization.[515]

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[512] The Two "Whatevers" originated in a policy guideline Hua Guofeng announced on the front page of *People's Daily* on February 7, 1977: *"*We will resolutely uphold whatever policy decisions Chairman Mao made, and unswervingly follow whatever instructions Chairman Mao gave". In this dissertation, I conditionally accept the view that Hua was more committed to Maoist ideology and ideological consistency of post-Mao reforms than Deng, who was basically a pragmatists. Recent research has questioned the practical importance of this statement and given Hua more credit for the reform. The latest research depicts Hua and Deng as basic in agreement in critical issues and attributes Hua's reputation to a myth created in the reform era. see: Frederick C. Teiwes and Warren Sun, "China's New Economic Policy under Hua Guofeng: Party Consensus and Party Myths, *The China Journal*, no. 66 (July 2011), 1-23.

[513] Xiao Donglian, *Lishi de zhuangui: boluan fanzheng Dao gaige kaifang* (A Turning Point of History: From Rectification to the Reform and Opening), Zhongguo Renmin Gongheguo shi vol. 10 (History of the PRC), Chinese University Press, 2009, pp. 20-22.

[514] Gu Hongzhang, Zhongguo zhishi Qingnian shangshan xiaxiang dashiji (Chronicles of the Events of the Sent-down Movement in China), Beijing: People's Daily Press, p. 141.

[515] Xiao Donglian, *Lishi de zhuangui: boluan fanzheng Dao gaige kaifang,* p. 156.

The sent-down policy might have delayed a fundamental crisis in the late 1970s if it still broadly adhered to the equalization principle as in the early 1970s. However, since the mid-1970s, the "back doors" gradually became the norm. Since the old cadres returned to positions of power, they tightened their grip on channels of upward mobility and prioritized their children for coveted places in urban China. From enrolment to college to enlistment to the army, the opportunities for career advancement increasingly became the exclusive preserves for the children of this newly restored class. The situation was worse in the military farms than the rural countryside, where the rigid hierarchy of military bureaucracy left much to power maneuvering of the cadres. The cadres frequently solicited money, gifts, and even sexual services for the opportunity to return. [516]

The sense of injustice did not arise from cadre corruption alone. The chaotic demobilization process across different cohorts and regions also meant certain groups were disadvantaged. The graduating cohorts of 1969-1971 felt they were treated unjustly when they compared their fate to other groups, who only spent a brief time in Shanghai before they got a job in factories. [517]Some of the youths in the Shanghai countryside were unhappy that their peers in Shanghai had a pay raise in 1976. [518]Even those who got an exemption from the movement due to health problems were unhappy when they compared their situation at home with those sent-down youths who eventually landed a job at Shanghai factories.[519]

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[516] Liu Xiaomeng, *Zhongguo Zhiqing shi, 1965-1980* (History of Chinese Sent-down Youths), Beijing: Shehui kexue chubanshe, 2001, p. 556.

[517] Shanghai Office of Sent-down Youths, *Qingkuang fanying* (Situation Monitor) No. 43, 29 April 1976, B228-2-337

[518] Shanghai Office of Sent-down Youths, *Qingkuang fanying* (Situation Monitor) No. 37, 23 February 1976, B228-2-337

[519] Shanghai Office of Sent-down Youths, *Qingkuang fanying* (Situation Monitor) No. 39, 15 March 1976, B 228-2-337.

As the sense of injustice mounted, the more unscrupulous among the sent-down youths began to play foul with all available resources. Leveraging the tiniest crack in the policy, such as dismissal on medical grounds, those sent-down youths without family background began to find ways to return home, as just the cadres' children did earlier. Bribery and forgery became prevalent; in extreme cases, some even practiced self-immolation to secure a medical certificate.[520] Meanwhile, the local farm administration had little incentive to enforce strict surveillance and control if they met the production target. In the countryside, the village leaders happily let the sent-down youths leave since they had been long unhappy about sharing limited resources. In some cases, sympathetic local cadres would even assist fleeing youths in exchange of some gifts and favors.[521] As desertions and backdoors mounted, the sent-down youths community became increasingly restless: more people were thinking about collective actions, if not violence, as the ultimate solution.

In the fall of 1978, the national discontent and restlessness reached a threshold across several military farms with tens of thousands of sent-down youths participating in demonstrations and hunger strikes. The most well-planned protests were a group of young workers in the state rubber plantation of Sipsangbanna, Yunnan. Led by Ding Huiming, a sent-down youth from Shanghai, the protestors wrote two letters of petition to Deng Xiaoping. They organized a strike of 30,000 sent-down youths between September and November 1978 to secure a general demobilization of all sent-down youths in Sipsangbanna. Upon hearing the disappointing results of the Zhiqing Conference, the protestors escalated their action by sending petition teams to Beijing, launching

[520] Liu Xiaomang, *Zhongguo Zhiqing shi, 1965-1980* (History of Chinese Sent-down Youths), pp. 320-322.

[521] Michel Bonnin, *Génération perdue. Le Mouvement d'envoi des Jeunes Instruits à la Campagne en Chine, 1968-1980,* Paris, Éditions de l'École des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, 2004, pp. 367-368

hunger strikes at the plantation in November 1978, and blocking the railways in Shanghai in January 1979.[522] In response to the emergency, Beijing allowed the representatives to an audience with Vice-Premier Wang Zhen. They dispatched Zhao Fan, the vice head of the Zhiqing Office, to negotiate with the sent-down youths in Sipsangbanna.[523]

Almost simultaneously, Deng Xiaoping's year-long power struggle with Hua Guofeng had reached a pinnacle in December 1978. The political battles encompassed a range of policy issues in post-Mao China and centered on the handling of the Maoist legacy. For much of 1978, a team of ideologues close to Deng first articulated their strong opposition to the principles of "two whatever" and put forth "Practice was the only criteria for truth". They argued that every theory, including the Mao Zedong thought, must stand the test of practice to be truthful. On the Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Party Congress, the truth criteria carried the day. Some more liberal reformers like Hu Yaobang wanted to cement their success by advocating for more openness, democracy, and a thorough critique of Maoism on the theoretically-oriented meeting in February 1979. Their attempts fell through by the conclusion of the meeting, when Deng Xiaoping, faced with the strong pushback from the old cadres, instituted the "Four Cardinal Principles" to reaffirm the Party's commitment to socialism, proletarian dictatorship, the CCP leadership, Marx-Leninism and Mao Zedong thoughts. The balancing act was not meant as a return to Maoism. Rather, it served to create a more stable political environment for economic reform under a new reformist leadership. In 1981, Deng managed to replace Hua Guofeng with Hu Yangbang as the head of the Party with the support or acquiescence of the Party elders.[524]

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[522] Yang, Bin. "We want to go home: The Great Petition of Zhiqing: Xishuangbanna, Yunnan, 1978-1979", *The China Quarterly* 198 (2009), 401-403.

[523] Ibid, p. 405.

[524] Xiao Donglian, *Lishi de zhuangui: boluan fanzheng Dao gaige kaifang,* pp. 74-77

The movement of the Yunnan sent-down youths coincided with the struggle at the top of Party leadership. The division at the top left a rare space for all sorts of democratic activists, which in turn facilitated Deng's decisive victory against Hua Guofeng in early 1979. From November 1978 to February 1979, thousands of active residents of Beijing participated in the battle for public opinion by posting their "Big Character Posters" on the "Democracy Wall" along Beijing's Xidan Street and distributing their ideas through samizdat underground journals. While several the activists were staunch supporters of Maoism, the majority were in support of a more radical position than Deng in calling for a more thorough critique of the Maoist doctrine. Deng allowed the Wall to function without restriction until the National Congress vindicated his victory and abandoned it soon later. On 29 March 1979, Wei Jingsheng, one of the most radical petitioners and an advocate for outright democratization, was arrested. A wave of arrests followed suit, and the democracy movement was over. [525] The window of the political opening was briefly enough, but it was just long enough for the Yunnan sent-down youths to achieve their limited aims.

Although the elites had a different experience of the post-Mao transition, the family problems of the Zhiqing must have struck some members of the political elites in the late 1970s who had similar experiences. Many of the difficulties the sent-down youths and their families faced were like Deng Xiaoping's family separation in the early 1970s, as we have discussed in Chapter Three. Zhao Fan, the Vice Minister responsible for handling the mass petition in Sipsangpana, was moved to tears by the sight of the kneeling youths and their harsh living conditions. He decided to side with the students in their negotiation with Beijing.[526]

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[525] Maurice Meisner, *Mao's China and After: A History of People's Republic of China*, New York: Free Press, 2000 (3rd edition), p. 436

[526] Zhao Fan, Yi Zheng Tu (A Memoir of My Revolutionary Life), Beijing: Zhongguo nongye chubanshe, 2000, pp. 125-126

In Beijing, the sent-down youths protest coincided with Deng's winning battle against the ideological hardliners. there is no evidence that Deng actively engaged in the resolution of the sent-down youths policies in 1978, he did suggest that the successful resolution of the sent-down youths' grievances and protests depends on urban job creation during a meeting with top ideologues Hu Qiaomu and Deng Liqun. The first thing to be done, Deng commented, was to stop the movement and create "a new economic space" by finding employment opportunities both inside and outside the state and collective enterprises, even though these measured would certainly revive the market economy and run counter to orthodox socialist principles.[527]

The new job creating strategy unfolded as part and parcel of the economic deregulation in the direction of Deng's signature "experimental" approach. In 1978, some local governments had already carved out new channels of urban employment under Deng's call for economic reform. From 1978 onwards, many cities had set up "Labor Service Companies" (*laodong fuwu gongsi*), a more flexible labor assignment system that organized surplus labor to take temporary works outside the formal state sectors, notably in the urban collective sector. By the end of 1979, there were already 831 Labor Service Companies nationwide, providing 1.6 million jobs to unemployed urban youths.[528] When the national employment situation eventually stabilized in the mid-1980s, the Labor Service Companies has allocated 6 million workers to 210,000 collective units, and the new urban household sector contained absorbed another 4 million.[529]

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[527] Zhang Ganbing, *Dazhuanzhe de ririyeye* (Chronicles of The Great Turning Point) vol.1, Beijing: Zhongguo jingji chubanshe, 1998, p. 171

[528] Laodong fuwu gongsi fazhankuai (Labor Service Companies are Developing Fast), *Laodong gongzuo* (Labor Work), August 1980, p. 13

[529] Hua Yingchang, "Renzhen yanjiu laodong jiuye de xinxingshi" (Carefully Study the New Employment Situation) *Laodong Fuwu Tongxun* (Labor Service Communications), 1987, No. 1, p. 3.

The geopolitical situation also lent help to the sent-down youths' cause. While the sent-down youths in Yunnan geared up for a massive protest, Deng was planning the war with Vietnam. Though the Sipsangbanna state farms were not on the Chines side of the battlefield, they were adjacent to the Sino-Vietnamese frontiers. The height of the protests in Yunnan and Shanghai in December 1978 and January 1979 coincided with the propaganda preparations and military maneuvering before the war.[530] Prolonged sent-down youths protests could amount to a significant source of uncertainty for the war. As Yang Bin shows in his study of the Sipsangbanna protest, the geopolitical situation of early 1979 also restraint the options of the Party vis-à-vis the Zhiqing protesters, making Beijing readier for concession.[531] The political climate of 1978-1979 thus offered a unique chance for collective action of politically active groups like the sent-down youths protestors, who were politically savvy enough to harness the prevailing public opinion and sympathy of political leaders.

Although Deng's strategy to create new employment proved useful in the long-run, the government still had to rely on the replacement system to absorb a massive wave of sent-down youths in the short-run. For sent-down youths of ordinary family backgrounds, the replacement system was the surest and most just channel of return. Unlike dismissal on medical grounds, which left the returned youths nominally an unemployed dependent, a transfer through work replacement allowed the unemployed youth to take over a factory job left vacant by their returned or resigned parents. It ensured the returned youths a secure place in the tightly controlled urban workforce, thus making them productive labor for the household economy. In the eyes of ordinary Shanghai

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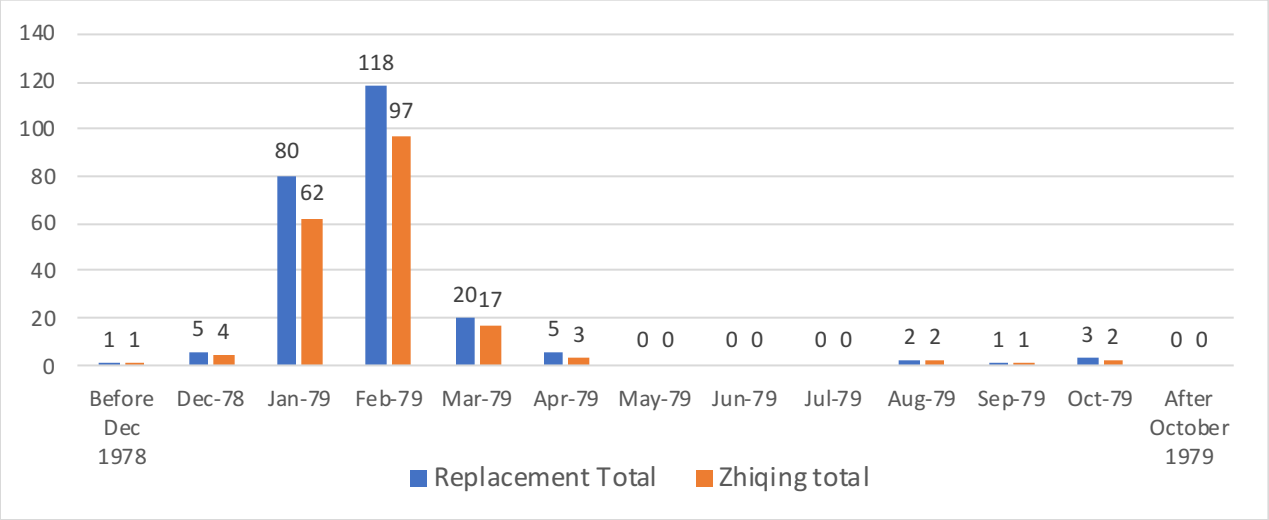
[530] Xiaoming Zhang, *Deng's Longest War: The Military Conflict between China and Vietnam*, Chaplin Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 2015, pp. 72-84.

[531] Yang, Bin, "We want to go home: The Great Petition of Zhiqing: Xishuangbanna, Yunnan, 1978-1979", p.415

youths in Yunnan, it was the "ideal option," better than dismissal on family and medical needs as well as transfer to a local farm.[532]After the suspension between 1968 and 1973, the replacement system gradually reopened, first in specific sectors experiencing acute labor shortage, such as geological survey teams, then for certain groups, such as those sent-down youths with special family needs in 1978. By November 1978, under the pressure of the nationwide social protests, the Shanghai Revolutionary Committee experimented with a gradual reopening of the replacement system. [533]

Figure 4.1 No. of Replacement Cases Approved in Shanghai Enamel Factories[534]



The Shanghai Enamel Company's registry of replacement cases indicates that there are 236 cases of replacement application between 1978 and 1980. All except one applicant were approved.[535] Of these 235 applications, 189 (80%) were sent-down youths. The first three

[532] Lu Rong, Jin Dalu (ed.) *SHZQJSL*, p. 425

[533] *Shanghai laodong zhi* (Shanghai Labor Gazetteer), p.160.

[534] "Shanghai Tangci baowen gongsi dingti shenhebiao"(Review Tables of Replacement Cases of Shanghai Enamel and Thermos Company), SMA B157-2-902.

[535] The failure is due to the applicant's marital status. The applicant, a sent-down youth in Jiangsu, could not take over his father's place as he had married locally so the household registration status can be not

applicants were between January and April 1978 but only approved on 23 December 1978, signaling a change of policy. This news likely led to a high tide of replacement in January and February 1979, each with 62 and 97 sent-down youths applicants. The climax of the movement was between February 5 and February 20, the Chinese New Year period, when 97 applicants were approved. On 13 February alone, there were 13 approvals.[536] After the spike in February, the number declined precipitously and returned to zero in May 1979. The events of the Xishuangbanna and the policy compromise made in late January and early February protest made a mark on the Enamel Company's decisions. The principle of leniency was already in force in January, before the Shanghai Sent-down Youths Employment Conference on May 28 and June 3 Conference formally endorsed a systemic approach to arranging the employment of returned youths.[537]

The family strategies in the replacement application also warranted some consideration. Of the 236 cases, mother-daughter and mother-son replacement each account for 21 and 37 cases, whereas father-daughter and father-son replacement account for 74 and 104, respectively. This round of replacement changed the gender ration of the 235 workers from 58:178 to 95: 141, a shift towards gender equality of the workforce. But if we suppose that the gender ratio of families in any given factory, then there is still a strong preference to provide the replacement with the opportunity to sons rather than daughters when there is only a single quota replacement per each working family. The pattern of the strategy was the same among the sent-down youths and other applicants. Among the 189 sent-down youths application cases, mother-daughter, mother-son,

changed to Shanghai. See "Shanghai Tangci baowen gongsi dingti shenhebiao" (Review Tables of Replacement Cases of Shanghai Enamel and Thermos Company), SMA B157-2-902, p.87

[536] Shanghai Tangci baowen gongyegongsi tuixiu dingti shenpi biaoge, SMA B157-2-902, pp. 1-236.

[537] Ibid.

father-daughter, and father-son patterns, each account for 15, 30, 60, and 84 cases.[538] In other words, only 40% of the working families passed down the place in the factory to daughters.

The age structure of the retirees also reveals the preference of the retirees. In 1979, the retirement age for female and male workers in state factories was 55 and 60, while workers can be allowed to retire early, depending on their health conditions. In the normal scenario, both male and female workers likely retire close to the retirement age. But among the 189 cases of sent-down youths replacement, the average of retired mothers and fathers were only 49 and 58, respectively. Such abnormality means workers in the enamel factories likely all conditioned their retirement on the chance of their children's replacement. Both female and male workers were prepared to retire early to pass down their place to their children. But the female workers tended to retire even before they reached the age of fifty. This pattern of early retirement reflected a family strategy to protect earnings since their retirement meant a lesser loss for family finance since they tended to enter the workforce later and earn less than their husbands.

The examination of the replacement review process for replacement indicates radical changes in the procedure. As discussed in chapter two, the work replacement system in the 1960s involves a complicated review process. In a typical review process, the applicants must submit a medical examination report, a school report, and sometimes even a report of the neighborhood Party organization, along with a detailed application form. The review process went through the factory to the company, and the district-level Labor Bureau typically took from two weeks to two months to complete. The approval rates could be as low as 50% in the work units affiliated with the Shanghai First Commerce Bureau in 1939-1941, before the institutions were phased out two years

[538] Based on my calculation of all the instances of replacement in Shanghai Enamel and Thermos Company, SMA B157-2-902.

into the Cultural Revolution.[539] When the replacement policy returned in December 1978, a simple application form with the information of the parents and children replaced the complicated paperwork of the 1960s. During the high tide of retirement and replacement at the beginning of 1979, if both the parents and children fit the policy description, the review process in Shanghai Enamel Company could be shortened to a few days, before again extending to a few months later in 1979.[540] In other words, while the replacement policy remained embedded in a tight system of labor-management and control in the 1960s. it has become a political measure to appease the troubled youths and their children in 1979.

The 189 returned sent-down youths of the Shanghai Enamel and Thermos Factories were among the most fortunate of the 303, 000 Shanghai sent-down youths who returned to take a job in the state-run factories and service sector via the replacement system in 1979. The replacement schedule of the Enamel and Thermos Factories corresponded closely with the overall pattern in Shanghai. From January to February, total replacement rose from 114,000 to over 200,000 and then declined precipitously to normal levels.[541] However, not everyone was so fortunate to get a job through this standard procedure. The chance of replacement depended solely on the work status of their parents and the decisions of the family. Should the families have no state-sector jobs, the returned youths could be unemployed or allocated to collectively neighborhood workshop, where wage and welfare were barely sufficient to cover their livelihood.

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[539] See Chapter Two for analysis of replacement situation in 1966-1968. C.f. “Shanghai diyishangyeju guanyu laorubingcan zhigong tuixiu siwang de laiwan Xinjian (Letter Exchanges Concerning the Replacement and Death of Old, Sick, and Weak Workers under the Shanghai Bureau of Commerce," B123-8-107, pp.1-50

[540] Shanghai Tangci baowen gongyegongsi tuixiu dingti shenpi biaoge, pp. 92-93

[541] *Shanghai Laodong Zhi* (Shanghai Labor Gazetteer), Shanghai: Shanghai Shehuikexue chubanshe, 1998, p. 257

While replacement represented the most important way for a family reunion, there were other institutional channels, namely, work transfer and college entrance, for the sent-down youths to return to large cities like Shanghai. Work transfer was the process that a worker transferred his or her work from one locality and work unit to another. The transfer can be done in two ways before the labor regulation reform in the early 1980s. Either the applicant found someone willing to swap their work units and household registration status, or the applicant sought a transfer to another department of the same work unit in a different location. The former was the safer path, but Shanghainese workers willing to move to other locations were understandably few. The latter was as much a matter of luck as bureaucratic intrigues. Many sent-down youths, who had moved to the urban centers from the countryside before 1979, could only rely on this channel for their return to Shanghai since they were no longer eligible for replacement. Work transfer was also the only option for other couples who were separated by the political mobilization of the Cultural Revolution. In the case studies, we shall further discuss how the transfer system impacted the everyday life of families suffering from separation.

The college entrance was also an uncertain and tortuous road for a family reunion. Before 1977, college entrance required endorsement from the grassroots levels, such as factories or communes, as well as approval from the educational bureaucracy.[542] After 1977, the national college entrance examination replaces the recommendation system as the only path to university. The chance of entrance was slim: the passing rates in 1977, 1978, and 1979 had been remained constant around 5-6%, and the sent-down youths applicants had a distinct disadvantage in terms of academic preparation.[543] For sent-down youths from Shanghai and Beijing, college entrance

[542] Yang Xuewei, *Zhongguo Wukaoshi lunxu* (A Study on the History of College Entrance Examination in China), Wuhan: Hubei jiaoyu chubanshe, 2000, pp. 145-147
[543] Ibid.

offers a desirable way for the sent-down youths to return home, though the prospect of family reunion remained uncertain, since they could still be allocated to work units in other cities upon graduation under the national work assignment system.

Trauma and Institutional Process in a Cadres Family

The Wu family of Shanghai belonged to such a category. The mother of the family, Yu Limei, a director in the Shanghai Textile Bureau, was investigated as a "spy" in the early phase of the Cultural Revolution and sent to work in the May 7th Farms, the euphemistic term for the labor camp for the re-education of the mid-level cadres. The father, Wu Youren, volunteered to work in the Shanghai's "Little Third Front" Industrial Bureau in Anhui. When she returned from the camp in 1975 on medical grounds, her health was almost destroyed. She still held cadre's position in the Bureau but had to take many other family burdens, with an ailing younger brother, an old father to care for, and her husband was working in Anhui. Mdm. Yang took a long-term medical leave to take up a neighborhood assignment as the supervisor at the "Sunflower Courtyard," a neighborhood organization for the political education of school-age children based on the remnant of the Neighborhood Committee.[544] During the time of her long medical leave, she corresponded with a younger sister, a likewise mid-rank cadre who worked in Beijing and her eldest daughter, Wu Zhen, who worked as a sent-down youth in the Huangshan Tea Plantation in Anhui.[545]

In her exchanges with parents and younger sisters, Wu Zhen remained upbeat politically and seldom expressed concerns about the hardship in the Tea Plantation, even after the fall of the Gang of Four in 1976. As with all letters, this could reflect either a sense of political caution or a genuine

[544] Wang Bangzuo, *Juweihui yu shequ zhili: Chengshi juminweiyuanhui zuzhiyanjiu* (Resident Committee and Community Governance: An Organizational Study of Urban Resident Committee), Shanghai: Shanghai Renmin chubanshe, 2003, p. 159.

[545] Yu Limei to Wu Xia, Oct 15, 1975

optimism. Either way, she neither stated a strong opinion nor expressed the desire to return to the city, despite significant political transformations in 1978. It was not until 26 Dec 1978 that Zhen related to top political issues of the today in her reply to younger sister's comments on Tao Silang's commemorative article "A Letter Finally Sent" about her father Tao Zhu, a high-rank official who died amid the persecution in the early years of the Cultural Revolution:

"Dear sister, the *People's Daily* just published "A Letter Finally Sent Out" by Tao Silang. Having read this piece a while ago, I shared the same strong feelings as you! This article is beautiful. I read this piece over and over again and shed a lot of tears. The piece of reportage articulates her authentic voice and describes the crime of the Gang of Four committed in their persecution of the old cadres in such vivid detail. It is an excellent textbook for us. Its political and artistic standard is very high."[546]

At the end of the same letter, she cautiously referred to the Shanghai sent-down youths' ongoing protests but depicted them in a bleak light: "Shanghai youths caused a commotion a short while ago. Did the government address their grievances? I think there were a lot of hooligans who deliberately disturbed public order among the ranks of those so-called protestors!"[547]

It could be true that Wu Zhen wanted to stick to the Party's official policy on the sent-down movement by "settling permanently" in the countryside, but her preference for "orderly resolution" of the ongoing protests suggested she also expected a less confrontational end to the austerity. In identifying with Tao Silang's story, she brought up her family's suffering during the Cultural Revolution. The letter was then shown to her mother and most likely aroused bitter memories. At

[546] Wu Xia to Wu Lian, February 9, 1978

[547] Wu Xia to Wu Yang, December 26, 1978.

that time, the Wu family must have been aware of the replacement system experimented with many factories. In the return letter from Limei to Zhen, the mother suggested that Wu Zhen could return to Shanghai via replacement and related the story of her colleague who was in a similar condition:

> "Zhenzhen, I want you to get back to Shanghai by replacing me at my work unit. Your dad thinks so too. Every time I thought about frostbite, about the inflammation of your feet and hands, I felt so troubled inside! If you can replace me, your dad says he would also take a load off his mind. But I, as a cadre in the Textile Bureau, cannot let you replace me as a cadre. But you can come back as a worker. My colleague Zhou Ji has visited the office to demand Zhou Xiaoming (his boy who had worked in Heilongjiang for a decade) to replace Xu Jing (Zhou's wife and another persecuted cadre) as cadre. It would be an exception, and he has not succeeded yet. The Bureau recognizes that she was driven mad during the investigation. She can thus get all her medical expenses reimbursed, 20.59 yuan per month. I am also rehabilitated in October. People also say I got my chronic conditions due to investigation and should get my full salary all back. Xu Jing's body is in good health, but she developed psychiatric conditions. I developed all sorts of chronic conditions, though my mind remains stable."[548]

The Wu family's experience in the replacement process was rather commonplace. In February 1979, the family began to work on the replacement procedure in earnest. Limei heard from a conversation with her colleague in the general office that the replacement work in the textile industry would begin immediately after the Spring Festival break. The colleague told her that they should apply as soon as the replacement process started. Since every family was rushing to get their sent-down children back to Shanghai, the government would act to stop the "turmoil." The best strategy would be for the Wu family to get their daughters back to work in the factory first and try their luck in the College Entrance Examination of 1978[549]. The Wu family must have applied in the first instance, like other families, but it took a long time before the application went through the administration. In latter letter exchanges, we knew that Wu Zhen eventually made her way back to Shanghai and was granted a position in the Chemical Test Department in the Textile

[548] Zhou Limei to Wu Xia, January 1, 1979.

[549] Yu Limei to Wu Youren, February 2, 1979.

Bureau on 30 June 1979. In the letter to her husband, Limei reported that a large volume of applicants had delayed her daughter's case, but it eventually went through. "Our family was rather fortunate," she comments, since the office gave precedence to Zhen in job allocation. We thus placed her into the more technical department, rather than low-skilled shop floor, thanks to the chronic conditions I suffered during the Cultural Revolution."[550]

Cultural Revolution experience matters in the cadres' children's replacement. Although cadres generally could only place their sons and daughters to a trainee job on the shop floor, but the suffering during the Cultural Revolution entered the calculus. For the Wu family, the work unit had to compensate for the suffering of the mother by giving some leeway to the daughter in her choice of work types. While it is still possible for Wu Zhen to take a job in her mother's work unit. if she were not a victim of political persecution, the sufferings that a parent endured in the Cultural Revolution could justify an official preference for her job allocation.

Cadres who suffered less political persecution and family separation had a different feeling about the replacement. Limei's younger sister Liqun, a Party secretary of a polytechnic school of a large factory in Beijing, also faced a similar choice of early retirement. Her daughter, Meiping, a senior high school student who would her college entrance exams in 1980, had little chance of getting into a college. Like her sister, Liqun also underwent investigation in the early stage of the Cultural Revolution, but she suffered much less as the investigation was only perfunctory. At the beginning of 1979, her family was in a better position than the Wus sister: her eldest son Zhenping, a former sent-down youths who had lived in Beijing's neighboring countryside, passed the college entrance examination of 1978. This was quite an achievement, given a general passing rate of

[550] Yu Limei to Wu Youren, July 12, 1979

5%.[551] Her younger son also had passed the selection test to become a trainee in the People's Liberation Airforce in April 1979.[552] The family thus saved the opportunity of replacement for the remaining child, Meiping, who was about to graduate from high school.

Yu Liqun's top concern was avoid at all costs the prospect of sending her daughter to the countryside. In her letter to her elder sister on 18 July 1979, Liqun informed Limei that she had applied for early retirement to let her daughter Ping take up a job in her factory. She contextualized her decision in the massive youth unemployment at both national and neighborhood levels. In the words of the street-level Party secretary, the neighborhood committee had to accommodate 200 youths, with precedence given to the returned youths aged above 27, in construction and commercial sectors. The Neighborhood Party secretary's slogan was "save our children"[553].

Given such a situation, Yu Liqun's choice was to make a sacrifice for her child:

> "I made the ultimate sacrifice for my child. While early retirement is good for my health, I feel sorry that I have to leave the revolutionary career behind. Labor is a right. Now I am deprived of the right (and the Constitution granted me this right)! And had I worked, my salary in the second half of the year would increase to 94 Yuan. But I am worried about several uncertainties: (1) the replacement policy in Beijing will change; (2) Meiping could be transferred to other factories if I apply too late. (3) The retirement settlement from her factory was not a bad bargain for the family. Pingping would work as an office clerk in her mother's former department with the care and support of our family. Liqun would continue to work part-time in the neighborhood Party Committee and receive a top-up of her retirement salary.[554]

While the security of the household economy was on top of her minds, a more urgent reason, as Liqun briefly describes, was the overwhelming social problem of youths' unemployment and

[551] Yu Liqun to father, August 15, 1978.

[552] Yu Limei to Yu Liqun, May 12, 1979

[553] Ibid.

[554] Yu Liqun to Yu Limei, July 18, 1979.

its wider impacts on the popular mind, which permeated Beijing in the summer of 1979. Liqun observes in the letter to her sister:

> "Meiping is rather pessimistic recently. She worries about her future since her results are not that great. I reassure her that at least she can work in my school. Nowadays all parents want to place their children to their work units. There was a mother who would like her daughter to take her job, but another daughter, also sent-down, committed suicide. There was a 29-year-old young man who returned Beijing via "special consideration." But he committed suicide nevertheless, after he was assigned to work in a collective enterprise in the western suburb of Beijing. The whole thing is not a family problem but a problem of our society! There is a rumor that nine Beijing young men committed suicide by taking poison together after failing the college entrance exams. The situation makes me feel sad. Pingping also felt a lot of pressure from her peers: young people here would gossip and tell her: 'Your mum doesn't care about you; and their parents would also make all sorts of negative comments about me." [555]

In Liqun's reasoning, there is an urgent sense of social pressure on parents in Beijing in mid-1979. As a mid-rank cadre, she knew well the political situation and the grassroots sentiment. In this regard, Liqun was in a better position than her sister, as she enjoyed several channels of information as an active member in a factory leadership. The decision to have her daughter replace her involved as much rational calculation as a mother's resolve to sacrifice for the daughter. In her sister's case, the choice was more emotional. The replacement was not just a process of exchange but also a partial compensation for her sufferings in the Cultural Revolution. The pain that the mother underwent in the early phase of the Cultural Revolution, the sent-down experience of the daughter in the latter half of the Cultural Revolution, and the eventual return to a promising technical position in the factory, formed their family's version of the *Scar* narrative.

Despite the uncertainties during the first post-Mao years, cadres' family typically avoided prolonged family separations and secured a return to the norm in their household economy soon after the Cultural Revolution. Compared with the working families, the youths of cadre families had less to worry about their future, if the family received some form of compensation from the

[555] Ibid.

state after rehabilitation. In the moral economy of both imperial and Communist China, the fruits of a parent's career sacrifice could by right accrue to the children's merits. For high cadres' families with access to the top leadership, the Communist Party restored the children' rights to work and education once the parents were rehabilitated.

The Dilemma of Double Separations

When the opportunity for return became available, Zhu Jianguo's case fit well within a negotiable "grey zone." A Shanghai sent-down youth from an intellectual family whose father was an editor at a publishing house, Jianguo was sent to Huangshan, Anhui in 1972, and consequently transferred to a local performance troupe in 1975.[556] Upon hearing the news of the reinstated replacement policy in *Wenhuibao*, he immediately wrote to his family in Shanghai to arrange the replacement procedure by the end of January 1979. Before the replacement policy, he planned to wait for an opportunity for work transfer in the long run.[557].

There were two pressing concerns for the Zhu family. The first concern was his eligibility. The new replacement policy specified that only "sent-down youths" still in the countryside could enjoy the privilege, whereas Jianguo was no longer in the countryside. But this policy rule was not an insurmountable hurdle, if one could handle the grassroots cadres. Since the local bureaucracy was lax, the sent-down youths could retain their "rural" status on paper by falsifying records or temporarily "transferring" their affiliation to a rural unit. As discussed in this chapter, the approval procedure in 1979 was perfunctory enough to allow a lot of ambiguities and loopholes.

Another former Shanghai sent-down youth shared his story of the return from Jilin:

> "I was already in the county factory in November 1978 when I heard that Shanghai was experimenting with the replacement policy. I quickly sent in a letter to ask my family to

[556] Zhu Jianguo to parents, October 3, 1978.

[557] Zhu Jianguo to parents, November 3, 1978.

> make an application. I treated the Director of the Zhiqing Office in my county and the factory director with fine wines and good meals. Both were already my close friends and readily issued the official letters of recommendation. They replaced my dossiers with a new one so I was affiliated with a rural factory. The process was very smooth, and I was back before the Chinese New Year. At that time, there was a lot of fear that anything could change at any time. I kept a low profile at my Shanghai work unit and refrained from talking about this to any friend. But later it seems most of my friends could manage the process. "[558]

A more severe concern arose from his engagement with a local girl who worked in the same troupe. He needed her consent before he could proceed. In the collective work units in the 1970s, there was no privacy, and news spread fast. Their intimate relations were already well-known and supposed to lead to marriage. But given state controls on population movement, there was little hope that the local girl could move to Shanghai. The prospect of separation and the end of the relationship would cause unbearable shame for the girl and deep-felt guilt for him. Since the girlfriend's father was a director of a local commune, he worried about their family's intervention.[559]

In February 1979, when the Yunnan sent-down youths movement and the replacement wave reached a head in Shanghai factories, Jianguo became extremely concerned about the prospects of his return but could not move beyond inter-family communication since he still lacked the information about the procedure. "Shanghainese in my troupes were hiding from me and don't want share their news." He observed in the letter[560]. At the same time, he noticed that Shanghainese parents were visiting their sons and daughters around him to help them in the application for a work transfer. "I have told this to Xiaohong (Zhu Jianguo's girlfriend). She had no objection."

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[558] Interview with a former sent-down youth YBX, April 19, 2019

[559] Zhu Jianguo to parents, January 29, 1979.

[560] Zhu Jianguo to parents, February 15, 1979

But at the same time, he was concerned about Xiaohong's family and kept his plan secret from Xiaohong's father.[561]

As the sent-down youths who was no longer working in the countryside, Jianguo found his situation to be more complicated than he had thought. In April 1979, he was still unable to proceed with the application for work replacement. In letter exchanges with his elder brother, he finally learned that the review process had become longer and stricter than in February. For starters, he needed to validate his status as a sent-down youth still in the countryside. On May 7th and 10th, 1979, Jianguo treated two local cadres relevant to the validation process to dinners: secretary Fu and old Zhu, who oversaw the sent-down youths' affairs at the Zhiqing Office at the Xiao County. They promised to stamp the seals on the pre-prepared letter of certification. On May 20th, Jianguo informed the family that he finally got the certification and sent it to Shanghai in the letter to his elder brother.[562]

Jianguo's plan to return home seemed to be going well until it came to a grinding halt. In early June, his father's work unit approved Jianguo's replacement request. But in the letter dated 21 June, Jianguo expressed deep dismay as the local Civil and Labor Affairs Bureau refused to approve the transfer of his household registration status and grain quota to Shanghai due to "untruthful information" in his application form. This latest development was distressing, since his father and brother had come to Anhui twice to help with the transfer of Household Registration and spent a considerable sum of money on gifts and feasts. As Jianguo told later, the outcome was a huge disappointment to the family: "This time around, mom, dad, brother, and sister have devoted much energy and money to secure my return to Shanghai. I am deeply grateful. In the

[561] Zhu Jianguo to parents, February 30, 1979

[562] Zhu Jianguo to Zhu Jianjun, May 20, 1979.

aftermath of this failure, my heart was full of the same pain and anxiety, just like yours. I am especially guilty that dad had come to Anqing and return home emptyhanded. I feel sad that Mom and my brother's great hope has come to such a big disappointment. This failure is a big blow to everyone!"[563]

After analyzing the situation with his new friends----old Zhu and secretary Fu in the local Zhiqing Office, he concluded that someone had written to higher local administrative body. Upon reflection, Jianguo confirmed his worst fears. The failure to transfer his household registration status to Shanghai was due to a covert intervention from Xiaohong's father and uncle. Xiaohong had supported him and suffered greatly in the past months, but her family would not let go. He was upset by two scenarios of separation. He could either break entirely with Xiaohong and return to Shanghai as person without household registration and job, or settle in the little Anhui town and remain separated from his Shanghai family in the foreseeable future.

Jianguo explains clearly this dilemma in the letter to parents on 20 July. He traces the difficulty to the national system of mobility control that imposed a stark choice upon him and his fiancée:

> "I would come back home immediately if I were single. But I also need to think about Hong. Since my transfer application, she has been unhappy, pining, and losing weight lately. Every day she ate only a little. I must think about her condition. Our relationship has come a long way. If I abandon her, she will certainly collapse. But when I think about mum, who cannot sleep or eat because of me, I can't help shedding tears. And I have made you spend so much money. How can I have peace of mind? Then I think about Xiaohong. She has been faithful to me for all these years. If I leave her for Shanghai and promise to bring her back in the future, when can I expect to bring her along, get her a household registration status, and find a job for her in Shanghai? How can I choose between these two extremes without feeling desperate? I can, of course, abandon this terrible place for good, but I can't do it now. It is this country and this government that traps me in this impossible situation!"[564]

[563] Zhu Jianguo to parents, June 21, 1979
[564] Ibid.

Like any sent-down youth, Jianguo would not easily give up what he considered the last chance to go back to Shanghai. In July, his father and brother arrived in Xiao County again with even more money and gifts to negotiate the transfer of his household registration. But like the first time, their efforts came to no avail.[565] Jianguo's anger towards the girlfriend's family developed into animosity after the cadres of the Bureau confirmed that Xiaohong's father indeed interfered in his transfer. Xiaohong's father set a condition for his return: if he returns to Shanghai, he must transfer Xiaohong's household registration status to Shanghai as well. In fits of frustration, he began to blame his relationship with Xiaohong. After all, the Zhu family has spent over 1,500 yuan on building the necessary social networks, which was equivalent to almost 30 months' salary, including a wristwatch as a gift to the person in charge of the work transfer.[566]

In extreme despair, Jianguo tried to go back to Shanghai and cut all his local ties for good. Sometime in early September, Jianguo returned to his Shanghai for his brother's wedding in October, without even informing either his girlfriend or his work units. Just as he had expected, the unannounced departure caused her insufferable pain. In September and October 1979, she repeatedly wrote to his Shanghai home, imploring him to return. In her letter to Jianguo on September 21, she could not help warning him of her desperate situation: "My dear Jianguo, the duration of your trip has not been very long, but for me, it felt like eons. I think about you every moment once I close my eyes. Do you have any idea how helpless one felt when she is separated from her loved ones? I could not live in this world without you." [567]

[565] Zhu Jianguo to parents, July 12, 1979.

[566] Zhu Jianguo to parents, July 16, 1979.

[567] Cao Yuehong (Xiaohong) to Zhu Jianguo, September 22, 1979.

Jianguo could not easily ignore these pleas. After considering all the odds, he realized that the life of a nuclear family in Anhui might be the only choice left for him. While Jianguo's reply was not available, his exchanges with his parents later suggested that he had given up the hope of reuniting with his Shanghai family by late 1979. In December 1979, he again went twice to the Labor Bureau to inquire about the possibility of a return, but he had evidently set his mind on a new life with his wife and in-laws. He also explained in the letter that he felt ashamed to in front of his colleagues since everyone around him knew about the 1,500 *yuan* spent in vain.[568]

As it so happens in everyday life, people moved to other preoccupation when they face a cul-de-sac. Jianguo soon left the idea of the return home behind and erected a new goal in life. In his family letters in the 1980s, there was no mention of the replacement and reunion. The focus of his life shifted to the preparation for a wedding in late 1980. Since the birth of his daughter in 1981, the focus of all the letters to his Shanghai parents turned to the care for a newborn child. The preoccupation with raising a daughter and his continued education in Chinese literature at a local correspondence university replaced the hope of return as the new sources for meaning in life. In the end, Jianguo would return to sometimes Shanghai in 1994 as a business representative of an Anhui county.[569] As the correspondence ended here, we are unsure about the family strategies that brought him home. Did his daughter and wife return to Shanghai with him? Did they build a stable life in Shanghai after many years of separation? The likely scenario is that the nuclear family will endure further sacrifice if they want to move back to Shanghai.[570]

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[568] Jianguo to parents, November 20, 1979.

[569] Zhu Jianguo to parents, February 15, 1995.

[570] Zhu Jianguo were among the very lucky ones. Most sent-down youths who returned to Shanghai in the 1990s only returned upon their retirement. It was not uncommon for the now mid-aged send-down youths to abandon their local jobs and even family life, according to an interview with a returned send-down youths in the Hongkou district.

Jianguo's case is characteristic of the sent-down youths whose life was already embedded with the local society and considered by the state bureaucracy as "settled locally" according to the goals of "unburdening the major cities" under the principle of revolutionary austerity. Once he chose to marry his girlfriend, he would lose the last chance to return to Shanghai. The state policy explicitly forbade anyone from returning to their home cities if they already had a job and family. Perhaps around 10-15% of all the Zhiqing belonged to this category between 1974 and 1979[571]. They were typically young women who could no longer endure the physical hardship of the sent-down youths movement. Lin Li, another sent-down youth from Shanghai and a friend of Jianguo, had to give up returning to Shanghai and left the chance of replacing her father to her younger brother, since she was already married with a baby when the replacement process started in early 1979.[572] For the Shanghai youth who never moved back because of their new family ties, the sent-down youth movement have indeed changed their family life forever.

The Impossible Fight with the Bureaucracy

Just like most sent-down youths who rode on the waves of sent-down youths movement in Yunnan to realize dreams of family reunion, Jianguo's attempts to return to Shanghai fell neatly within the time frame of the major political events of 1979. Though this strategy did not work for the Zhu family, it could have worked for others. However, some sent-down youths did not have any parent's job to replace. The only option left for these youths was a prolonged negotiation with the work unit bureaucracy. Even as they eventually succeeded in the negotiations, it was often a Pyrrhic victory that came with much emotional and economic costs.

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[571] Liu Xiaomang, *Zhongguo Zhiqing shi, 1965-1980* (History of Chinese Sent-down Youths), Beijing: Shehui kexue chubanshe, 2001, pp. 510-512.

[572] Zhu Jianguo to parents, January 29, 1979.

The story of the Zhao family illustrates this alternative strategy of the family reunion. Between 1975 and 1985, Zhao Minghua and Qin Xiaowei, first as lovers and then a married couple, exhausted all means to secure a reunion. Minghua and Xiaowei both came from Shanghai working families with multiple children: Minghua had a younger brother and younger sister, whereas Xiaowei had two twin elder brothers and a sister. As high school sweethearts, they started dating in 1972, when Minghua was about to go to Anhui countryside. Xiaowei stayed in Shanghai and worked in a hotel since her two brothers were both sent to Heilongjiang. They corresponded weekly with each other ever since. After the sent-down policy moved away from universal and permanent rustication to selective re-employment of the rusticated youths, Minghua was hired by a ship-building company in Anhui as a worker in 1975. Since then, a constant task in their life was to secure Minghua's return to Shanghai.

In a letter to her loved one about a week after they were secretly engaged in 1976, Xiaowei stated clearly the couple's plan for the reunion:

> "My beloved Hua, I have been thinking about our plan all along. We cannot live in separate locations after we get married. Family separation is the greatest misfortune for loving couples like us. It is a great spiritual infliction. We already know about this through our experience. This is the biggest challenge that we must face and tackle bravely. We must carry out "operation" to get our family reunited. Wherever we might end up in the future, first thing first, we must do our best to secure the future of our baby. We must do our utmost for our future baby. As for me, I can go anywhere as long as I am with you!"[573]

The "operation" to get the family together started auspiciously in 1977. In March 1977, Qin Xiaowei chanced upon a plan to get Minghua enrolled in one of Shanghai's local colleges so they could be reunited. On 24 March, when she was sharing her story of separation and frustration with a friend, Mr. Yao of Tianjin, a factory intern, Yao was deeply moved and promised to help in

[573] Qin Xiaowei to Zhao Minghua, September 4, 1976.

getting in touch with people in the College Enrolment Office. Yao immediately wrote to his master in the factory, Master Li, who, in turn, sent a letter to his in-law, Mr. Yan, a cadre in the Shanghai Office. It turned out that Yan's son, Yimin, a graduate of Fudan University, was also separated from his girlfriend in Shanghai due to his work assignment in Taiyuan. Moved by their stories, Yimin tried in vain to persuade his father, an official in charge of college enrolment, to intercede on Minghua's behalf. Two days later, Xiaowei met Mr. Yan at the railway station seeing off his son. The old cadre treated her politely but "dodged any serious discussion" when it came to the matter. [574]

After repeated failures with the college entrance option, Xiaowei became disappointed in the whole bureaucratic procedure. By hinting to the state powers as the "society" and drawing on French literature for guidance in everyday life, she voiced out a forceful strategy for family reunion: "These days, I reflected on the ways we can deal with the suppressive forces in our life. Granted that the "society" surrounding us is powerful and its structure is about unequal power, why should we obsequiously beg others? Why can't we behave like Count Christo in the Count of Monte. Christo and use our own hands to secure power and status to achieve power in his society? My dear, let's struggle for the most results! Let us make those people who condescend on us change their attitude!" [575]

According to the rules and institutions of labor transfer, there were only two options for Minghua and Xiaowei: either they find a partner to swap with them or negotiate a transfer within the work unit. Between 1978 and 1981, the couple made one attempt after another at work transfer. The most difficult part of the swap option was to find a suitable partner with the same professional

[574] Qin Xiaowei to Zhao Minghua, April 1, 1977.

[575] Ibid.

background and salary level but wanted to move from Shanghai to Anhui. Although Minghua worked in a factory, he was a specialist in event organization and propaganda work, a popular job easily transferrable across work units. Since a move from Shanghai to Anhui would involve substantial fall in life chances, the odds of finding such a person was low. Things did not change after a major policy change in 1980, when the State General Bureau of Labor dictated that switch partners would not need to hold similar professional and salary ranks. Swap was allowable if the partners came from two cities of the same administrative levels. However, the policy did not apply to the three centrally-administered cities of Shanghai, Tianjin, and Beijing.[576]

Since there was little chance for a swap, the only option left to Minghua was to negotiate a transfer within the work unit. Determined to get married in 1981, Minghua and Xiaowei formulated plans for a "negotiated transfer," whereby Minghua could end up working at the Shanghai branch of the shipbuilding factory. He could either work in a shipyard built for the testing of newly made ships in Wusong, a suburb area in Shanghai, or serve as the factory's trade representative in Shanghai. In the first months of 1981, Minghua cultivated friendship with two cadres in the Shanghai representative office of the ship-building factory by lavishing them with gifts and banquets. However, their plans still failed to materialize, as another colleague from Shanghai took the vacant position through his connections with the company's management.[577]

The financial cost for building social "connections" also presented a significant burden, as they needed to secure a fund for the wedding and dormitory room under an extreme housing shortage. Most of the emotional and financial burden naturally fell on Xiaowei, since she faced all

[576] "Guojia laodong zongju guanyu jinyibu kaizhan hudiao gongzuo jiji jiejue gongren changqi liangdi fenju de tongshi" (National General Bureau of Labor Notice on Solving Family Separation of Workers through Transfer by Swap), Hebei Provincial Archives, 981-6-268-3.

[577] Qin Xiaowei to Zhao Minghua, July 15, 1981.

the family pressure as a young working woman in her twentieth. As she remarks in her letter on August 21, 1981, four "mountains" ----family separation, housing, family finance, and child-birth -----had made her life in Shanghai almost unbearable.[578]

In the spring of 1982, as Minghua and Xiaowei were exhausted by the fruitless wrangling with the bureaucracy, they once contemplated the prospect of moving to Anhui. However, a family misfortune forced them to make a final, coordinated trial of work transfer. In February 1982, Xiaowei's father was diagnosed with terminal cancer. The blow proved to be the last straw for Xiaowei. Her family had not prepared for this misfortune, after they had just exhausted all their savings for the weddings of Xiaowei's two brothers.[579] The physical, financial, and psychological burden was so overwhelming that the family reached a consensus that their son-in-law, Minghua, must come back immediately to help in the family emergencies.

With the thought of family emergencies in mind, Xiaowei wrote an impassioned plea to Wu Fanfu, the Director of the Personnel Department of her husband's factory on April 7, 1982. She explained the pains of separation, the history of failed efforts, and the current family hardship. After repeated trials, Xiaowei anticipated that the official reply would cite the central document urging married couples who are separated to move from big to smaller cities:

> "From all these above, we can naturally understand how helpless it was for me to live in this metropolitan city as a woman. Therefore, I was originally prepared to abandon all the benefits of a Shanghai resident and moved close to Minghua. However, when I raised the option in the family meetings, our parents on both sides disagreed. Their opinion was that we should try our best to get Minghua back. In the worst-case scenario that he cannot come back, we should at least let our future child retain Shanghai household registration status. I would give up Shanghai residential status after the birth of our child and move to my husband's city. I would like then happy leave for Anhui…."[580]

[578] Qin Xiaowei to Zhao Minghua, August 18, 1981.

[579] Chen Juxiang to No. 1 Silk Factory, February 27, 1979.

[580] Qin Xiaowei to Wu Fanfu, April 7, 1982.

She then listed her family's difficulties as the conditions for special consideration: her father's terminal cancer; her mother's dangerously high blood pressure; her grandmother's accidental fall and loss of eyesight; her eldest brother's four-month-old baby; her younger brother's eight-month pregnant wife; her sister's planned wedding for October; her own chronical conditions while taking care of all family duties.[581]

Despite the pleas, Director Wu did not even reply. Instead, the factory issued an official reply in an arid, formal manner on 14 May:

> "Comrade Qin,
> We have received your requests. The work unit understands the difficulty of married couples living in separation. Should Comrade Li find a work unit in Shanghai that accepts him, we will be happy to send a letter of reference so he can go freely. As for your request to transfer Comrade Zhao to our team in Shanghai, we regret it is too hard to fulfill at this moment, considering the mismatch between Comrade Li's skills and the work requirement[582]."

On May 17, Minghua's father wrote another petition to the Shipbuilding Factory, requesting the factory leadership to transfer Minghua to their representative office in Shanghai. In this letter, he repeated all the difficulties of Xiaowei's family, underlying the fact that they had still not yet had their long-awaited grandson. Unlike Xiaowei's, the father's demand was not for a permanent work transfer but only a temporary measure to ease the family's burdens:

> "We implore the factory leadership to transfer our son back to your office in Shanghai. He can then look after his sick wife, take care of his parents-in-law, and participate in the factory's work. This perfect solution works both for us and the factory. Once the family situation stabilizes, we would understand it if the factory leadership will transfer Minghua back to Anhui. We hope you can consider our request!"[583]

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[581] Ibid.

[582] Factory Workers' Union to Qin Xiaowei, May 4, 1982.

[583] Qin Xiaowei to Wu Fanfu, April 7, 1982.

This short request, unlike Xiaowei's much longer plea, receives a much more detailed response from the factory bureaucracy, perhaps because it was directed to the unspecified "leader" and delivered to the Labor Union, where Zhao Minghua worked as a clerk. In this response, the Union's director personally expresses their regret for not being able to fulfill the demand: "For your request to transfer Zhao Minghua from our factory to our office in Shanghai so he can take care of his sick father-in-law and wife, we think this is fair and sensible demand. Given the situation, we should actively solve your problem. But we also face a few actual difficulties."

The reply lists the case for the work unit's difficulties in arranging a transfer. There is a mismatch between the work requirement and Minghua's qualification and the lack of affiliation between the Union and the Shanghai Office. Moreover, the overwhelming number of Shanghai couples in the factory had similar problem of family separation. If the company let Minghua return to Shanghai even for a few months, they could violate the principle of equality and cause a commotion among the Shanghainese employees. Furthermore, the Director explains, the couple had made too many requests and took up too much resources of the factory management during the past few years. The factory's Workers' Union promises to give another try but will not guarantee a successful outcome.

Much to the family's surprise, the factory's official reply then shifts their blames to Zhao Minghua. It goes to provide an unsolicited political and moral assessment of Minghua, listing both his contribution as a talented propaganda worker and his lack of discipline in daily work and financial matters. In the ending paragraph, the Director notes that such mixed assessment serves to "let us cooperate with you in the education of your child so that he can build upon his strength and improve his moral caliber in the future." [584] By listing these shortcomings, they implied that

[584] Labor Union to Zhao Deyu, May 22, 1982.

the non-transfer was at least partially due to Minghua's work performance. It appears that the factory was worried about Minghua's lack of obedience to the authority, a fatal weakness in the organizational culture of state-owned enterprises in the 1970s.[585]

The Zhao family was unsurprisingly furious at the official replies, which they found bureaucratic and inconsiderate. As Xiaowei remarked in her letter to Minghua: "Both your father and I were furious at your factory. I can't even imagine they merely merited you as 'having a stable mind' and 'actively participating in work', even after you have slaved yourself for seven years. I didn't expect that they take this opportunity to complain about you. What is the point of working with those heartless people?" She suggested that Minghua could request an extended leave to visit his family in Shanghai and even resign from the factory, should the management refuse to grant him a long leave. In the worst-case scenario of dismissal from the factory, she surmises, Minghua could make a living by renting a stall in the neighborhood free market. At least, the family reunion is more valuable than mere livelihood.[586]

The absence of letters between July and September mostly likely indicates an extended reunion without the factory's approval. From a letter dated October 2, Xiaowei felt content that the factory eventually acquiesced on Minghua's exceptionally extended leave between June and September 1979. This show of leniency satisfied the family's immediate need. Still, it could not save their failing trust in the system, as Xiaowei remarks in the letter: "To be fair, the way your factory leaders dealt with the matter (exceptional long leave) was reasonable. But from my point of view, the purpose is to use rather than care for you. But at least they didn't embarrass you with

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[585] Andrew Walder, *Neo-traditionalism: Work and Authority in Chinese Industry*, Alto Palo, CA: Stanford University Press, 1986, pp. 238-252

[586] Qin Xiaowei to Zhao Minghua, June 4, 1982

disciplinary actions."[587] Although the Zhaos failed to secure a permanent family reunion, their negotiations with the factory was rewarded with a hard-earned, temporary family reunion.

The Zhao family never ceased in their repeated attempts to negotiate a work transfer for Minghua. They finally seized a chance in early 1985. By then, Minghua and Xiaowei's son was almost two years old.[588] From 1975 to 1985, they had made at least ten attempts, involving countless money, gifts, and social networks in Shanghai. No matter how hard they tried, they faced an invisible institutional hurdle, namely, the nationwide regulation on work transfer and household registration. The dramatic encounter with the factory management in 1982 indicates that the bureaucracy is not heartless: while they may not challenge national institutions, they can extend a helping hand if the situation is within their control. Unlike the Wu family, who watched opportunities of political events and policy shifts carefully, the Zhao family placed all hope of reunion on the favors and sympathy of friends and grassroots bureaucracy.

The Luck with Bureaucratic Machinery

Among the four case studies, the Zhang family stands out as a special case. When their bid for reunion began, both were both intellectual professionals: the wife, Li Weiying, was a 34-year old English teacher in a high school in Nanjing; the husband, Zhang Wenshou, was a mid-aged doctor in Shanghai hospital. Xiaowei was a Shanghainese educated in a Shanghai university. Yang graduated from colleges in Shanghai in 1960s. The wife was sent to work in rural Jiangsu during the high Cultural Revolution and then transferred to her hometown, Nanjing in the early 1970s. In 1975, they have been separated from more than a decade. Their son was born around 1973. As a single child to intellectual parents in their early and late thirties, which were considered unusually

[587] Qin Xiaowei to Zhao Minghua, October 2, 1982

[588] Qin Xiaowei to Zhao Minghua, January 10, 1985

advanced age for the first child in the 1970s, the boy received a lot of attention from the parents. He lived with his mother in Nanjing in 1975 and stayed with his father's family in Shanghai in 1977, presumably until the family reunited in 1978.

As ordinary urban professionals, Weiying and Wenshou represent a significant type of family separations in the post-Mao era. Unlike the sent-down youths, they lacked the strength in numbers to mount a national movement. Unlike the elite intellectuals, they lacked the political patronage from the Party's liberal wings to get a compensation for their political sacrifice. However, their experience was more representative of ordinary professional families separated by the Cultural Revolution. In early 1973, a Bureau of Education study found that 1,892 of all the 10,207 college teachers in Shanghai's newly opened universities suffered from family separation due to the Cultural Revolution displacement. By the end of 1973, only 261 couples ended their family separation under the new policy of conciliation toward select intellectuals.[589]

The case of the Zhang family in the late 1970s was like the Zhao family in early 1980s. As in the case of Zhao Minghua Li Weiying and Zhang Wenshou could try either swap or internal transfer. The prospect of an internal transfer was limited since professional organizations like schools and hospitals only operated locally and rarely transferred people across regions. The second option was a matter of chance and luck. The couple would need to find a swap partner, usually a couple who similarly worked in Shanghai and Nanjing. They would need the support of both work units' bureaucracy to achieve any success.

The couple made their first attempt at the family reunion in August 1975. Both Weiying and Wenshou tried to persuade their respective work units so either of them could move to the city

[589] "Shisansuo daxue jiaoshi fenju liangdi qingkuang diaochabiao" (A Table on the Situation of the Family Separations among teachers in thirteen Universities), SMA B44-3-522, p.11.

of their partners. But the plan soon collapsed. The high school just suffered an exodus of English teachers of overseas Chinese background who recently got the chance to leave China for Hong Kong and Southeast Asia[590]. The school administration made it clear that Weiying must find her replacement before she can depart for Shanghai. Meanwhile, the hospital insisted they must have approval from the revolutionary committee of the Health Bureau. Sometime in November, they made the surprise move to transfer Wenshou to work at a local branch at Jinshan County, a suburb area of Shanghai, making the prospect of the family life after reunion even dimmer.

The most pressing concern for the couple was money. In 1975, intellectual professionals like experienced teachers and doctors in urban China did not earn much more than 70 yuan per month after a decade-long wage freeze[591]. The financial challenge would have bearable for a family living under one roof. But a de-territorialized family with a one-year-old baby boy costed more than they earned. As the financial situation of Li Weiying at the end of 1975 indicates, the household economic crisis drove her to an emotional breakdown:

> "When you visited Nanjing last time, you left me with 70 yuan. Now three months have passed, and I have used 60 yuan. There are only 10 yuan left. I was so helpless that I sold my English dictionary to a student for 12 yuan and used the receipt to pay for rice and coal. The situation makes me cry. When will be the end to all such misery! I have no fund left for our trip to Shanghai in the Spring Festival, the wet nurse, and even rice! At first, I don't plan to talk about money with you. But now I am at the end of my means. I have no energy left to swallow the bitter pills of this kind of life. You are a husband and a father. You should

[590] During the Cultural Revolution, returned overseas Chinese were generally not allowed to leave China. They were assigned to work in various institutions and designated units, such as the overseas Chinese farms. Since 1973, Chinese government began to allow returned overseas Chinese to migrate to Hong Kong or Southeast Asia, should they have families or friends as local sponsor. Editorial Committee *Shanghai Gongan Zhi* (Shanghai Public Security Gazetteers), Shanghai: Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences, 1997, p. 264

[591] Ma Si, *Bainian lengnuan: ershishiji Zhongguo zhishifenzi shenghuo zhuangkuang yanjiu* (A Century of Changes: Living Standards of Intellectuals in the 20th Century), Beijing: Zhongguo tushu chubanshe, 2003, pp. 535-536.

> come up with a solution at this moment! What can we say for the year 1976? Are the bureaucratic "lords" at my school and your hospital still scheming against you?"[592]

As if a letter would not exhaust her bitterness, Weiying wrote another follow-up letter the next day to express her fury at her husband's work unit. She even deployed the revolutionary trope of "tell bitterness" to vent her frustrations at the work units. Adapting the revolutionary discourse against class enemies to a repressive bureaucracy, she subverted the revolutionary class struggles for her struggles of the family reunion. In their private discourse of politics, cadres were equivalent to "mandarins" and bureaucracy was the new oppressor.

> "I think the No. 5 People's Hospital will sooner or later collapse due to infighting! Those of you sent to Jinshan were the only ones who can get along with the leadership. In a long-term perspective, you will benefit from the "demotion". Currently, I can only bend myself and endure the scornful eyes of the "mandarins". Once I come back to Shanghai, I will regain my confidence and pride. I will defend my dignity. Then we can hold a "tell bitterness" session and pour out all our bitterness to those lords…" [593]

After the initial attempts failed, the couples tried their luck at another possible "switch" arrangement in 1976. In the beginning, it seems everything began to move smoothly. They found a similar couple who wished to exchange their locations. The husband was a school teacher in Nanjing, whereas the wife was a nurse in Shanghai. Through the help of Xu Haiyi, a close friend and a deputy head of school's personnel office, Weiying persuaded the school leadership to let her go. In her letter dated 31 May, Li Weiying mentioned that the school had arranged her to undergo a medical examination and submit a standard photo.[594] The application materials were already at the Bureau of Education when the exchange partners renegaded. The situation compelled the

[592] Li Weiying to Zhang Wenshou, December 16, 1975.

[593] Li Weiying to Zhang Wenshou, December 17, 1975.

[594] Li Weiying to Zhang Wenshou, May 31, 1976.

couple to seek alternative plans. Haiyan even asked her husband if he can move out of Shanghai since he could not bear the pain of separation any longer. [595]

The struggles continued into 1977 with no visible progress. In the first half of the year, they tried the "negotiated transfer" but without finding any suitable positions. While Weiying and Wenshou still held fast to the family's goal for reunion, two years of fruitless trials filled their hearts with frustrations, anger, and disillusionment. Like many intellectuals in the immediate post-Cultural Revolution years, the couple poured their bitter hatred on the "Gang of Four", blaming them for their long separation.[596] Reflecting on her work and family life, found the only child to be the single source of hope and motivation:

"In my heart, only two hearts that speak to each other can move into a common life. But the difficult life these years have made me dispirited. There is not a single inch of land here that allows such pure love and marriage to survive! I have already reached our middle age. Recalling our experience, I think these years have taught me a lesson. The lesson is that everything we shared and cherished have been destroyed in our youths by the cold reality. The birth of our child is the only thing that comforts me tremendously. But our child has already suffered from the bitter cold of the world. We shall struggle for a better future for him, right?" [597]

In October 1977, Weiying made a sacrifice as a mother by sending her child to live with his father. The letters never mentioned the motivation. But the concern for the future of their single child must have outweighed all other concerns. In the eyes of the Shanghainese, Shanghai was not

[595] Li Weiying to Zhang Wenshou, June 26, 1976.

[596] Li Weiying to Zhang Wenshou, March 12, 1977.

[597] Li Weiying to Zhang Wenshou, May 3, 1977.

only the home but China's leading industrial city. In late 1977, the separation from her son was has become a new source of pain:

> "How is Miaomiao (Weiying's son)? I felt so sorry for him. He has to be separated from his mum at such a tender age. Perhaps he too will grow up to be a cold-hearted boy? I have seen many such children (who suffered from the Cultural Revolution). My heart pains when thinking about this. I can't even say what is filling my heart right now. Is it love or hatred? Maybe one day I will become a cold-hearted person too…"[598]

Meanwhile, the bureaucratic process of transfer was still ongoing. The personnel department of the school reiterated its support for Weiying's transfer but asked her to wait patiently for "the Shanghai side to find a suitable place." After multiple failures within two years, she seems to have developed a better understanding of the logic of the impersonal bureaucratic process of work transfer. The process dragged on without a definitive outcome. She even brought up "God" as a metaphor for the bureaucratic machine that always operated beyond the rich of the ordinary people:

> "Forgotten by others, I am now reduced to a machine that speaks. Lately, nobody even mentioned the work transfer, because according to the office, 'the whole process was still ongoing.' Any future reversal of the process will not be a surprise. People around me all admonish me to 'take it with equanimity.' Indeed, I can quietly accept any consequences without complaining. …I would say to ask these (bureaucratic) lords to serve ordinary people (*laobaixing*) is harder than begging the grace of God. I will peacefully accept any outcome."[599]

After more years of bitter wrangling with the bureaucratic system, Weiying and Wenshou's struggle appeared to be hopeless case. After so many failed rounds of attempt, the couple saw no immediate prospects for reunion. In the letter to her husband on 5 March 1978, Weiying was still working out the plans. She thought about offering free English class to a close relative of the Party

[598] Ibid.

[599] Li Weiying to Zhang Wenshou, November 9, 1978

secretary of Nanjing. By cultivating an extensive network, she hoped to find a final solution via the intervention of top local leadership.[600]

However, the solution to their separation turned out to be much simpler than they imagined. Another miserable family came to their aid. Sometime in April or early May, a certain Mr. Zhang, an English teacher in Shanghai, urgently contacted the couple to arrange an immediate swap, so that he could move from Shanghai to Nanjing to take care of his family affair. His wife suddenly fell ill and left two young children unattended in Nanjing. On 26 May, Weiying sent a short note to his husband, confirming 25 June as the final day of her stay in Nanjing. This was the last letter in the collection. In a letter from Wenshou's younger brother to the Zhang couple, he congratulated his brother and sister-in-law for their reunion.[601] The long struggle to end family separation finally achieved its long-due success.

Epilogue: Bitter Sweet Reunions and Political Disenchantment

"All happy families are alike; each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way." We might quote Tolstoy's opening sentence to summarize various patterns of urban family life in the wake of the Cultural Revolution. The prolonged family separation of the ordinary, non-cadre families featured a consistent pattern across the families examined. Overburdened by the emotional and economic costs of separation, they had to negotiate with the local bureaucratic machinery and the local surroundings with whatever resources they could draw from their families and friendship networks. For the millions of youths who took up this hefty challenge, the bureaucratic machinery and the local surroundings were the concrete, personified "state" and "society."

[600] Li Weiying to Zhang Wenshou, March 5, 1978

[601] Zhang Wenru to Zhang Wenshou, July 18, 1978

No matter how this tug of war between family and bureaucracy played out, the erstwhile revolutionary youths often felt alienated, if not disgusted, in their encounter with the underbelly of the state. If the send-down movement's mobilization still carried a quasi-religious Durkheimian "collective effervescence." In contrast, the demobilization process was often a senseless struggle for the individuals and families, without any apparent meaning. The tussles with the myriad bureaucratic strictures only strengthened the prevalent belief that the family, especially the child, was the only source of hope and salvation.

In 1979, there are virtually no perfectly happy families, when millions of Zhiqing returned home. The relatively happy ones are those cadres' families that suffer relative less and have their children returned rather smoothly, such as the Wu family. Even they had their regret, since the mother was already very ill and father was still in distant Anhui. The typically unhappy ones, such as the Zhu family and the Zhao family, each have their distinctive difficulties and sufferings. Somewhere between the two extremes are the ordinary families who see their children return home in the first months of early 1979. If the scar literature characterizes the family experience of the post-Mao transition, this experience applies primarily to the elites. The dominant sentiment among urban families was likely disillusionment and cynicism.

A contemporary report to the Youth League shows the opinions of the returned youths. In June 1979, the Youth League of Shanghai commissioned research on the political attitudes of the CCP Party members among the returned Zhiqing in Guangdong Streets, Huangpu District. Out of the 63 Party members, 21 returned via replacement, 38 on medical grounds, four on account of family difficulties. By late June 1979, only 25 returned youths were allocated work at the Neighborhood Production Teams, 22 sent to labor in the political education schools, and 16 stayed at home as unemployed. The secretive survey summarizes their feelings as three "D":

"disillusionment," "disadvantage," and "despair." They were disillusioned, because they, as student leaders felt their revolutionary zeal suffered from so many "unjust" practices during the return process that they began to embrace individualism as the highest virtue. The feeling of betrayal came from the realization that their outcome was no better than those "backward elements" who managed to stay in Shanghai.[602] In the end, they cannot help feeling despair as they had achieved little in their career after spending the best years of their youths in the countryside and could not find a decent job when they were around thirty years old.

The Youth League report shows how the political economy of the Cultural Revolution undermined the foundation of the Communist faith, as the erstwhile activists were subjected to what they perceived as unjust, meaningless suffering. The report highlights the experience of two Party members among the returned Zhiqing, who felt the most profound demoralization. Shen Yuanliang, who had married and had children in the countryside, had to endure the pain of separation after his return. Tan Wei, who had been a Youth League Committee secretary and an activist in the early sent-down movement, felt abandoned to the lowest rank of society, since she could not find work and had to depend on her families. The report remarked alarmingly since those attitudes of three "Ds" were typical of the Party members, the government should deal with them urgently.[603]

In Barbara Rosenwein's study of emotional words in inscriptions and private writings in religious and lay communities in early medieval central Europe, she coins the concept of "emotional communities" to denote communities of shared emotional words and concepts. [604]In

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[602] "Huicheng Zhiqing sixiang diaocha," *Thought Monitor No. 44*, SMA A22-4-117

[603] Ibid.

[604] Barbara H. Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities in the Early Middle Ages,* Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006, 74-79

Rosenwein's work, these communities each had their norms of emotional valuation and expression: the Christian goals predominated in some but not others. We might distinguish two types of emotional communities in post-Mao Shanghai. The "universal" emotional communities built on the Party state and its apparatus surely existed, the networks of "particular" emotional communities built on family experiences must have predominated. As we have discussed in previous chapters, the universal techniques of "telling bitterness" used to hold the urban working class in Maoist China as an imagined community of proletariats before the Cultural Revolution. By the late 1970s, such a sense of shared emotions had disappeared from the family letters. While there were still a small minority of Communists who shared the words and concepts of official media, the non-elites' families in Shanghai no longer participated in the exchange of such feelings and expressions.

Chapter Five

Small Comfort: The Post-Revolutionary Withdrawal to the Family in Post-Mao Urban China, 1975-1984

On 16 December 1979, Deng Xiaoping, during his meeting with the Japanese Premier Ohira Masayoshi, articulated the idea of *xiaokang* (literally, "small comfort") as the vision for China's modernization set forth by the late Premier Zhou Enlai in 1975. When asked by Premier Ohira about the kind of modernization China wanted to achieve, he explained to the Japanese guest his vision of China in the near future: "The "Four Modernizations"[605] that we want to realize is the modernization in the Chinese way. Our ideal of Four Modernizations is not like the modernization of yours but a well-off family ("xiaokang zhijia"). By the end of this century, even if the "Four Modernizations" reached its specific objectives, our per-capita income will still be meager[606]. We must make great efforts to achieve a better-off living standard for the Chinese with a per-capita income of 1,000 USD. Even if we reach that level, we are still backward in comparison with the West. So, I can only say that China will be in a "better-off" condition by the end of the century.[607]" As the Chinese interpretation for "modernization", *xiaokang* has become one of China's the most durable official visions for the future.[608]

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[605] "Four Modernization" was Zhou Enali's blueprint for China's modernization the areas of agriculture, industry, defense, and science and technology.

[606] Leng Rong, Wang Zuoling ed, *Deng Xiaoping Nianpu* (Deng Xiaoping's Chronology), Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 2005, p, 681

[607] *Ibid*, p. 682

[608] A frequency search at the People's Daily finds 1,317 articles containing "four modernization" in their titles and 2,616 articles containing xiaokang. In the 1980s and early 1990s, "four modernizations" still

Deng put forward the *xiaokang* ideal shortly after he had engineered a historical turn in China's grand strategy in the Cold War. Ohira Masayoshi's visit to China in December 1979 was to repay Deng Xiaoping's state visit in late 1978, which formed part of his first exchange with America's Asian allies from November 1978 to March 1979. In a series of diplomatic feats, Deng toured a ring of newly industrial Asian economies: Japan, Malaysia, Thailand, and Singapore, before flying to Washington to announce the formal diplomatic ties between the People's Republic with the United States. Deng reassured the Asian leaders that China would soon withdraw supports to Communist movements across Asia and embrace the rest of industrialized Asia in the pursuit of modernization.[609] During his closed-door talks with Jimmy Carter at the White House, Deng shocked his American counterpart with China's plan to launch a punitive campaign on Vietnam, its erstwhile Communist little brother. In a matter of weeks, the People's Liberation Army dutifully fulfilled the promise, dealing a blow to the reputation of the Soviet Union in Asia. In this light, the other side of the "small comfort" story was the official abandonment of the "big" Communism ideal, the utopian project to build a "*datong shijie*" (Grand Harmony, or a Chinese vision of Communism). After admitting the failure of the Maoist goal to liberate all the proletariats and oppressed peoples of the world, Deng offered an alternative vision of China as the home to millions of families with a uniform, single-minded aim of better material life.

Drawing on family letters, surveys, magazine articles, memoirs, and archival sources, this chapter examines the political and social foundations of the *xiaokang* ideology in the family life in the 1970s. This chapter will elaborate three developments that defined the popular sentiments

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dominated the official discourse. However, there are only 10 articles containing "four modernizations, compared with 2,000 articles containing *xiaokang*.

[609] Ezra Vogel, *Deng Xiaoping and the Transformation of Modern China*, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009, pp. 234-241

in urban China against the background of the late 1970s, when the Communist Party's pragmatic faction ended revolutionary austerity, leveraging urban popular opposition to continuous revolution and favorable geopolitical opportunities. As urban families' responses to revolutionary austerity, three developments unfolded in the two decades after the Great Leap Forward: first, the economic recovery at the costs of urban families engendered an unstoppable drive for better consumer products; second, the disillusionment with the Cultural Revolution and the family separation of sent-down movement caused a "withdraw into the family"; third, the experience of the Communist Revolution fostered a new culture of wealth accumulation and heralded the "possessive nuclear family" in post-Mao China. In the epilogue, I shall return to the everyday politics of the early 1980s by placing China's political transition from a global comparative perspective.

The End of Revolutionary Austerity

On 13 January 1975, Zhou Enlai, China's ailing Premier, made one of his last appearances and articulated China's development goals at the opening session of the Fourth National Congress. In what became popularly accepted as his official political testament, Zhou stated that China's policy objective in the next few decades was get rid of backwardness and poverty through modernization in agriculture, industry, defense and science.[610] For the first time in more than a decade, the top leadership officially gave preference to popular welfare over class struggles in the highest political occasion.

Although Mao approved the "Four Modernization," he created a delicate political balance to contain the developmental objectives within his broader ideological visions. After reinstating

[610] Zhou Enlai, 1975 Nian Gouwuyuan Zhengfu Gongzuo Baogao (The Work Report of the State Council for 1975), http://www.gov.cn/test/2006-02/23/content_208796.htm (Accessed on 15 October 2020)

Deng Xiaoping as the Vice Premier and Chief of Staff of the PLA, he was careful to make sure Deng's actions were confined within the grand vision. At the elite political level, the balance was between loyal moderate cadres and the Cultural Revolution faction. At the level of everyday politics, there was an equilibrium between catering to people's material needs and the key institutions emblematic of Mao's continuous revolution, such as the sent-down movement and political study sessions. After Deng was rehabilitated in 1974, Mao entrusted him with "economic rectification" (*zhengdun*), while leaving propaganda and education systems to Zhang Chunqiao, the leading ideologue of the Cultural Revolution. Meanwhile, Mao instructed the Politburo consisting of rehabilitated cadres and the ideological hardliners to remain united in both anti-revisionist struggles and economic development.[611]

Deng Xiaoping's economic rectification soon yielded fruits: the railway system recovered its orderly operation, industrial investment increased, and the influx of foreign technology accelerated. [612] Heedful of the irreconcilable enmity of the Cultural Revolution faction, he creatively adapted Mao's "Three Instructions"---solidary, anti-revisionism, and economic development—into a shield against their potential attacks. In practice, however, Deng focused exclusively on economic growth and avoided the talk of ideology. He even ventured into the college campaigns of Tsinghua University, urging the schools to divert resources from ideological campaigns to regular operation.[613] In response, the Cultural Revolution faction reaffirmed the

[611] Shi Yun, Li Danhui, *Nanyi jixu de geming: Cong piling Dao pideng* (When the Continuous Revolution Goes Awry: From the Anti-Lin Biao Campaign to Anti-Deng Xiaoping Campaign), Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2008, pp. 502-503

[612] *Ibid*, pp. 518-520

[613] Zhang Hua, *Deng Xiaoping yu 1975nian de Zhongguo* (Deng Xiaoping and China in 1975), Beijing: Party History Press, 2004, pp. 248-251

Party's official anti-bourgeois stance and attacked Deng as the veiled revisionist and the capitalist-roaders within the Party[614].

During the winter of 1975-1976, Mao reshuffled the leadership at his deathbed, when the delicate political balance between the Cultural Revolution factions and the pragmatic cadres fell apart. As the "Great Revolutionary Teacher," Mao regarded the continuous revolution in the education system as his last great achievement to be defended at all costs. Infuriated by Deng's "rectification" of education and his politically dubious "guidelines," he was convinced that Deng was a dangerous revisionist. In February, Mao had Deng removed from active duty and named Hua Guofeng to succeed Zhou Enlai as the new premier. Meanwhile, he dictated to his nephew, Mao Yuanxin, his last major political doctrine of the "continuous revolution" between October 1975 and January 1976. In these talks, he was especially concerned about the danger of the inveterate inclinations of the "small producers" to lean towards revisionist on an everyday basis:

"Is there not class struggle in a socialist society? Who turned my "three instructions"[615] to an overriding guideline? To build solidarity is not to give up all class struggle. Class struggle is the principle for everything. Stalin has made a glaring mistake on this. Lenin is right. He said 'the "petty-bourgeois" practiced capitalism in their everyday life. Lenin said we might unwittingly build a country without the bourgeois but still protect private property rights. Indeed, we have created such a state in China. We were not different from the Old Society, because we installed a salary system of eight levels. We upheld the principle of income distribution according to

[614] *Ibid*, p. 252.

[615] The three instructions refer to three key tasks that Mao entrusted to the Party leadership in late 1974. Later conceptualized by Deng into "three instructions", these tasks became the operation principles of Deng's policy: anti-revisionism and anti capitalism, peace and solidary among the leadership, and economic growth.

contribution. We also still upheld the free market principle of equal exchange, since you still need money to buy rice, coal, oil, and vegetables."[616]

Mao's last major political testament suggested that his final battle was still about the hearts and minds of the Chinese people. The real socialist society, in his mind, was akin to the Communist Party's political economy in 1940s Yan'an, where direst state provision for soldiers and cadres fighting for the cause of the revolution, instead of the salary system for the bureaucratized state, was the order of the day in income distribution. Citing Lenin's dictum on the everyday culture of "petty bourgeois," Mao highlighted on the political fallibility of the ordinary "petty bourgeois". He appeared to be confident that people were on his side, fighting with their own everyday inclinations towards bourgeois corruption. Indeed, Mao's theory of continuous revolution used to motivate millions of families to make economic sacrifices, when the revolutionary narratives resonated with the sentiments of the older generation. However, the principle of unlimited sacrifice for continuous revolution could hardly appeal to younger workers and cadres by the late 1970s. They had indeed become "petty-bourgeois" in their increasing attachment to their family.

Mao's concern about the return to the bourgeois values accurately reflected the political situation on the ground. After a decade of austerity, even ordinary workers gradually came to see their sacrifice as senseless suppression from the state bureaucracy and its policy failures. By 1975, many had begun to voice disaffection in their private writings with family and friends. Mao had perhaps underestimated the pains that the revolutionary austerity inflicted upon everyday life and the popular reaction against the revolutionary ideals. The resentment centered on the impacts of

[616] Research Office on Party Literature (ed.), *Mao Zedong Nianpu, 1949-1976, Vol. 6* (The Chronicle of Mao Zedong's Life)., Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 1993. p. 617

Mao's revolutionary austerity on the family: unsatisfied material demands and the pains of family separation.

In Chapter Four, we have discussed Li Weiying's family reunion experience in the late 1970s. In her weekly letter to her husband in Shanghai in September 1975, she made a scathing critique of everyday politics in late Maoist China. In her view, the society she experienced was a mockery of Communism, as it was devoid of both material well-being and class solidarity:

> "There are so many urgent matters pressing on teachers like us! The school treats us like milk cows. They feed us grass and expect us to produce milk. They want to divert our thoughts from everyday life concerns to politics. But the people are no longer as foolish and foolhardy as they were at the beginning of the Cultural Revolution. They have their views and opinions. When we hold denunciation meetings on bourgeois values, the school leaders still shout the slogan at the top of their lungs. But the content is empty and monotonous and we chat from the beginning to the end. Anyway, I pretend to know nothing (about politics). There are currently only two things in my mind and on my mouth: work transfer and our kid. People like me are not in the minority! What will happen to our life in the near future? I don't know. Currently, we can't even find kerosene in Nanjing. When the stove is running of fuel, we can only go to the restaurants. Since people here are very cold towards each other, you can't even think of borrowing neighbors' kerosene or dining with them, since you are not welcome. Is this a sign that the "Communist" is coming? I am indeed perplexed!"[617]

In 1975, Weiying's school, like any educational institution, were still the strongholds of the Cultural Revolution and Mao's ideologues, where top-down indoctrination of the revolutionary austerity was the order of the day. But politics was seldom a topic in the weekly exchanges between Weiying and her husband. When Weiying deployed the lofty language of the revolutionary catchword *faquan,* [618] she used it to mock the everyday reality in her school, as she could not even afford a short bus trip from Nanjing to the nearby Anhui province for the Spring Festival reunion

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[617] Li Weiying to Zhang Wenshou, September 16, 1975.

[618] *Faquan* is the abbreviation for "Zichan Jieji faquan" (资产阶级法权), , which literary means bourgeois rights to private property. As we shall discuss below, wage is also considered as "bourgeois right" during the revolutionary austerity. Therefore, it must be restricted and eventually eliminated.

with her meagre, frozen salary. Given her life experience, she found the incessant struggle sessions against the “bourgeois rights” a meaningless activity. Reflecting on her lack of money for the New Year reunion in 1976, Weiying remarks bitterly the family’s economic plight: “It is up to you if we shall make our annual trip to your old home in Anhui for the Spring Festival of 1976. I can't find any cash this month to fund the trip. This situation is not because of our "recalcitrant bourgeois nature." We can only sigh in the face of “bourgeois rights (*faquan*)”! I think your younger brother Lian and your mom can understand!”[619]

The attack on bourgeois rights was a theoretical basis for revolutionary austerity. Initially coined by Marx to recognize the lingering source for private wealth as a society underwent the transition to Communism[620], bourgeois rights entered Chinese political discourse in 1958. In September 1958, Zhang Chunqiao, a little-known Party theoretician in Shanghai, raised alarms about the Great Leap Forward as promoting a capitalistic tendency in an article on the *Liberation*, a Shanghai theoretical journal. In Zhang Chunqiao’s view, the Great Leap’s goal was to realize the Yan'an system of "free supply," rather than benefit "bourgeois rights" or the personal income of urban families by paying high wages to more productive laborers. As Zhang Chunqiao foresaw, the prevalence of wages over egalitarian virtue could be the sprouts of "money worship" that would

[619] Li Weiying to Zhang Wenshou, December 22, 1975.

[620] In Marx’s original formulation, "Bürgerliche Rechts" refers to the rights to the products of labor determined by the law of equal exchange-value, which exists in the transitional stage from capitalism to Communism. The true Communist society will overcome "the horizon of bourgeois rights" and realize the principles of "from each according to individual ability, to each according to individual needs" in a highly developed Communist society when individuals were no longer subject o the division of labor and labor becomes an end in itself”. Zhang Chunqiao and likely Mao himself insisted that post-1949 China has drifted away from this principle, whose spirits the war communism of Yan’an days once embraced. C.f. Karl Marx, "Kritik des Gothaer Programmes", *Marx-Engels-Werke (MEW), Band 19*, 4 Auflage, 1974 pp. 19-20

eventually topple the Communist society. [621] Zhang's article fell on deaf ears in the academic circles but received an enthusiastic endorsement from Mao, who immediately ordered the *People's Daily* to reprint it and personally penned an editor's note. While Mao found Zhang's virulent attack on the wage system a bit idealistic, he agreed with the essay's broader ideas about the necessary moves to eliminate wages .[622] Throughout his career as a Party ideologue since 1958, Zhang had been insisting that the Communist Revolution should aim to eliminate any form of private wealth, including the wage. Since the early 1960s, this critique of *faquan* had served as a theoretical foundation for Mao's revolutionary austerity to reduce the role of wage in income distribution. The *faquan* theory thus became the theoretical foundation for the "continuous revolution" against urban bourgeois values in general and the wage system in particular.

In 1975, Zhang, the chief ideologue of the Cultural Revolutionary faction, launched a final attack on bourgeois right, which he connoted the Dengist policy of promoting economic growth and private welfare. His points of attack were the principle of income allocation according to labor contribution (按劳分配), which he saw would necessitate unequal wage rates. It was necessary to freeze wages as an inherently capitalist institution and replacement it with a need-based central provision system. Arguing against the pragmatists who favored economic adjustment over class struggles, Mao and the Cultural Revolution faction reaffirmed the commitment to class struggle and Communist egalitarianism as the Party's chief principle. Zhang levelled his critique especially at Deng Xiaoping as the unnamed "leading capitalist roaders" inside the Communist Party, whose

[621] Zhang Chunqiao, "Pochu zichan jieji faquan sixiang" (Getting Rid of the Ideas of Bourgeois Rights), *People's Daily*, October 13, 1958.

[622] Zheng Zhong, *Zhang Chunqiao Zhuan, 1949 ji qihou* (Biography of Zhang Chunqiao since 1949), The Chinese University Press, 2017, pp. 90-91.

push for economic growth revisionist.[623] While much of the critique would prove prescient, Zhang might not have realized that his orthodox principles had lost much of their appeal in the eyes of ordinary people. The sacrifice the *faquan* theory imposed on the urban families had become economically unsustainable and politically costly by the mid-1970s.

As Mao's cultural revolutionary orthodoxy on private welfare became a source of popular discontent, the sent-down youths policy, another key element of the revolutionary austerity, was also becoming politically costly. In Chapter Three, we have encountered Hua Zhongmin, the father of two sent-down daughters and a firm supporter of the sent-down policy. Their family's economic situation improved remarkably in 1975. Though the father had to face the possibility that they would never return to Shanghai, the family finally repaid more than half of their 400-yuan debt. He also felt a bit of relief by comparing the misery of his family with many other Shanghainese whose children settled in more impoverished regions like Huaibei and Yunnan.[624] On 17 September 1975, Hua Zhongmin expressed the first serious doubt that the country can provide enough factory jobs for the sent-down youths. He was afraid that the temporary delay of hiring now became a permanent feature of the underdeveloped economy. As he wrote to Yanxi, his friend in rural Zhejiang:

> "The rural-urban divide is huge because the rural area is too poor. The "Shanghai Greeting Team" has visited Huaibei. They found the most impoverished peasants in rural north Anhui only earn 10 cents a day! Our sent-down youths in that area also make this amount! Now those Shanghainese youths there were around 27 or 28 years old. They rely on their parents for a living. How can they start a family? The children and their families are becoming hopeless. Anyway, since our country's economic development has not made any progress, urban youths employment remains a problem. Whenever the economy was weak, they shift the burden to us! The sent-down movement left me in debt for eight years. My only hope is to pay off the debts, boost my household economy, and rebuild a well-off family (*xiaokang*

[623] Zhang Chunqiao, "Lun dui Zichanjiejii de quantity zhuanzheng" (On the Dictatorship over the Bourgeoisie), *Hongqi* (Red Flag), 1975, No.4, pp. 1-19.

[624] Hua Zhongmin to Wu Yanxiang, September 15, 1975.

zhijia)".[625]

The popular discontent of revolutionary austerity had been brewing for a long time. In 1971, when Lin Biao's son, Lin Liguo, plotted to assassinate Mao with his small clique of commandos, they noted in their "571 Project: An Outline" that the sent-down youths, the persecuted cadres, and the poorly-paid workers, and especially younger workers would lend their support to their coup d'état due to their prolonged sufferings under Mao's revolutionary austerity[626]. By 1975, workers Hua Zhongming and intellectuals like Li Weiying began to regard the Party's economic policy as a failure and the official ideology as empty talks. Their frustrations over the family sacrifice for unrealistic utopian goals called for an alternative vision. For parents separated from their children and couples torn apart from their loved ones, the family separation has exhausted the passion and diminished the hope inspired by the vision of a Communist society. Pressing family concerns, either the "well-off family" for Hua Zhongmin or the reunion with husband and son for Li Weiying, became the paramount goal in their lives. People frequently asked in their letters: what can we do about the reality?

The death of Zhou Enlai on 8 January 1976 galvanized the pent-up popular grievances against the revolutionary austerity and more broadly, Mao's continuous revolution. In Beijing, hundreds of thousands gathered voluntarily along the Chang'an Street to see off the premier's

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[625] Hua Zhongmin to Wu Yanxi, 17 September 1975

[626] The Lin Liguo clique listed the grievances of social groups as follows: the send-down policy was a disguised reform through labor; the May 7th School of the cadres was a disguised employment; the freezing of wages amounted to disguised capitalist exploitation of the workers, especially younger workers earning entry-level wages; and the peasants who lived in extreme poverty. See: CCP Central Committee, "Zhonggong zhongyang Guanyu zuzhi chuanda he taolun 'Fensui linchen fangdang jituan fangeming zhengbian de douzheng' de tongshi yu cailiao" (CCP Central Committee Notice and Supplementary Materials on the Communication and Discussion of *The Struggles to Defeat the Counter-Revolutionary Coup d'état of the Lin Biao-Chen Boda Anti-Party Group*), Jan 13, 1972. The Chinese Cultural Revolution Database.

hearse. In the three months leading to the Tomb Sweeping Festival on 5 April, hundreds of mourning poems circulated across China, especially in the cities. Rumors circulated that Zhou died at the hands of the leftists as he was defending the people's interests. The rising popular discontent, often expressed as collective mourning for Zhou and support for Deng, prompted Mao's decision to oust Deng from the Party leadership.[627]

When the news about Deng's ousting from the Politburo reached Chongqing, Bai Chongzhi, a worker of the Chongqing Steel Company, posted a Big Character Poster on a conspicuous spot in the city center and stirred up a sensational response. The 10,000-words poster mounted a sharp critique of Zhang Chunqiao's *faquan* theory, accusing the Cultural Revolution faction of "distorting the principle of Communism, destroying the economy, exploiting the people, and jeopardizing the country's future". In one of the most sensational paragraphs, Chongzhi evoked the powerful image of Zhou Enlai to rally ordinary people behind the popular movement against continuous revolution: "I believe, those thousands of people who mourned the Premier on Tiananmen Square, those friends who voluntarily wore black cotton bands to mourn our Premier, those sons and daughters of the Chinese nation, who hope for the country's prosperity and the people's happiness, and those sons and daughters who have not lost all their love for the nation, and those Chinese nationals who have not lost all their moral conscience, must all share my anger and remorse at this moment."[628]

On March 10, 1976, Li Junxi, a 23-year old worker at Hangzhou Steam Turbine Factory, began to circulate a fabricated "Last Testament of Premier Zhou Enlai." The writer of the false

[627] Alexander V. Pantsov, Steven I. Levine, *Mao: The Real Story*, New York: Simon and Schuster, p.643
[628] Bai Chongzhi, in Yu Xiguang ed., *Wenhuadageming shangshuji* (Collections of Petitions in the Cultural Revolution), Changsha: Hunan renmin chubanshe, 1989, p.225

testament was no average worker. The son of the Director of the Hangzhou No.1 Hospital, Li was closely associated with the children of provincial Party elites. The little circle of elites' children often met and debated about politics, since they all had access to "internally circulated books"[629] and classified documents. However, Li Junxi's intention for engaging in such a risky act was personal more than political: he just broke up with his girlfriend and was desperate to find a way to vent his frustration.[630] The meticulously composed "testament" immediately went viral in urban and rural China. Within two months, the "testament" spread via family and friends' networks and reached every corner of urban China and many parts of rural areas. People talked about it, copied it, and passed it around furiously. In Anhui alone, the local police tracked down 6,935 hand copies or 5 copies per 100,000 people in a month. [631]

Besides the high level of disaffection, the fake testament sparked, the document contains a few dangerous lines on contemporary politics in early February 1976. The first paragraph is a fictional endorsement of Deng Xiaoping by Zhou Enlai. In the false will, Zhou Enlai was imagined to have approved Deng Xiaoping, which more likely expressed the popular support for Deng:

> "Comrade Xiaoping has done great service for our country in the past year, especially in his implementation of the three instructions of Chairman Mao (Study theory, stop political struggles, and promote economic development). The decisive manner in which Xiaoping discharged his duty is sufficient to prove that the Chairman's decision (to reinstate Deng Xiaoping) is right. Xiaoping must sustain the stamina, frequently ask the Chairman, care for other comrades, and take more responsibilities, and think about longer impacts when putting forth new slogans. Xiaoping will face more pressure in the future. If he maintains this right

[629] Under the publication law of the People's Republic China, certain books can only be circulated among and read by people above certain ranks. Any books that contain sensitive political content belong to this category, such as books on the Party's history, Western politics, and most of the social science disciplines. These books are called "internal reference books".

[630] Yuan Min, *Chongfan 1976: Wosuo jingli de Zongli yiyan* (Back to 1976: The Case of the False Will of the Premier that I Experienced), Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 2010, pp. 120-132.

[631] Zhou Ming, Fu Xipeng, *Chongbai de daijia* (The Price of Worship), Beijing: Huaxia chubanshe, 2000, p.108

course (of economic development), he will surely overcome any obstacles." [632]

The second paragraph is even more potent since it implicitly acknowledges the failure of the Communist project to deliver its promise. Impersonating Zhou Enlai, Li Junxi mounted a biting attack on the economic failures of the Communist state that almost sounded like the betrayal of the revolutionary cause.

> "In 1926, when I parted with Comrade Yun Daiying, he said: "When all Chinese people are living a good life, the survivors among us must go to the tombs of the martyred and tell them that they have not died in vain. The dead will hear the voice of your comrade. Next year, he martyred for the revolution. I have been wondering all these years: "how can I report to our revolutionary martyrs? As I am looking back to the words of the martyrs and reflecting on the living standard of our people, I feel guilty for not doing a bit more work." [633]

The sense of mourning and anger soon burst into a mass political movement. Beginning in January 1976, several Big Character Posters accusing the Gang of Four had appeared in Nanjing. For the next couple of weeks, flowers, poems, and posters in commemoration of the Premier seemed to be all over the public places in China, and notably, at the Tiananmen Square.[634] In Chinese political tradition, the spontaneous mourning over a national symbol was a sure sign of mass disaffection. The Cultural Revolution faction naturally became the principal targets of the grievances. Although they had the consistent vision of a continuous revolution, the pains the Cultural Revolution, especially the emotional and economic sacrifice it imposed on millions of urban families, ultimately proved unsustainable for the vision.

Leveraging on the popular content against the Cultural Revolution, Hua Guofeng launched the coup d'état against the Mao's most loyal supporters on 6 October 1976, a month after the death

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[632] Ibid pp. 27-29

[633] Ibid.

[634] Shi Yun, Li Danhui, *Nanyi jixu de geming: Cong piling Dao pideng* (When the Continuous Revolution Goes Awry: From the Anti-Lin Biao Campaign to Anti-Deng Xiaoping Campaign), Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2008, pp. 624-628

of the Chairman. By this time, the popular grievance against the Gang of Four, if not Mao himself, was already the dominant sentiment among the urban residents, who had begun to equate the idealistic austerity with political persecution. When the Cultural Revolution factions attempted to place their 30 divisions of Workers Militia in their base of Shanghai "on high alert", they did not receive any positive response from the militia. Few Shanghai workers wanted to stand up for the call to stage an "uprising". Once a takeover team from Beijing easily disbanded the Workers' Militia, hundreds of thousands Shanghai residents participated in the self-organized celebration of the arrest of the Gang of Four. A few phone calls and changes of key personnel were enough to liquidate the resistance of the Cultural Revolution factions' formidable urban stronghold. [635]

Although the coup against the Cultural Revolution faction was successful, Hua's brand of refined Maoism fell short of a critical policy overhaul. After the fall of "Gang of the Four," Hua championed revolutionary objectives and sought a conciliatory approach amid mounting disaffection from both the elites and the mass. He blamed the "Gang of Four" for an "economic collapse" without jettisoning Mao's visions for continuous revolutions. On the National Congress in 1978, Hua indicted the Gang of Four for "driving the national economy to the brink of collapse" and called the nation to unite in the struggle for economic revival under the Maoist doctrine. He promised to unite the country for rapid economic development and the people's welfare, while continuing the Maoist programs of class struggles.[636]

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[635] The Shanghai Garrison Theory Work Team, "Shanghai junmin jianjue yonghu dangzhongyang jueding" (The Army and People of Shanghai Steadfastly Supports the Decision of the CCP Central Committee), in *Zhonggong dangshi cankao ziliao* (Reference Materials on CCP History), vol. 27, Beijing: PLA Party History Office, 1988, pp. 629-637

[636] Hua Guofeng, "Unite and Strive to Build a Modern, Powerful Socialist Nation," *Beijing Review,* 1978, Vol. 21, No. 10. p.2

Hua and his allies soon became the victim of the economic and political problems of the day. After the fall of the Gang of Four, Hua had to restore Deng to leadership positions in 1977 under renewed pressures from old cadres and public opinion. Once back in the leadership position, Deng launched attacks on Hua and his fellow Maoists. A loyal student of Mao, Hua had to toe the line between Maoist politics and necessary adjustments. As unpopular measures like sent-down policy and re-education of cadres by labor continued into the late 1970s, the pragmatists' coalition accused Hua of committing ideological dogmatism. The returned technocrats further criticized him for a Great Leap style investment-driven heavy industrialization. After the apparent failure of these projects, Hua and the remaining loyalists resigned from the Party's leadership.[637]

While Hua Guofeng's failure to hold his position as Mao's chosen successor was primarily due to the overwhelming political balance in favor of the old cadres, he was also weakened theoretically by the pragmatists. Most critically, he could not hold a consistent Maoist position vis-à-vis the pragmatists on the revolutionary austerity after the death of Mao and the defeat of the ideological hardliners. In 1977-1978, under the Hua Guofeng leadership, the Party theoreticians held four conferences to evaluate bourgeois rights and wage incomes' theoretical validity. Although a handful theoreticians still insisted that the wage system was in principle against the "Dictatorship of the Proletarians," most returned old cadres and Party intellectuals agreed that wages should not be regarded as bourgeois right. The official consensus recognizes individuals' material interests and reasonable income inequality rates as consistent with principle of Chinese

[637] Xie Yuanxue, *Zhongguo gong chan dang lishijishi* (Historical Chronicles of the History of the CCP), Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 2003, p. 153.

socialism.[638] In particular, the per-piece wages and merits-based bonuses received overwhelming support from the majority.[639] Despite resistance from Propaganda Department, the debate's conclusion received the endorsement from Deng Xiaoping and appeared in the *People's Daily* in May 1978.[640]

The theoretical reevaluation on wages in 1977 paved the way for the first national wage adjustment since 1963. The wage reform of 1977 increased the wage rates of 51% of workers and raised the average urban monthly wage by 5.6 yuan. In 1978, bonus and piece rates also returned to the standard wage package.[641] Wage rates at national and provincial levels have been adjusted upward regularly since 1977. By the mid-1990s, the increasingly unequal income distribution has become such an established fact of everyday life that the official discourse of "shared prosperity" as the goal of Chinese "socialism" almost became a scholastic tautology.[642]

At the same time, a shift in China's geopolitical strategies in the late 1970s marked the end of its role in global Communism. Once Deng secured his position as the de facto decision-maker

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[638] Liu Guangjie, *1977-1978 Anlao fenpei lilun taolunhui jiyao sici huibian* (The Summaries of the Four Sessions of the Theoretical Conference on the "Allocation according to Labor"), Beijing: Zhongguo caizheng jingji chubanshe, 1978, pp. 59-67.

[639] Zhao Lukuan, "Laodong baochou xingshi" (Forms of Compensation to Labor), in *Anlao fenpei lilun taolunhui jiyao sici huibian,* pp. 67-71.

[640] Huang Li, "Wei "Anlao fenpei zhengming": 1977-1978 Anlao fenpei lilun taolunhui shimo (Legitimizing the Principle of "Allocation according to Labor": the History of the Theoretical Conference on the "Allocation according to Labor"), 1978.

[641] Huang Dingtai and Chu Keqin, *Zhongguo de gongsi tiaozheng yu Gaige* (Wage Adjustment and Reforms in China, 1949-1991), Chengdu: Sichuan People's Press, pp. 225-227.

[642] The latest principle of income distribution was "distribution according to labor contribution in principle supplemented by distribution according to factors of production." Most recently, there was signs that Xi Jinping would revive the "shared prosperity" by aggressively reforming China's income distribution system.

on the Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Party Congress, he staged the so-called "diplomatic whirlwind" in the last months of 1978 and the first months of 1979 by formalizing China's diplomatic relations with the United States and its Asian allies. During these tours, Deng not only promised China's withdrawal of support for the Communist movements in Asia but also vowed to deliver a military blow to Vietnam to protect China's national interests[643]. As Deng rightly predicted, the Soviet Union watched closely from afar without interfering directly in the Sino-Vietnamese war to aid its Vietnamese ally.[644] Since the Soviet Union was drawn into a costly, unwinnable war with Afghanistan in late 1979, it ended the détente with the United States and entered another round of geopolitical struggles with an United States under the leadership of Ronald Reagan, the unflinching Cold Warrior.[645] The return of Soviet-American tensions in the early 1980s facilitated Deng's strategic cooperation with the United States, while overseeing a détente with the Soviet Union in the 1980s.[646] As the détente with both superpowers proceeded smoothly, China's security situation was the very opposite of the 1960s, a situation ideal for ideological demobilization and economic opening to the capitalist world.

China's rapprochements with the United States and opening to the Western world coincided with a significant structural change in the global political economy. The stagflation of the 1970s in the United States, Japan, and Europe stimulated the rise of the outbound investment of capitalist

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643 Xiaoming Zhang, *Deng Xiaoping's Long War: The Military Conflict between China and Vietnam*, *1979-1991,* Chapel Hill, N.C, University of North Carolina Press, 2015, pp. 170-171.

644 King C. Chen, *China's War with Vietnam 1979: Issues, Decisions, and Implications*, Stanford: Hoover Institution, pp. 109-111.

645 Vladislav Zubov, *A Failed Empire: The Soviet Union in the Cold War from Stalin to Gorbachev*, Chapel Hill, N.C., The University of North Carolina Press, 2007, pp. 192-205.

646 Sergey Radchenko, *Unwanted Visionaries: The Soviet Failure in Asia at the End of the Cold War,* New York: Oxford University Press, 2014, pp. 44-48.

enterprises, who sought a roundabout way to make profits by circumventing the political power of the trade unions at home. [647] The opening of markets and the arrival of foreign investments have already helped to industrialize many countries in Asia, such as Hong Kong, Singapore, Taiwan, Malaysia, and Thailand, where overseas Chinese had long consolidated their footholds in the transnational market network. As China opened its door to global capitalism, it soon found its way to enter Asia's growing networks through overseas Chinese communities' active roles. [648]

As a political economy doctrine, the revolutionary austerity ended with Mao's death, the fall of the Gang of Four, the bourgeois rights debate of 1977, and the subsequent pro-welfare reform policies in 1978. However, the full implementation of these policies would wait until 1984, when the government kicked start the urban economic reform. Under Deng's aegis, the pragmatic factions took advantage of the geopolitical shifts in the late 1970s to launch China's Xiaokang-brand modernization by integrating with the American world order. Thanks to the broader popular sentiments against continued austerity and family separation, these elite political shifts proceeded smoothly. When Deng Xiaoping reoriented the Chinese economy from revolutionary politics to depoliticized reform and growth, he received widespread support as the successor to the dying Premier Zhou Enlai, the leading pragmatists in the popular mind.

After revolutionary austerity lost its ideological and political bases, the pragmatic factions seized the control of the Chinese political economy. Unlike the 1960s, the market mechanisms no longer faced the powerful challenges of ideological puritanism. The Anti-Spiritual Pollution Movement, the last resistance from Communist ideological puritanism in 1983, targeted mainly

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[647] Prasad Monica, *The Politics of Free Markets: The Rise of Neoliberal Economic Policies in Britain, France, Germany, and the United State*s, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2006.

[648] Paul J. Bolt, "Looking to the Diaspora: The overseas Chinese and China's economic development, 1978 – 1994", *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* 5:3, pp. 467- 96

the moral and social influences of the nascent "bourgeoisization" but could not change the course of the economic reform.[649] Deng Xiaoping and his reformist lieutenants introduced a series of unprecedented measures to opening China to market forces, starting with the increased use of economic levers in urban enterprises and de-collectivization in rural communes. This first period of reforms culminated with the comprehensive urban economic reform, when Beijing gave green lights to experiments with the market mechanisms under the politically ambiguous heading of "commodity economy" in 1984.[650] Even though these early steps towards economic liberalization were still a far cry from the "capitalism with Chinese characteristic" in the 1990s, these measures initiated China's integration with the capitalist world system.

An Unhappy Economic Recovery

Both Hua Guofeng and the pragmatists blamed the "Gang of Four" for "economic collapse" and the material deprivation among urban and rural residents by the end of the Cultural Revolution. But was the Chinese economy on the verge of collapse during the later stages of the Cultural Revolution? The well-documented disaffection in the late Maoist years seemed to confirm the narrative. But if we compare the early 1970s with previous periods, the later years of the Cultural Revolution were a time of sustained growth in agriculture and industrial output. There was ups and downs in the economy's performance, but nothing like the disasters of the early 1960s or the Cultural Revolution ever the interrupted the upward economic trajectory since the late 1960s. In Shanghai, the gross output and per-capita growth output increased 200% and 160% between 1968

[649] Richard Baum, *Burying Mao: Chinese Politics in the Age of Deng Xiaoping*, Princeton, N.J,: Princeton University Press, 1994, pp. 159-169.

[650] Barry Naughton, *Growing Out of the Plan: the Chinese Economic Reform, 1978-1993*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995, pp. 98-103.

and 1980. The only disaster was the stagnant or even falling per-capita wage rates during the 1970s.[651]

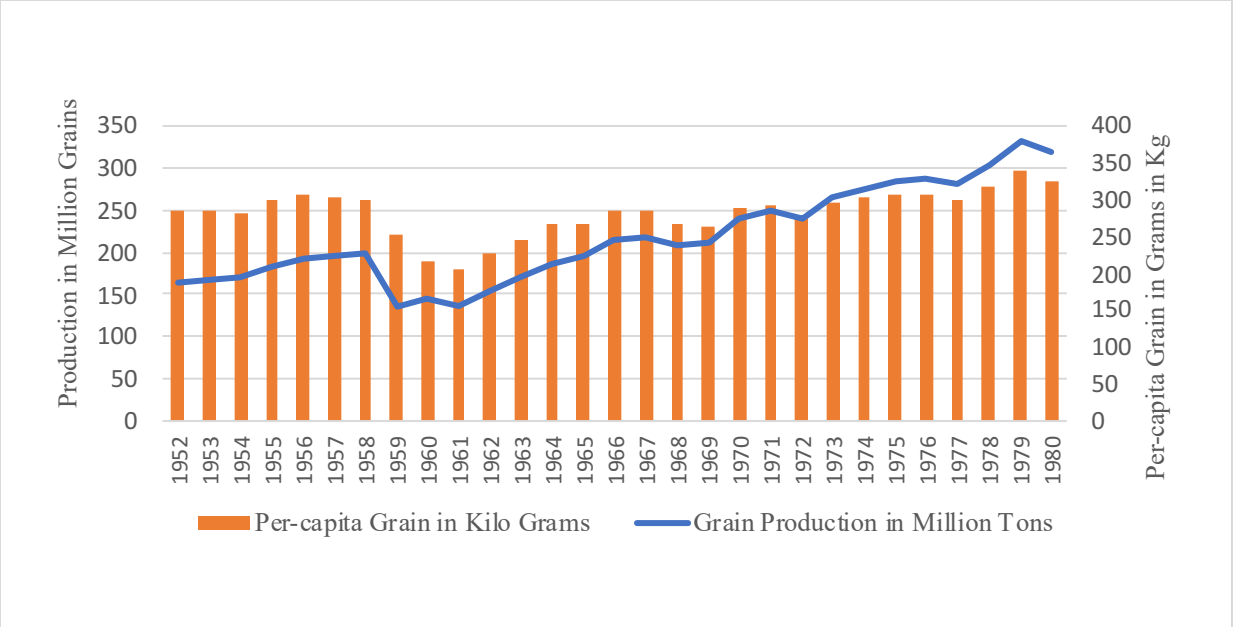
As Sigrid Schmalzer and Joshua Eisenmann have emphasized in their recent works on Maoist agriculture and rural communes, post-Great Leap rural China saw sustained growth in agricultural outputs and improvements in agricultural technologies. This transformation of Chinese agriculture was due to state-sponsored grassroots experiments and the implementation of new farm technology such as hybrid varieties of rice, irrigation projects, and widespread use of chemical fertilizers.[652] Even the sent-down movement between 1968 and 1979, which has proved costly for urban families and inefficient for the rural economy, yielded a positive long-term effect on rural children's education achievement in the 1970s and beyond[653]. As a result, post-Great Leap decades of revolutionary austerity saw a quick recovery and then a sustained albeit slower growth in grain production and rural economic development, until there was again a spurt of rapid growth after 1978. Though population growth ate away much of the gains in grain production, China's per-capita grain consumption in 1978 surpassed the historical height of 307 kilo grams in 1957.

Figure 5-1 China's Grain Production and Consumption, 1952-1980

[651] Refer to Appendix E for detailed tabulation.

[652] C.f. Sigrid Schmalzer, *Red Revolution, Green Revolution: Scientific Farming in Socialist China*, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2016; Joshua Eisenman, *Red China's Green Revolution: Technological Innovation, Institutional Change, and Economic Development under Commune*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2018.

[653] Yi Chen, Ziying Fan, Xiaomin Gu, and Li-An Zhou, "Arrival of Young Talent: The Send-Down Movement and the Rural Education in China", *American Economic Review*, Vol. 110, No. 11, 2020, pp. 3393-3430



Source: National Bureau of Statistics Database

In the domain of household consumer durables, the Cultural Revolution years saw rapid industrialization and rising consumer demand for quality products. From 1965 to 1975, China's economy grew at an annual rate of about 7% from 171 to 301 billion Yuan. While the agricultural and service sectors both expanded moderately, the manufacturing industry grew fastest at the rate of 8.8% from 55 to 124 billion.[654] The impact on the industrial structure was the expansion of the secondary sector, manufacturing, and construction. The share of the secondary industry in China's GDP has increased from 35.1% to 45.5% while the share of agriculture and service declined from 38.3% and 26.7% to 32.5% and 22.0%. [655]

[654] National Statistical Bureau, *Xinzhongguo liushinian Tongji ziliao huibian* (Collection of Statistical Materials in the First Sixty Years of the PRC), Beijing: Zhongguo Tongji chubanshe, p. 12

[655] *Ibid*, p. 22.

In the later phase of the Cultural Revolution, Shanghai was a thriving industrial and commercial hub of China undergoing a profound demographic transition. Between 1968 and 1976, Shanghai, like other major urban centers, saw a moderate decrease in its working population but a gradual economic recovery. As the sent-down youths moved out to the countryside and industrial production returned to full gear, the city reached near full employment and ran into a labor shortage. For the first time, Shanghai became a city of "proletariats," with 1.5 million urban population classified as workers.[656]

As discussed in previous chapters, the revolutionary austerity had a profound impact on urban families' marriage and reproductive choices. The reduction in jobs, average wage, and amenities like daycare had a direct impact on urban families' reproductive choices. The sent-down youths were the worst affected population, as their marriage and childbirth were typically delayed by the financial costs and economic uncertainties brought by family separation. The introduction of family planning further curtailed birth rates and initiated a rapid demographic transition for the younger generation. Even as the population of Shanghai was stabilized between 10.7 and 10.8 million between 1963 and 1977, net birth had fallen precipitously from 248,000 to 46,700[657]. Such structural changes in the population tended to increase the share of working people by reducing the number of young dependents.

Although the overall wage rates remained frozen raised until 1977, the weight of the demographic transition carried a broader economic consequence for average urban families. When the younger generation delayed marriage and childbirth, they oriented household economy from

[656] *Shanghaishi guomin jingji he shehui fazhan lishi Tongji ziliao* (Historical Statistical Materials on the National Economy and Social Development of Shanghai) 1949-2000, Beijing: Zhongguo tongji chubanshe, 2000, p. 35

[657] *Ibid*, p. 37.

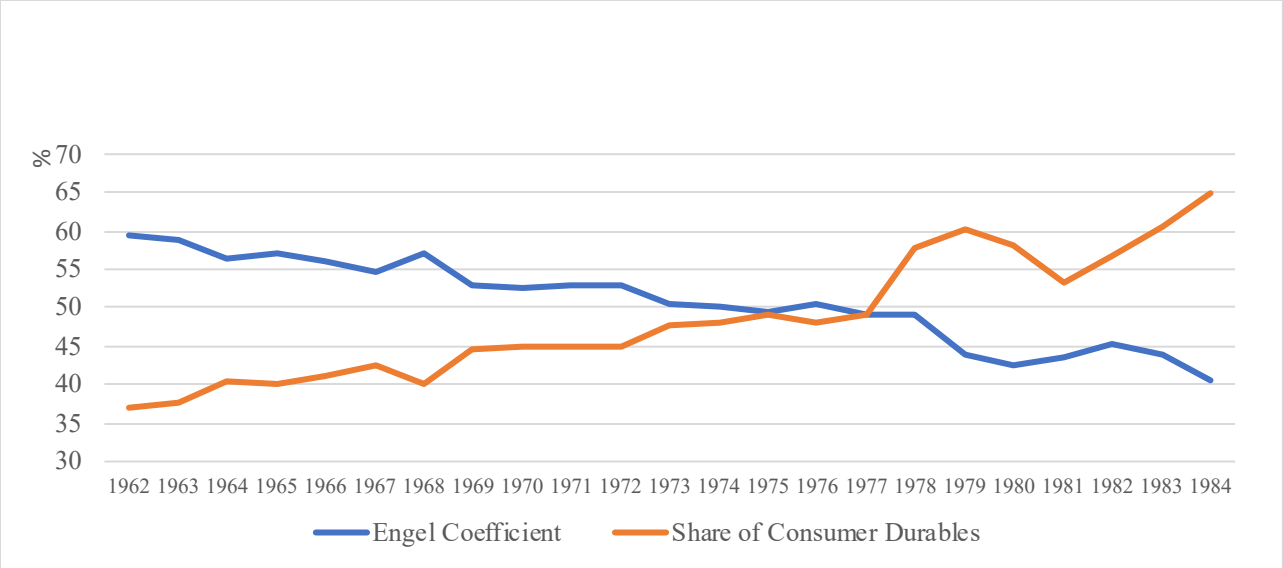
reproduction to consumption. In the early 1970s, Shanghai transformed from a city of dependents to a society of working consumers. The demands for all sorts of goods, and especially consumer durables and quality products, increased rapidly. Between 1968 to 1975, the total sale of Shanghai's state-run retail system has increased from 541 to 969 million yuan, while the sale of Shanghai's largest shopping complex, the Hualian Shopping Mall, increased from to 34 to 77 million yuan.[658]

The consumption boom during the Cultural Revolution was not merely a recovery from the crisis of subsistence. It also entailed a structural change in the household economy. The best measure of the fundamental difference is the Engel coefficient or the share of food in household expenditure in Shanghai. After the Great Leap, it has risen from 50% in 1957 to 60% in 1962, provoking a significant crisis of subsistence. Except for a moment of the Cultural Revolution, the share declined continuously between 1962 and 1984. By 1975, it has fallen below 50%; in 1984, it reached 40 %. While the Engel coefficient decreased significantly, the household saving rates, which once fell to negative in the early 1960s during the Great Leap Forward slump and the first years of the Cultural Revolution, recovered in the later years of the Cultural Revolution and increased to an unprecedented 15% in 1984. The structural changes in household expenditure provide robust demand for the consumer durables: the "three pieces," textiles, furniture, radio sets, and other goods, whose share in household expenditure rose rapidly from 15% to 45% from the mid-1960s to the early 1980s[659]

Figure 5-2: Structure of Shanghai Household Expenditure: Food (Engel Coefficient) vs. Consumer Durables (including clothing)

[658] *Shanghai Riyong Gongyepin Shangyezhi* (Gazetteer of Shanghai Everyday Industrial Products), Shanghai: Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences, 1999, pp. 664-665

[659] Calculated based on the household incomes and expenditure date from the Historical Statistical Materials.



Source: *Shanghai Lishi tongji ziliao huibian, 1949-2009*

The economic transformation of the Cultural Revolution years also changed the values and consumption patterns of the youths who married later and had less children than their parents. If the primary identity of urban youths in late 1960s China was a revolutionary vanguard, the dominant character in the late 1970s was an increasingly "materialistic" proletarian consumer. The transformation of the national and household economy in the Cultural Revolution decade meant a different world of work and family for the young generation. Compared with the older generation, they could afford to enjoy the economic freedom of an unmarried single wage-earner or a married couple with double income and no child under the state policy of late marriage and family planning. Meanwhile, as the political enthusiasm of urban youths had receded in the 1970s, their appetite for all facets of material life, especially the interests in consumer durables and a more sophisticated lifestyle, grew exponentially.

If in the early 1960s, the typical consumer durables---bicycles, watches, and sewing machines---collectively known as "Three Pieces," were still the mark of economic privilege; by

the late 1970s, they had become the universally recognized "must-haves" for newly-wed couples nationwide. This trend first appeared in 1970s Shanghai, where urban youths tended to regard the accumulation of these items and other necessary material conditions as the threshold to marriage. Even the sent-down youths in the countryside and military farms considered the acquisition of wristwatches and bicycles, usually via their family, as an essential marker of their coming of age.[660]

As the urban household economy became more consumerist, Shanghai manufacturing and service sectors could hardly meet the rising demand of the proletariat families under multiple institutional burdens. First, the production level increased and labor supply relative unchanged, the city experienced a shortage of labor. Second, the lack of economic incentives and competition led to reduced work discipline and inadequate quality control. Third, the revolution austerity had drastically decreased the investment on economic sectors that directly catered to the daily needs of every life, especially various street-level services. All these problems were exacerbated by the militant anti-bourgeois and anti-revisionist fiscal rules that the post-Cultural Revolution regime imposed on all the factories and their workforce. As a result, an acute contradiction between the working population's demand for a better quality of life and the sluggish supply of everything was taking shape.

By late 1975, the grievances of proletarian consumers over the poor quality of consumer goods became such a significant concern that the Shanghai Revolution Committee controlled by the Gang of Four ordered a general survey of the situation. The findings present a bleak picture of rapid industrial growth amid unmet household demands. The final report by the investigation team of the First Commercial Bureau of Shanghai in January 1976 notes that the production of Three Pieces--watches, bicycles, and sewing machines--has increased by 300-400% from 1965 to 1975.

[660] "Nongchang daishoubiao de Gushi" (A Zhiqing Story about Wearing a Wristwatch in a Farm), http://www.shnczq.org/detail.php?id=5907 (Accessed on 15 November 2019)

Textiles and other household consumer goods like nylon socks, polyester blouses, and fir coats experienced similar growth. Most notably, consumer electronics like circuit radio sets and television sets increased 800-1000% in the same period.[661]

After remarking on the achievements in industrial outputs, the report goes on to elaborate on what appeared as the most challenging issue for the state-run commercial system, namely, the lack of quality assurance due to the lack of qualified repairers across China for the "Three Pieces." The unmet demand was most acute in sewing machines, but the situation of wristwatches was also desperate. In 1975, the demand for repairs of the "Three Pieces" in Shanghai reached 1.2 million, and the maintenance costs amounted to 6 million yuan, while the capacity could hardly meet a fraction of these demands. Things could be much worse for smaller cities and towns, which lacked even the most meager ability to repair and quality control.

As the report laments, the battlefield (market) for watch repair at the county level was left all to the suspicious "autonomous capitalist elements," or individual or small household repair shops that operated on black or semi-legal markets.[662] While the production of the Three Pieces went through a series of technical improvements, including the national standardizing of all watch work and the introduction of a new model of sewing machines in 1971, Shanghai watch and sewing-machine factories could not meet consumer demand for repairs. Most critical to the shortage was the sluggish supply of spare parts. In Shanghai No.1 Sewing Machine Factory, there were only five works who worked on the leather shuttle, a critical replaceable part. Once they finished their

[661] "Shanghai diyi shangyeju diaochazu diaocha" (Investigations of Shanghai First Commerce Bureau's Investigation Team), January 1976, B123-8-1542, 30-43

[662] Ibid, p. 35.

planned quota, they hurried to other work stations. As a result, there were few workers available to meet the demand for spare parts, which remained undersupplied for years.[663]

The production of wristwatches was symptomatic of the rapid industrialization and its impacts in urban China. In 1958, Tianjin, Beijing, and Shanghai produced a total number of watches was 165, 000. In 1962, the number reached 760,000. In 1965, the number of wristwatches first reached 1 million. The production increased at the annual rate of 28.1% between 1965 and 1970, 17.6% between 1971 and 1975, and 23.1% between 1976 and 1980. In 1980, China produced a staggering number of 22 million watches, well ahead of other countries in the world. Watch factories could be found across major cities except for the remote provinces of Inner Mongolia, Qinghai, Ningxia, Xinjiang, and Tibet. In 1960, only 1% of urban residents wore wristwatches. By 1981, every urban Chinese had, on average, 1.1 wristwatches. The urban market has become saturated, while the rural market remained largely underexplored with an overall possession rate of 5%. [664]

Rapid industrialization induced a disproportionate outburst of demands also strained the service sector. In September 1977, it came to the attention of the Shanghai Revolutionary Committee that the supply of neighborhood service in worker's communities, known as the New Villages lagged far behind rising demand. In Zhapu Commune Dining House, workers were complaining that the 1.5 yuan per diem dining subsidy could barely meet their primary need for nutrition. The equipment had become dangerously outdated, as the government budget could scarcely keep the six dining houses financially afloat. Most of the workers were older women who

[663] Ibid, p. 41

[664] Zhao Fusheng, Yu Kunyi, "Woguo shoubiao gongye de fazhan he Buju kaiguang" (An Outline of Our National Watch Industry: Its development and distribution), *Jingji yu guanli yanjiu*, 1982, no. 6, pp. 37-38.

joined the workforce in 1958, and more than 30% of them reached retirement age.[665] The most severe shortfall was in the supply of breakfast for over the demand of workers. The amount for deep-fried twist dough sticks and soya-bean milk, the most crucial breakfast dishes for working-class Shanghai, could hardly meet the minimal demand. In Kongjiang New Village, a working family housing compound, the supply for dough stick was one per ten residents and soya-bean milk, only one per eighteen.[666]

It was not just breakfast that was in short supply in the rapidly industrializing city. In Kongjiang New Village Cooperatives Shop, the total retail sales have increased by 150% between 1966 and 1976, while the number of shop assistants only rose by 50%. In Neijiang New Village, one food service center only had 2-3 workers, resulting in long queues and hours of waiting. In the depth of the community, more than 1600 households and 6600 residents had no access to any commercial outlets.[667] A special report on the community public bathing systems found a similar shortfall in supply due to the rising demand for bathing. From 1965 to 1976, the total revenue of the public bathes has increased by 75%. While the income of male bathes increased by 50%, the female bathes have seen a 261% increase in their revenues, suggesting a significant lifestyle change among Shanghai's female workers during the Cultural Revolution. Amid such rising demand, the bathes found not find enough workers, as one-third of workers in the bathes were sick or retiring. [668]

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[665] "Shangye fuwu diaocha zhuankan" (Special Issue on the Commercial Services), March-April 1977, SMA B 248-2-1060, p.15

[666] Ibid, p. 21

[667] Ibid, p.26

[668] Ibid, p. 44.

The rising consumption of working families exerted a powerful influence on state service providers in the name of "the reasonable demand of proletariat consumers." For example, once a working family saved enough to purchase a television, there was an immediate demand for quality entertainment beyond hardcore propaganda. When the Cultural Revolution ended in 1976, the Chinese Central Television Station, China's only television station, was exclusive devoted to political propaganda. Although the television programs in 1978 began to include televised lectures on everyday science and medical knowledge and transmission of sports games, the daily programs were full of international news, political study classes, and revolutionary movies.[669] The situation lingered until 1979, when workers opened criticized the outdated TV programs. By March 1979, the mailroom of the Propaganda Department had received such a growing number of letters that they felt it necessary to incorporate these complaints into their weekly newsletters: "Our family has gone to great length to secure a coupon for a television. We lived frugally for years to save a few hundred *yuan* for this television. But all that we can watch now are old revolutionary movies. How can you treat us, the toiling proletariat workers, in this deplorable way? Are you not saying that you serving the people? I can say you only work for money, not for the proletariat."[670]

A petition signed as "A Communist Youth League Member" contains similar complaints against the inadequate supply of new movies: "I think our leaders don't care about the need of the people. They know very well that our development of the country's movie industry lags far behind the demand of workers and peasants. But they never put forward any concrete measures. They wait

[669] "Shanghai dianshitai jiemu anpai" (TV Programs of Shanghai Television Station), October-November 1976, SMA B285-2-372, pp. 1-10.

[670] "Guangdang qunzhong dui dianshi bubo xinyingpian qianglie bu man"(The People are Strongly Dissatisfied with the Shortage of New Movies), *Xuanchuan gongzuo jianbao* (Newsletters of Propaganda Work), 1979, No. 54, SMA A22-4-131.

passively. There are now a lot of grievances among the proletariat. I hope I can pass my words of heart to the leadership via your mailbox"[671]

In the late 1970s, such complaints were ubiquitous. The tourism sector was another area that badly needed improvement. In April 1979, Shanghai Food and Beverage Service Company filed an urgent report to the Second Bureau of Commerce on a crisis in the family tourism sector. The report described a dire shortage of double rooms in Shanghai hotels due to a surge in travel weddings among young couples. In the Huangpu District, where tourist attractions like business street and the Bund were concentrated, the district service center hosted 143 couples traveling to Shanghai on 19 April. The tourist service center could only accommodate 23 of the 143 couples, leaving 120 couples in public bathrooms. These furious couples gathered at the center to demand better service, claiming that they have saved for years to travel to Shanghai for a wedding. The next day, the center urgently requested 100-150 rooms so they could be accommodated to appease the angry couples.[672]

From the lack of repair capacity of consumer durables to the shortage of new movies, the perceived material deprivation of the self-identified proletariat families gained national political momentum in the historical contexts of the 1970s. While the economy recovered growth, the slow recovery in the provision of goods and services could not meet the rapidly rising expectations of urban residents. Moreover, since Mao's rapprochement with the United States and the decline of ideology, the Party could no longer put the society's material desire in the crosshair of revisionism as in the early 1960s. In 1975, even Zhang Chunqiao had to reaffirm the commitment to workers' legitimate demand for better livelihood amid the enhanced ideological campaign against bourgeois

[671] –Xu Minxing to Zhao Minghua, 6 Sep 1977.

[672] "Guanyu shiying luxing jiehun xuyao, luguan zengpi fufu danjian de Qingshi" (Report on the Lack of Double Rooms for Couples on a Wedding Tour), SMA B98-5-82, p. 338.

values[673]. Shanghai First Bureau of Commerce's investigation into the quality of consumer goods cited earlier was likely an official answer this pressing concern. Furthermore, the revolutionary austerity and especially the painful experience of family separation during the sent-down movement had a political twist to the workers' economic demand. The traditional approach of the Party to such grievances included denunciation meetings and the study sessions of Mao's work. By the late 1970s, these political rituals no longer resonated with most, if not all working families. The combined political weights of unsatisfied demand, ideological retreat, and pent-up disaffection moved Deng Xiaoping and his vision of the future to the front page of history.

The Withdrawal into the Family

Even as the Maoist revolutionary austerity was still ongoing, the appetite for the consumer durables and overall quality of life in the 1970s foreshadowed the Dengist formulation of the "better-off family". This association of *xiaokang* with the failure or decay of a utopian social project was by no means accidental. To understand this pair of conceptual antithesis, we need to delve into history of Xiaokang in China's intellectual history. In its classical formulation in the Classics of Rites and drawn from the everyday language of the people, *xiaokang* (small comfort) was envisioned as the alternative to the perfect social order of *datong* (great harmony). In contrast to *datong*, where "public and common spirit ruled all under the Heaven" and where "men did not just love their parents only, nor treat as children only their sons," the *xiaokang* society that followed the decline of Great Harmony practiced a different set of political and ethical norms centered on the family. Though the "family" in the Warring State text referred to the "family" in the feudal system[674], the

[673] Zhang Chunqiao, "Lun dui Zichanjiejii de quanmian zhuanzheng", p. 9.

[674] The precise date of the text could not be determined, but the scholarly consensus attributed the text to the idealistic Confucians in the Warring State Period. The institution of the family-state thus must likely refer to the feudal patrilineal family before the statist reforms of the family in the late Warring State period. See Liu Feng, *Xianqin Lixue sixiang yu shehui zhenghe* (Ritual Theory and Social Integration in Pre-Qin China), Beijing, Renmin daxue, 2005, pp. 216-217.

Confucian logic of the historical evolution paralleled the shifts from the public to the private in the post-Mao ideology of Chinese socialism:

> "Now that the grand course of history has fallen into disuse and obscurity, the state is a private inheritance. Everyone regards above all others his parents and cherished as children only his sons. People accumulate wealth and exert their strength for their advantage. Great men imagine it is the rule that their states should descend in their own families. Their objective is to make the walls of their cities and suburbs strong and their ditches and moats secure. They make the rules of ritual propriety and righteousness their principle. With these principles, they maintain correct relations between ruler and minister, foster sincerity between fathers and sons, make peace between brothers, and create harmony between husbands and wives. Under the same principles they frame buildings and measures, lay out fields and hamlets, adjudge the superiority of men with prowess and knowledge, and regulate their achievements with a view to their advantage….".[675]

The conceptual history of *xiaokang* as a political discourse reflected changing conception of family-state in Chinese history. In the original Confucian cyclical theory of history, the most significant shift in the transition from *datong* to *xiaokang* was the recognition of the family as the foundation of political order. In the *xiaokang* world, the universal standard of values and common good in the *datong* world would yield to the individual interests of the families, where private interests reigned above everything. Unlike the "universal harmony", which was imbued with public and communal spirits, the *xiaokang* society foregrounded on kinship ties and the wealth of the family. Moreover, the political legitimacy of family-based reproduction of power and wealth accumulation was the norm. In late imperial Chinese political language, the term *xiaokang* referred increasingly to a prosperous, middle-level peasant family. The image of a better-off family was an idealization of peasant life during a time of peace and harmony[676]. It was based on this image that

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[675] The translation here is adapted from James Legg's rendition of the *Book of Rites* with my modifications.

[676] Cihai Editorial Committee, "Xiaokang," *Cihai,* Shanghai: Shanghai cishu chubanshe, 1979, p. 2537

Kang Youwei famously defined the Western society he observed in the early twentieth century as near a realizable model of "xiaokang" for the impoverished China.[677]

In the Maoist days, the vision of "xiaokang" attained a negative connotation. In 1958, a namesake film depicted this popular idea of a better-off family as an outdated idea. Set in rural China during the Great Leap, the film extolled the new Communist norms in rural China, as a new generation of "revolutionary" peasants turned away from their narrowly defined self-interests in the "family plot" characteristic of their parents to the cultivation of the land of the Commune.[678] Deng's positive use of a "better-off family" in 1979 overturned this Maoist formulation. This turn from communist goals to family welfare undergirded a new ideology based on the everyday politics of family welfare. By evoking the vision of a middle-income family as the goal of the Party-state, Deng's reformist coalition effectively endorsed a sweeping ideological shift in Chinese socialism with "Confucian" characteristics.

From the perspective of everyday politics, the ideology of a well-off family (*xiaokang zhijia*) was the official affirmation of the "primacy of family," a grassroots consensus captured in official opinion surveys in urban China. In April 1980, Shanghai Propaganda Department commissioned a series of investigations on values of youths across Shanghai work units by interviewing more than 10,000 workers and comparing their political attitudes with their parents' generation in the late 1950s. Most of the workers surveyed entered the factory by replacing their retired parents in 1978-1979. The findings alarmed the study team of the Propaganda Department so much that they had to delete a substantial part of the original executive summary on the poverty and political

677 Wang Yubo, "Xiaokang Shi Kao" (A Historical Genealogy of Xiaokang), *Shehuixue Yanjiu* (Sociological Research), 1992 (2), 63-64.
678 Li Zhun, *Xiaokang renjia* (Well-off family), Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 1958.

apathy of young workers.[679] The draft report submitted for review on April 1, 1980, noted that there were three ideological trends among the young workers in four sample factories: the activists, the apathetic, and the reactionaries. To the dismay of the ideological workers, the prevailing mood was passive.

The Shanghai factory survey in 1980 finds that both "activists" and the "reactionaries" were the minority. The Party's favorite category, the "active" and "idealist," covered only about 15% of young workers under the age of 35. Active in both politics and professional development, these workers were not only eager for "skill acquisition and self-improvement," but also were ready to "sacrifice individual interests for the public good." The last category, accounting for about 10% of young workers, could be appropriately named as "reactionaries" or "nihilists." Interested in neither politics nor work, they indulged themselves in "individualistic material pursuit" and even criminal activities. For example, gambling and drinking among the younger workers increased by almost 100% from 1978 to 1980, since the sent-down youths replaced their parents in the workplace.[680] Considering the political correctness of official surveys, we can presume political activists were likely below 15%.

The survey found that dominant segment or about 75% of the young workers were politically apathetic and family-oriented. These workers were primarily motivated by the material interests of their nuclear families. Their predominant political identity was a self-identified victim interested in escaping from politics. They identified themselves as "the victims of the Cultural Revolution, the product of the sent-down movement, and the test items of the One-Child Policy."

[679] "Gongchang zhigong duiwu qingkuang diaocha" (A Survey of the Thoughts of Workforce at Factories), Shanghai Municipal Archive (SMA) A22-4-494, pp.1-3

[680] Ibid, pp. 12-14

Yet they were not mainly against the Party-state and its current policies since they regarded state provision of welfare as the compensation for their sacrifice and any resistance to the state policy of family planning as counterproductive. In their words, "We have weathered too much turbulence, traveled far from home, tasted all the bitterness of life, and seen through the smokescreen of politics." "Now we knew only our salary; the politics of the Communist Party was none of our business." On the top of the minds of these youths were to a happy nuclear family: young men were busy with purchasing furniture and household consumer durables; young women were most interested in clothing, decorations, and textile designs.[681]

Economic concerns weighed heavily on young workers who returned to the city after years in the countryside. A look at the young workers at several state-run factories finds them overwhelmingly concerned with family economics. In the Huasheng Fan Factory, the average monthly wages for older workers were 70 yuan. They needed not to worry about thorny issues of housing, marriage, and children. In contrast, a young worker aged 25, freshly entered the factory via work replacement, typically earned only a starting pay of 38 *yuan*. Meanwhile, the marriage expenditure in Shanghai in 1980 has reached from 200 in the late 1950s to 1,000-2,000 yuan, equivalent to three to five years' earning of the young workers.[682] Some workers who returned from the countryside were disillusioned to find their economic status unchanged: the workload was like the countryside, and the income was not much better given the price level. Most alarmingly for the Propaganda officials, young workers were not interested in the Party as Party

[681] Ibid, p. 17

[682] Ibid, p. 19

membership could not help delivering economic benefits: about 3% of the young workers were interested in joining the Communist Party or the Youth League.[683]

The older generation's opinionated views of the Cultural Revolution threw the younger generation's political apathy into sharp relief. While young urban workers understood themselves as victims, there was surprisingly little that they wanted to say about the revolution in the surveys. The typical attitude was to bury the revolutionary learnings of their formative years and move forward with the new life in the family. Among the elders, however, the dust of the revolution remained unsettled. Some actively supported the official verdicts of the Gang of Four. Some opposed the old cadres' criticism of the Cultural Revolution. The Department of Propaganda's survey of public opinions after the Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Party Congress in December 1978 found that a substantial minority of mid-rank cadres in Shanghai were opposed to the Party Central Committee's critique of Mao. Citing Mao's analysis of Soviet revisionism, the Maoists were unhappy that Beijing had "cut down the flag" and "thrown away the knife"[684] by criticizing Mao's political judgment in launching the Cultural Revolution.[685] A sizeable minority among the cadres were also comprehensive about Beijing's strategy to uphold socialism by steering politics away from class struggle. "What was socialism without the class struggle?" they asked, "Isn't it just lip service?". Some cadres wanted the Party to acknowledge the total failure of socialism and openly embrace capitalism.[686]

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[683] Ibid, p. 21.

[684] These popular metaphors, first coined by Mao in his ideological struggles with the Soviet Union, mean "to abandon the Communist ideology" and "to forsake the power of ideology".

[685] "Jinnian yilai ganbu qunzhong sixiang qingkuang" (Current Thoughts of Cadres and Masses), SMA A22-4-113, p.3

[686] Ibid, pp 4-6.

The trend of youth de-politicization in Shanghai reflected a broader national phenomenon across the country's factories and schools. On university campuses, the traditional stronghold of political education, young students, and teachers hid away from politics as if it was a plague. When they were opinionated, they often developed "heretical" thoughts. On Beijing university campuses, there were widespread doubts over the Party's infallibility. Some students even openly question the war with Vietnam as a Chinese invasion of Vietnam. The willingness to participate in the Youth League's compulsory education session was so low that 80% of the students were not listening to the lectures. They were more enthusiastic about reading politically suspicious, bourgeois pop-fictions and poetry.[687] In a critical assessment of contemporary youth culture, a contributor to the Youth League's weekly bulletin lamented that the Cultural Revolution had destroyed idealism and enshrined self-interests as the highest good among the youths. Looking at this same development in a positive light, another scholar argued that such self-interest would serve as a driver for economic growth. Either way, the top brass of the Youth League conceded the decline of revolutionary ideals and the rise of self-interest as the dominant value.[688]

In private talks and family letters, when youths in the post-Mao era were franker about their opinions, the turn from politics to everyday life came earlier and carried a stronger emotional imprint. On 16 August 1977, Zhao Minghua, the Shanghai youth straddled in Anhui and separated from his loved ones in Shanghai, wrote to his fiancée about his ideas of politics and family life. Sent down to rural Anhui in 1972 and recruited to a local factory in 1975, Zhao Minghua was hardworking, though not a very self-disciplined worker. His fiancée, who never went to the

[687] The Communist Youth League, "Tuan de Qingkuang" (Youth League Weekly Monitor), No. 38, July 27, 1979, Jilin Provincial Archive, 0015-1979-0096-1925.

[688] The Communist Youth League, "Tuan de Qingkuang" (Youth League Weekly Monitor), No. 82, April 9, 1979, Jilin Provincial Archive, 0015-1980-0043-0014.

countryside thanks to her two sent-down brothers, clearly shared his views. At the time the letter was written, their most pressing issue was the emotional suffering of separation rather than politics and material deprivation. They used Pushkin's *If life deceives yo*u to encourage themselves. But Minghua went beyond encouragement to reflect on their fates in the broader historical context.

> "Recently, I felt that we must develop our perspectives on everything and every point of view rather than following others. If we look at history and political stage, there is no single political slogan, article, or assertion that is not interpreted differently in society. Haven't "fragrant flower" in the days of Gang of Four become "poisonous weed" in our days? Nothing is for sure in our recent history. Just as you said, political struggles are meaningless fights for power (original emphasis). They serve the ruling class and has nothing to do with the ordinary people. People like us who live at the grassroots should have our perspectives, even if these perspectives are "reactionary." Our understanding of everything should rest on a clear understanding of self-interests."[689]

Reflecting on his past commitment to Communist ideals, Minghua finds that meaning of life was not in work but the future of the unborn baby. In his mind, the baby has replaced the Communist ideal as the new sacred goal in his life.

> "I used to consider myself a Marxist. I have indeed read some books by Marx and Lenin. But there are always things beyond their explanations. Their logic seems coherent, but the hard reality shows the opposite. I can't talk about these issues in the letter, nor could I explain clearly my theory. Let's ground our life on reality and not waste our days (in Marxist theory). Even if we can't make our names in this world, we should leave something to the world. My highest goal and happiness in life is to witness in our future baby the embodiment of our best sides. Let him realize our dreams and stand out among his peers!" [690]

Zhao Minghua and its circles of friends would readily fit neatly with the 75% majority in the factory surveys. His political apathy was not due to his aloofness as a talented young man well-versed in arts and literature. His close friend Xu Minxing, another Shanghai sent-down youth who worked at a Power Plant in Henan, strongly endorsed his political views. Though he attended the factory's Party school and actively followed national politics, Minxing was dismayed about

[689] Zhao Minghua to Qin Xiaofei, August 16, 1977, p.2

[690] Ibid, p.3

political upheavals and recent ideological shifts after Deng Xiaoping seized power. On March 3, 1980, Minxing shared his frustration with Minghua about the Communist Party's problematic historical narrative:

> "If we want to be logical, the Communist Party was already done with the Maoist line when they rehabilitated Deng Xiaoping. What is the glory of Maoism but the decade-long destruction? From the Fifth Plenary Session of the Eighty Party Congress to the Fifth Plenary Session of the Eleventh Party Congress, are we not seeing that history is a mockery of the Communist Party? I can't help to ask how much of these words by the Communist Party is pure deception. Maybe we should ask how much of them are truthful? History, especially the Communist Party's history, is always subject to arbitrary revision and omission. We have to study the Party history this semester, but there has been so far no textbook. I don't know when they will cook up another 'history'."[691]

For many of Minxing's generation who actively took part in the Cultural Revolution and volunteered in the sent-down youths movement, the Communist past was a dystopia that they eagerly wanted to escape. Though youths like Minxing still had some faith in Deng Xiaoping's reform, they were unsure about the prospects for the reform, since recent history taught them that nothing stayed unchanging in elite politics. The best option was to hide away the grand visions of national politics and take refuge in the little things of everyday life. In his more profound reflections, he thought that the nostalgia for the Maoist revolutionary doctrine was rooted in China's social conditions, since "most Chinese people are still slaves" and "lack basic education." "The incapable and ignoble are numerous, while straightforward and sensitive people like us are the cold spectators," he notes, "much more societal effort is needed for Deng Xiaoping to implement his *xiaokang* ideals." But Minxing, still smarting under the sense of injustice, would not join in such efforts, "I know my thought is a bit too rightist. But many years' sufferings have left me with a lot of horrible memory. The most hurtful thing, however, is not the Party's persecution but its

[691] Xu Minxing to Xu Minghua, March 4, 1980, p.3

deception. Faced with this society, I only have discontent and resentment."[692] For the disillusioned youths, the prime concern in life is not about politics but the cultivation of domestic life and personal interests. Full of admiration for Minghua's interests in calligraphy and seal-making, Minxin was thinking about reviving his interests in music one day while studying at the Party school.[693]

This bleak view of politics and hope for the next generation can be found even among the pro-democracy activists. The most civically-spirited among the youths, these semi-underground activists shared the same apprehension about the future. A handful of the young placed their hope in democracy. But even they feared the future. Like the politically apathetic, they put the promise of a political future on their future generations rather than the current reformist regime.

A widely-circulated story in the March 1979 issue of the *Beijing Spring*, the most important underground journal of the political activists, foretold a dystopian future of Maoist restoration in Beijing in 2000. Immediately after Deng Xiaoping died in 1998, the author imagined, the Maoist faction would launch a *coup d'état* to impose the authoritarian order of the Cultural Revolution and start a new geopolitical struggle with the United States. It tells the story of a political activist who wrote on the Democracy Wall in 1979 who reposts the Big Character Letter he had written twenty years ago, decrying the coup and demanding the restoration of freedom of speech.[694] While this imagined future proved far too optimistic---Deng himself tore down the Democratic Wall two years later and ordered a military crackdown of the student movement a decade later---the story reflects a more profound uncertainty among the political activists. Similar to the feelings in the

[692] Ibid

[693] Ibid, p. 4

[694] Anonymous, "Yichang keneng fasheng Zai 2000 nian de beiju", *Beijing Spring*, 1979, No.3, pp. 13-16

family letters, the story in Beijing Spring predicted an uncertain and unreliable political future. The only silver lining in the story's ending was the son and daughter of the martyred activist couple surviving the persecution. They carried the hope of democracy to the next generation.[695]

A Possessive Vision of Family Life

Despite its Confucian classical origins, post-Mao conception of *xiaokang* was more closely associated with the classical liberal idea of property possessions rather than the Confucian conception of dynastic rule. In the *Book of Rites*, *xiaokang* was essentially a dynastic order centered on a patrilineal family clans, with a direct line at the center, multiple branches on the peripheral, and the dependents who labored on the fields and in the households. Although the interest of the family clans was certainly much narrower than *datong*, it was still about a community of shared fate whose members' material interests came under collective interests and sumptuary order[696]. The *xiaokang* in the post-Mao China was no longer about such a collective political identity. Rather, it was about the material welling of the dominant nuclear families[697], whose ideal visions were a comfortable living space filled of consumer durables. The notion that nuclear families must "possess" space and objects for a meaningful life loomed large in late 1970s Shanghai and urban China more broadly.

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[695] Ibid. p. 17

[696] For a full discussion of the feudal family clan, see Tung-tsu Chu, *The History of Chinese Feudal Society*, New York: Routledge, 2021, pp. 110-138

[697] According to government surveys of three neighborhoods in Shanghai in 1982, nuclear family was the most prevalent type of family, accounting for 57-70% for each neighborhood. However, stem family, where a young couple with or without children still lives with one or two parents, typically the husband's parents, still account for 23-31% of all the families. See Five Cities Family Study Team, *Zhongguo Chengshi jiating: wuchengshi jiating diaocha baogao he ziliao huibian* (China's Urban Families: Compiled Survey Reports and Materials on Families in Five Cities), Shandong renmin chubanshe, 1985.

In his critique of the Lockean liberal tradition, Macpherson's formulates "possessive liberalism" as an influential but problematic type of individualism that regards the individual as the sole proprietor of his own person and capacities with no other obligation to the society.[698] While post-Mao China did not see the immediate dominance of possessive individualism, the nuclear families that came to dominate urban life shared some features of "possessive individualism". Although the post-Mao urban nuclear families did not demand political rights beyond what they saw as their legitimate material interests, they were like the possessive individuals in their socio-economic outlook. Like the possessive individuals, "possessive" nuclear families were self-centered actors engaged in their pursuit for wealth and achievements as the key measurements of their self-worth. For many nuclear families in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the possession of consumer durables and ideally, a comfortable home went beyond their material and social values to symbolize the visions that the Communist Revolution had once stood for: virtue, dignity, individual freedom, and self-realization.

In post-Mao urban China, the typical nuclear family's aspirations for a separate dwelling space filled with consumer desiderata lay at the core of their vision for the future. This desire to be "free" from its immediate surroundings often came into conflicts with the interests of other members of the larger family. The struggle for space could be contentious, since urban Shanghai's dwelling space per capita was only 3.75 m^2 in 1978, thanks to a virtual halt in residential building construction during the austerity years.[699] With the rise of possessive nuclear families, the socialist state found its increasingly difficult to retain the loyalty without satisfying the demand for housing.

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[698] C. B. Macpherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p.3

[699] Per-household living space fell from 20 m^2 to 14 m^2 from 1958 to 1978 while per-capita space decreased from 4.39 m^2 to 3.75 m^2. There was only few new housing projects in Shanghai from the end of the Great

By the 1970s, as food consumption fell below 50% of the average household income, the culture of material possession among Shanghai families had superseded subsistence as the prime goal of the household economy. This was especially the case among the newly formed nuclear families, whose material aspirations often jeopardized the harmony within extended families. We have seen the segments of such new economic sentiments of working families in Shanghai in the "proletarian class" demand for quality consumer durables. More significantly, the material desire of the sent-down generation created a desire for wealth accumulation that could only be addressed by rapid economic development.

Since the late 1960s, post-Mao nuclear families in urban Chinese families began to develop a keen interest in the acquisition of consumer durables. The cultivation of consumer durables first arose with the planning for a wedding. In Liang Xiaosheng's memoir of the Maoist era, he highlights how new industrial products like the wristwatches, bicycles, sewing machines, and synthetic textiles constituted a fixture in a young Ha'erbin woman's ideals of a good marriage in the late 1960s: "At last, the grown-up girl became a bride. The bridegroom's family would give her a set of fine textiles, usually beige, to make wedding clothes. This set of wedding clothing would remain the finest for her in the next twenty to thirty years. There was, of course, the need for a pair of leather shoes, which certainly would be the very first pair of leather shoes she had worn. Wristwatches, bicycles, and sewing machines were the hardware that represented the real life of a family in those days. Newly-weds seldom had all the "three pieces." It was usually up to

Leap Forward to the beginning of the reform. Virtually no new residential housing was built in Shanghai between 1965 and 1975. See Appendix F for details.

the grown-up girl to decide which one or two items of the three pieces that the new family would kick start her married life.[700]

While the rise of the consumer durables in everyday life followed the decline of the Maoist doctrine of class struggles in the 1970s, the virtue of financial self-discipline, a legacy of revolutionary austerity, played a shaping role in the new economic culture of material acquisition. For example, urban youths typically acquired a wristwatch for personal use or a wedding gift when entering work. Since the starting pays for young workers did not vary widely, and the demand for watches was almost universal, the possession of a watch was the trophy of a race to achieve successful financial planning and self-disciplining. These were important qualities for a young man to demonstrate before he could qualify for the marriage market. As a former worker in a county factory in Sichuan recalls how he planned to acquire a watch with a low wage of 32 yuan, before he started his family:

> "When I got my first job in 1971, I made to plan to buy a watch. For the first few years, my monthly income was only 30.5 Yuan, and the subsidy for urban grain purchase was 1.5 yuan. They added up to 32-yuan disposable income. Setting aside 20-yuan fixed expenditure and necessary pocket money, I was left with only 5 yuan to save every month. I kept this saving plan with self-restraint and unshakable faith that I would succeed. After two years, I got enough money and chanced to receive an allotted coupon for a "Shanghai" brand watch from the factory. At last, I had realized my dreams. I still remembered that in the first months, when I got my first wristwatch, my feelings of joy and my confidence were unsurpassed. In the day, I would look at my watch every moment; in the night, I would take care to wrap my watch with a handkerchief so it would be not damaged by the heat of the quilts. I happily fell asleep and made happy dreams with the sound of the watch.…." [701]

[700] Liang Xiaosheng, *Zhen Lishi zai minjian* (The Real History is the People's History). Beijing: Minzhu Yu Jianshe chubanshe, 2014, p.32 .

[701] Xiao Dingpei, "Cong minyao Dao shoubiao" (From Folklore to Wristwatches), *Jiangyou wenshi ziliao* (Jiangyou Literary and Historical Materials), Jiangyou: Jiangyou Local Gazetteer Office, 1991, vol. 12, p.10.

As the most expensive city in socialist China, Shanghai was at the forefront of national consumption trends in the 1970s. For Shanghai youths in the late 1970s, a typical marriage plan could take up two years in advance and an estimated cost of 1,000-2,000 yuan. Given an almost fixed price under the planned system, this was a steep increase from the late 1950s. For example, when Zhao Minghua planned his wedding with his fiancée in Shanghai in October 1978, the couple estimated that the minimum monetary costs for their wedding were 1200 yuan. The shopping list includes a bed, a radio set, a writing desk, bedding, a cupboard, and the wedding banquet. Among these, wedding clothes and the wedding banquet accounted for 300 and 200 yuan respectively. They need to purchase all these desiderata with prospective savings in the next two years[702]

The acquisition of consumer durables was only part of the cost of a typical Shanghai wedding package in the late 1970s, which included a long shopping list and negotiations with the work units for housing. In the Zhao family's case, they could inherit a set of consumer durables from the extended family, including a sewing machine, but had to buy all other items. Given a limited budget, they delayed the purchase of a black-and-white television, a bookcase, and a sofa after the planned wedding in early 1980. The most significant difficulty was housing. They had to secure it either via the public housing office, or their parents. In the first case, they had to compete with their older colleagues with stronger claims on available space due to their larger family size and smaller per-capita dwelling space. In the second case, they had to contend with their siblings for limited family space. For the Zhao family, this is easier to justify given his sacrifice for the family as a sent-down youth, if Minghua could somehow return to Shanghai.

Within a small but still larger-than-average space of 14 square meters within the extended family's house, Minghua and Xiaowei tried to fit in as many items as possible: a large cupboard,

[702] Zhao Minghua to Qin Xiaofei, November 22, 1978.

a bookcase, a food cabinet, a bedside cupboard, two large boxes, a lot of books, and a chest of drawers. They planned to place a flower vase placed on the cupboard boxes at the center of the room, and a wedding photo on the wall. In the cross-sectional plan, the couple sought to install a chamber pot on one end, place sewing machine on the other end, and position an electric fan on top of the machine. The cozy dwelling space would require complex woodworks for self-made furniture, which in the late 1970s were hand-made items by brothers and friends of the bridegroom rather than standard items sold at a limited number of furniture shops.[703]

The new couple enlisted the help of the bridegroom's younger brother, Chenghua, in making the furniture pieces in the next few years. Chenghua felt obliged to help his brother, not only because of their close ties, but also because Minghua's status as a sent-down youth allowed him to stay behind according to the "One Child" principle when he was also met the sent-down age criteria. In November 1978, Chenghua had just received a job allocation notice from a state factory. Feeling financially secure, he was more than happy to help in his brother's wedding plans. Though the room was already full of furniture and consumer durables, he was worried that the modesty of the wedding room could cause neighbors' contempt, as the community increasingly judged people in terms of their material standard of living. After reviewing their wedding plans, Chenghua shared his views about Minghua's new home in Shanghai:

> "I enjoyed reading the plan for your home last time. As a brother, I am deeply sympathetic to your plans. I don't have any economic means to supply your needs, but I will contribute to the limits of your means. There is no need to worry about the furniture, brother, since I have about 80-90% mastery of carpentry skill. I will hone my skills in the coming years to make sure you have quality furniture. If there is any problem with the plan, it is too simple and modest. Brother, it is the most important thing right now in your life to make a good wedding plan. If we don't prepare well to have quality furniture and appliances, we will become the laughingstock of our neighbors. And you know how those people around us see

[703] Interview with WFZ, a former sent-down youth, April 29, 2019.

things nowadays."[704]

For a couple making less than 90 yuan a month, the wedding plan was a substantial financial burden. Since the bride and groom remained separated by 300 miles, their planned marriage entailed additional material and emotional costs. Moreover, they devoted most of their energy and money to the tedious bureaucratic process of family reunion during the entire year of 1979 without making any progress. Eventually, the cost of the wedding far exceeded the 1000-yuan budget and reached 1500. By April 1980, they had depleted all their savings and borrowed at least 500 yuan from work units, friends, and family from both sides for the wedding and family reunion. They bought a new chest of drawers, a table, a set of cupboards, and clothing. Like most new families of the day, they regarded borrowing as a last resort and made repayment the highest financial priority. In the letter to his fiancée on 18 April 1980, Minghua mentioned that he had to sell off his most valuable possessions, a cassette player, and an imported wristwatch for 185 and 200 yuan respective to repay the debts. But even with the sale receipts, he felt hard-pressed to acquire all the necessary items: the writing desk and the book shelves were still not secured. [705]

The debt crisis of the new couple dragged on for at least three years until 1983. In April 1981, Minghua's nuclear family had accumulated more than 500 yuan in total debts. Their repayment strategy was to prioritize repaying the work unit using the couple's monthly savings and financial assistance from Minghua's extended family. The couple would combine their income with the extended family, who in turn allocated the couple 50 yuan to pay for the "external debts", if the family's financial condition allowed. But such rigorous financial discipline proved unattainable for both the nuclear and extended families. Minghua's parents were unhappy with

[704] Zhao Xinhua to Zhao Minghua, December 12, 1978.

[705] Zhao Minghua to Qin Xiaowei, April 18, 1980.

him after he failed to contribute regularly a monthly remittance of 20 yuan. After all, the parents had a reason to expect some return, since they had spent a large share of their saving on the wedding of Minghua and the dowry of his younger sister, Xinhua, who got married in October 1980. As Xiaowei's displeasure with her in-laws shows, the nuclear family's aspirations would soon or later require complete financial independence of the nuclear family:

> "We have been married for one year but still only repaid 500 yuan debts. More than half of our debts are still outstanding. And now we are planning for our baby but without a penny of saving. I am in such a panic everyday! And the (larger) family does not help us. If our accounts are separate, we can still repay 50 yuan per month if we are frugal enough. Since we combined our incomes with the larger family, we have suffered the ill reputation of 'benefiting from the parent's subsidy', while bearing the brunt of the family's financial burden. Worse still, we might be called "stingy" by your younger sister. But how can we have our separate account, if I continue to live under same roof with your parents and younger sister?[706]

In the late 1970s, the independence of the nuclear family increasingly requires, ideally, the physical autonomy of their living quarters. But spatial freedom was by no means an easy task. Zhao Minghua and Qin Xiaowei also had to compete with other senior workers in their work units to secure even the smallest flat. Even before their wedding in 1978, the couple had requested an apartment of 13-14 square meters from Xiaowei's work unit and local housing administration. But they had little response from the housing allocation office until 1982.

In January 1982, Xiaowei's work unit finally allocated her a small, old, and depilated flat left vacant by a senior worker. The flat was a huge disappointment. With an area of nine square meters, the room was partitioned from a larger endangered structure by a wooden plank. Minghua's extended family all advised the couple to decline the offer. But they were concerned about two risks. First, as Xiaowei noticed, the government has announced a new policy of organizational reform to downsize the public sector, so the supply of housing could be even more limited in the

[706] Qin Xiaofei to Zhao Minghua, March 3, 1981.

future. Second, the work unit urged them to accept the offer, stressing the extreme shortage of housing in Shanghai. Eventually, Xiaowei decided to drop the offer and stayed with Minghua's family.

Not all families were so harmonious when it came to material interests of the nuclear families. When their interests came into conflict, family members could turn against their loved ones. Such strife became especially violent when the rivalrous material interests could be not balanced by moral guilt, or when the individual claims overrode the sense of duty. Worse still, the families could not rely on any higher authority to adjudicate dispute and alleviate tensions. After family reforms in the early twentieth century swept aside Confucian parental legal authority, the Cultural Revolution destroyed much of its replacement, the grassroots Party organizations such as the neighborhood committees.[707] Before the Party-state could rebuild grassroots networks, nuclear families were left vulnerable to encroachment from outside.

When possession and property were equated with the meaning of life, an encroachment upon family property could cost people lives. On October 10, 1980, the family of Cao Pinfang, an engineer at Shanghai Metallurgical Research Institute, committed suicide together at home. After suffering during the Cultural Revolution due to their overseas connections and bourgeois status, the Caos cherished the return to normal life after the Cultural Revolution, although they had to share a shabby western-styled flat with his wife Chen Mingtun's aunts and cousins: the Caos lived on the third floor; the family of Chen's cousin, Madame Chen, occupied the first floor; and her elderly aunt took up the second floor. The Madame Chen's son, Chen Wenxu, a former sent-down youth in his early thirties, was in an acute need of housing. He had a long-time girlfriend but could

[707] Guo Shengli, *Jumin weiyuanhui de chuangjian yu biange: shanghaishi gean yanjiu* (The Founding and Transformations of the Residents Committees: A Case Study of Shanghai), Beijing: Zhongguo shehui chubanshe, 2004, pp. 169-171.

not secure a flat from his work unit to get married. Left with no alternatives, Wenxu's and his mother decided to build an attic between the third floor and the old house's ceiling. The Caos resisted fiercely, pointing out their intrusion into their private space and creating hazard in the old house. Their protest was in vain. Chen Wenxu, along with his mother and grandmother (the old aunt on the second floor), insisted on the reconstruction projects.[708]

The stakes of the dispute were high on both sides. Cao Pingfan deemed the domestic space as sacred property and the material foundation of happiness for his nuclear family after suffering financially and politically during the Cultural Revolution, while Wenxu regarded his claim to a part of the family house as both a necessity for marriage and a rightful compensation for many years' sacrifice as a sent-down youth. While the Cao family refused to compromise, the Chens forced their way into the third floor, started their construction work, and spread rumors about Cao's character at his workplace. The Cao family sought help with the police, the work units, and the neighborhood committee. When the agonized Cao families failed to get any help from these organizations, they hanged themselves at their own home after poisoning their two daughters, a worker at a Shanghai factory and a high-school graduate. On the suicide note they left on their desk, they attributed their decision to end their lives to their complete lost of hope with their family and the community, since none of the people around them, including the extended family, the neighborhood, the work units, and the police, came to uphold justice on their behalf. [709]

In late 1970s urban China, the chronical undersupply of housing had become an explosive issue for millions of families demanding their independent living space. In Shanghai, the acute

[708] Wang Zhanlin and Zheng Yi, "Gongchengshi yijia renaming an shi zenyang zaocheng de" (What was the Cause of the Death of an Engineer's Family?), *Minzhu yu fazhi*, 1981, No.2, pp. 31-32.

[709] Ibid.

shortage of the residential housing supply since the early 1960s and the abysmal per-capita living space in the late 1970s and early 1980s was exacerbated by the return of more than 400,000 sent-down youths in their late twentieth and early thirtieth during the final days of the sent-down youths movement[710]. The Cao family's suicide due to a housing dispute thus became the talk of the town and provoked a vigorous investigation by *Democracy and Law*, a Shanghai-based leading socio-legal journal. As the narrative above shows, the magazine initially portrayed the Cao family as the victim of the Chen Mingtu and Chen Wenxu's encroachment on their living space. The public sympathy for the Cao family and condemnation on the Chen family filled the "readers' letters" session of the magazine.[711]

Two months after the report came out, the magazine's editorial office received petition letters from all the living parties, which further complicated this matter: Wenxu, a former sent-down youths and a worker at the Shanghai Watch Factory, was in many ways also a victim. When Wenxu returned to Shanghai from the countryside in 1974, he could not return to the old home, as his mother would not welcome him. She had shared the room with a boyfriend since Wenxu's father passed away in 1973. The family arranged Wenxu to live with his bachelor uncle as a secondary legal occupant of the uncle's flat, so the government could not confiscate the flat on account of its vacant rooms. In 1978, when the government restored private property rights, there was suddenly no need for a secondary occupant. Wenxu's uncle immediately got married and kicked the nephew out from his house. Wenxu went back to live with his remarried mother, who insisted that he carved out a new space in the family's old flat, thus triggering the Cao family's tragedy. Although

[710] Chen Haihong, *Shanghai Chengshi 15 Nian* (An Urban History of Shanghai in the Last 15 Years), Shanghai shehui kexue chubanshe, 1995, p. 34.

[711] "Duzhe Laixin" (Letters from readers), *Mingzhu yu fazhi*, 1981, No.3, pp. 20-21.

Wenxu thought he had the right to claim a little space from the Cao family's spacious apartment, he denied the use of force and rumor. Indeed, he was not even sure he must proceed with this construction so quickly. He called himself as a pawn in the family's strategy to game the system.[712]

In March 1981, *Democracy and Law* solicited readers to comment on the Cao family case. They received a wealth of responses, from sent-down youths sympathetic to Wenxu to professionals identifying with the Caos. The consensus was that both had the rights to enjoy comfortable life after they had endured so much austerity during the Cultural Revolution.[713] After studying the views of the readers and claims of the parties, the editors of *Democracy and Law* concluded that the real culprit was the backward supply of housing and the low level of economic development.[714] When the appeal of ideology declined, the only way to alleviate grassroots tensions was rapid economic growth and welfare standards for the nuclear family.

Shanghai in the early 1980s was teeming with family conflicts due to competing claims for property rights. Most of these tensions centered on the gap between the material aspirations of the nuclear families and the material and moral constraints imposed by the extended family and the socialist economy. In Maoist days, the ideological straitjacket could still hold these "bourgeois tendency" in check, while the demand for family forced the extended families to pool up their resources to cope with the Communist state. The liquidation of Communist ideology and the end of most austerity policies unleashed all the conflicts and contradictions latent in the society. The struggle with the extended family and members of the same social class for wealth and status filled the role of class struggle as motors of the new society.

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[712] "Duzhe laixin" (Letter from readers), *Minzhu yu fazhi,* 1981, No.4, p. 19

[713] Ibid, pp. 16-19

[714] "Cao Pinfang zisha an de jiaoxun (Lesson from the Suicide of Cao Pinfang family)," *Minzhu yu fazhi,* 1981, No.4, p. 22

Epilogue: Popular Sentiments in Urban China in the early 1980s

Xiaokang, Deng's interpretation of Zhou Enlai's "Four Modernizations", proved to be the most durable of the Chinese Communist Party's ruling ideologies. In the leading state media outlets, *xiaokang* has largely outshined the original national ideal of "four modernizations" as the ideological catchword for the Communist Party since the early 2000s. In this Confucianized interpretation of modernity, Deng skillfully and perhaps unwittingly incorporated three elements of the popular sentiments in the late 1970s: the cry for better material life, withdrawal after the public into the private space, and the wealth accumulation of the nuclear family. All three developments were products of the Cultural Revolution. Mao's "revolution and industrialization" not only brought about economic recovery but also stimulated rapid rising expectations for a quality life. Meanwhile, the political failures of the sent-down policy led to sweeping de-politicization and the withdrawal into the family. Before Deng repudiated radical Maoism and launched the economic reform, many urban families had already articulated their disillusionment with politics and preference for household economic well-being.

Once they gained supreme power, the pragmatists came to define the complex story of the Cultural Revolution as a "catastrophe." While the narrative fit with popular sentiments and the experience of the returned elites, it also concealed a subtle ideological betrayal. Riding on a social consensus of the primacy of the family, returned cadres and intellectuals eventually abandoned the Maoist vision of class solidarity through class struggle to a Confucian family-state centered on a depoliticized developmental state. The new ideology of *xiaokang* anchored the legitimacy of the Party-state in the popular demand for better livelihood. In doing so, they jettisoned the lofty ideal for a just, Communist social and world order once so dear to the Chinese mindset.

Since the Party has abandoned any ideological commitment to Communism without finding its alternative, cynicism became the order of the day. As a young Communist Youth League member wrote to the Shanghai Communist Youth League Headquarters in 1980:

> "In real life, everyone and everything I come across were all shrouded with hypocrisy and deception. Everybody worked for their self-interest. People study hard to become famous, gain a high status, make lots of money, and enjoy a good family life. Everyone must have chanted 'Communism' and 'Four Modernizations' for a thousand times in their lifetime, but who cares to carry the missions out? I confess that the national goal and the individual interest were closely related, but all the people I encounter in life put themselves above everything else. This self-interestedness is especially true when it came to money. The mid-aged, shrewd and philistine, work all day round for their family, taking care of the young and the elderly. They are thrilled by discounted products on the market and excited about getting sick leaves without deduction on their bonuses. The youths chase after vainglory and tangible benefits, finding their only happiness in a good-looking partner and the latest furniture designs. There are still selfless Communists, but they are a rare species."[715]

These observations of a high school student and Youth League member portrayed the mentality in post-Mao urban China from the vantage point of the loyalists of Communism. To be sure, her ideologically-charged critique was not fair to those who had suffered and were toiling to rebuild their lives. But it nevertheless reflected a prevalent defeatism among the loyalists and perhaps even among the Party leadership. Her view was so widely shared among the rank and file of the Youth League that the Beijing Headquarters reprinted it in the national weekly monitor. While the collective goals of a Communist society vanished from everyday life, the average people placed their hope in the comfort of their homes and the future of their children. Official media, schools, and work units still loudly promoted Communism, but the only form of politics resonant with the popular sentiments was the everyday politics of their livelihood. However, lamentable this appeared to the idealists; most people accepted the contradiction a basic fact of life.

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[715] The Communist Youth League, "Tuan de Qingkuang" (Youth League Weekly Monitor), No. 10, Feb 27, 1980, Jilin Provincial Archive, 0015-1980-0043-0004.

Such cynicism distinguished urban China from major urban centers in both Eastern Europe and East Asia in the late 1970s. While the *xiaokang* ideology replaced the revolutionary creed of global communism in China, Poland and South Korean underwent two simultaneous revolutions. In Poland, workers around the country armed themselves with the hope of democracy and marched under the flag of the Solidarity. In South Korea, fearless student protestors could have the help of millions of working-class in the Gwanju city and elsewhere in their successful bid to end the military dictatorship. In both cases, the protestors framed their sufferings not as defeat and humiliation but as an act of martyrdom for a worthy cause to garner the supports of domestic and international public opinion.[716]

In urban China, the contemporary mass movements comparable to Gwangju were the mourning of Zhou Enlai in 1976 and the sent-down youths movements for their return to home in 1979. Contrary to contemporary democracy movements elsewhere, they were primarily bottom-up collective actions to end the Maoist politics and political economy. In a way, these protests intended to end top-down political mobilizations by moralizing and domesticating politics. Except for a small fraction of democracy activists, the participants in the Zhou Enlai worship and the sent-down youths protests never called for a revolution. Once the political de-mobilizations were complete, the returned youths celebrated the *xiaokang* ideology and withdrew to the family. Cherishing the hard-fought comfort of the home, they diverted their energy and hope for the future to private life, leaving any form of politics to the hands of the bureaucrats and ideologues

[716] For the Polish case, see K. M. Fierke, *Political Self-sacrifice: Agency, Body, and Emotion in International Relations*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016, pp. 150-152; For the Kwangju case, Sun-Chul Kim, "The Construction of Martyrdom and Self-Immolation in South Korea", in Charles R. Kim et al, , in *Beyond Death: The Politics of Suicide and Martyrdom in Korea,* Seattle, WA: Washington University Press, 2015, pp. 211-215.

Conclusion

Amid a global pandemic, the Chinese Communist Party celebrated the year 2020 as the official "comprehensive realization" of the *xiaokang* vision, first set by Deng Xiaoping in 1979

and elaborated by successive generations of Chinese leadership since Deng. At the Fifth Plenum of the National Congress on May 22, President Xi Jinping proudly announced that China has eliminated extreme poverty and achieved the moderately prosperous *xiaokang* society after the state-led mobilizations appeared to have curbed the wide spread of the COVID in mainland China.[717]. China has entered a new era with the uniquely elevated position of a singularly powerful leader, a situation unseen since the death of Mao.[718] His relentless concentration of power, forceful crackdown in Hong Kong, the arrests of civil and labor rights activists, and the incarceration of a million Muslim minorities in Xinjiang have surprised many observers in China and abroad.[719] From the death of Mao to Xi's ascendency, Chinese history seemed to have completed a cycle. The period between these two supreme leaders was when China achieved sustained economic growth without any fundamental political changes.

China's depoliticized economic growth since 1979 was shaped by the Maoist experiences of revolutionary austerity in the 1960s and 1970s, especially the sent-down movement between 1968 and 1979. A key generation in China's demographic transition shifted the focus of family life from reproduction to consumption and investment on the single child as the sacred goal in life. Tempered in the Maoist mobilizations in the 1960s and 1970s, they imprint their collective

[717] The Xinhua News Agency, "China's Two Sessions to Secure the Nation's Xiaokang Victory," http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-05/22/c_139076611.htm (accessed on November 20, 2020)

[718] Elizabeth Economy, *The Third Revolution: Xi Jinping and the New Chinese State*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2018, p.1

[719] Jagannath P. Panda and Arthur S. Ding, "Xi Jinping, The Peking Order, and China's post-COVID-19 Political Trajectory", in *Chinese Politics and Foreign Policy under Xi Jinping: The Future Political Trajectory*, Arthur S. Ding, and Jagannath P. Panda, ed., London: Routledge, 2020, pp. 1-22.

memory on contemporary urban China's conservative, pragmatic socio-political order. The de-politicization since the 1980s.[720]

The family-state tacit pact on stability and material well-being has created one of the most potent and instrumentalist states in modern history. Rising on the political legacies of revolutionary austerity, post-Mao state could tap on millions of urban and rural Chinese families, whose primary concern was their family's well-being and children's future rather than a consistent collective vision beyond the family. In contrast, the elites took care of matters beyond the everyday. The highly popular but narrowly-focused *xiaokang* ideology ensured that the political imagination of average urban Chinese remained at the level of everyday life with parameters set by the state and market.

Over the years, the *xiaokang* model has accumulated myriads of problems. Despite its track record in delivering growth and stability, the model has not been very successful in delivering the promised prosperity for most rural residents. Moreover, there was a limit to the family-driven sacrifice, a historical product of demographic transition and the memory of the revolutionary austerity. In recent decades, the rising costs of living and the slowing down of upward social mobility to achieve and retain a better-off life have begun to undermine the hope of the middle class and migrant workers for a better future. Just as Beijing announces the completion of the *xiaokang* society, the *xiaokang* model is fast becoming history.

The Revolutionary Austerity in Retrospect

[720] The collective memories of the Zhiqing generation indeed varied across both historical and current class backgrounds. According to Xu Bin's study of generational memory, the general trend has been from a negative to a more apolitical assessment of the movement and its impacts. However, this trend can be identified with the broader and continued de-politicization in post-reform China. See Xu Bin, *Chairman Mao's Children: Generation and the Politics of Memory in China*, New York: Cambridge, 2021 pp. 232-233

Between the early 1960s and late 1970s, the Chinese Communist Party's leadership applied the principle of "revolutionary austerity" based on economic and political experiences in Yan'an to urban China. After the country's economy suffered from the double duress of the Great Leap Forward and the Cold War militarization, China's top leadership made the urban families bear the brunt of the costs by sending select groups of urban populations to the countryside and cutting down wages and welfare. Most importantly, new job supply was limited in the large cities during the hyper-politicized years, and urban wage rates remained frozen between 1963 and 1977. [721] The bitter experiences of stagnant salaries, stagnant jobs, and forced rustication have profoundly shaped urban family life.

Despite the hefty costs these measures had exacted on millions of urban families, the austerity policies were applied only selectively before the Cultural Revolution. The costs of the downsizing, for example, fell disproportionately upon the newly recruited women and recent rural migrants. Seasoned workers and their families mostly suffered wage cuts, early retirement, and stagnant wages, while the replacement system guaranteed the job for children of retired workers until 1968. For the Maoists, the practical measures of the early 1960s implied an unacceptable concession to grassroots capitalism. An ideologically coherent austerity demanded that economic policies were freed of special considerations and dovetailed with the Socialist New Person's cultivation. As the Maoist economic policy moved to idealist austerity after Mao's triumph over the pragmatists in the Cultural Revolution, universal financial sacrifice for revolutionary became the new order of the day. Since the send-down generations were the sons and daughters of workers who benefited from the Communist Revolution, they felt a political and moral obligation to follow

[721] Andrew Walder, *Communist neo-traditionalism*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA.: University of California Press, 1986, pp. 160-161.

Mao's call to make the sacrifice as a repayment to the salvation of the Communist Party in the 1950s. However, the pragmatic policies of the 1960s proved politically unsustainable in the mid-1960s. For almost a decade, a whole generation of urban youths and their families experienced extended material hardship and family separation's emotional pains.

As China started to control the urban population, the extreme austerity of the 1970s initiated a fundamental shift from quantity to quality in urban reproductive strategies. Under the multiple effects of industrialization, birth control, and the send-down movement, Shanghai saw a steep fall in birth rates and population growth in merely twenty years between 1961 and 1978[722]. As the Hua family and other cases in the dissertation chapters demonstrate, wage freeze, unemployment, and especially sent-down policy hit ordinary families with multiple children much harder than families with a single child. Seeing that the single-child family could legitimately avoid sending their only child [723], many families with multiple children recognized that having too many children was a recipe for financial disaster. The almost universal adoption of family planning was the only measure that urban families could took upon themselves, without or without state coercion. In 1979, Shanghai heralded China's major demographic transitions by entering into an aging society as the population above 60 reached 10%. [724] As the dissertation shows, children's emotional value

[722] See Appendix C for detailed tabulation of the demographical changes in Shanghai in the 1960s and 1970s.

[723]The one-child family was among the four exceptional cases that warrant an exception to send-down mobilization. The other three exceptional circumstances warrant policy waivers include disabled children, foreign-born children, and children of returned overseas Chinese. See "Guanyu zhishi qingnian shangshanxiaxiang ruogan wenti de shixing guiding cao'an" (Drafted Provisional Regulations Regarding the Some Issues of the Sending Down of Educated Youths), in Gu Hongzhang, *Zhongguo Zhiqing shangshan xiaxiang dashiji* (Chronicles of China's Send-down Youths Movement), Beijing: Zhongguo Jiancha chubanshe, 1997, p. 118.

[724] Shanghai minzhongzhi bianji weiyuanhui, *Shanghai minzheng zhi* (Shanghai Civil Affairs Gazetteer), Shanghai: Shanghai shehuikexue yuan chubanshe, 2000, p. 263.

increased during the austerity, as urban families regarded the children and sometimes the only child as the hope for future.

The austerity ultimately proved too costly for urban families and politically unsustainable for the Cultural Revolution faction, the post child for everyday revolutionary struggles, especially after the revolutionary zeal began to peter out in the mid-1970s. By 1973, Mao had to concede to the old cadres and the parents of send-down youths concerning the harsh policies against their families by restoring some cadres and softening the send-down measures. In 1975, a rehabilitated Deng Xiaoping took the economy's helm and gained broad popular support in the popular mind as the heir to Premier Zhou Enlai. By this time, a grassroots counter-mobilization against the revolutionary austerity began to take shape in the bigger cities where material deprivations and the economic costs of the sent-down policy were most acutely felt.

The prevailing sentiments of victimhood erupted into nationwide mourning for the deceased premier in 1976. A massive wave of widespread enchantment with Zhou followed the heels of the disenchantment with Mao. Leveraging the populist movement centered on Zhou Enlai worship, Deng Xiaoping and the pragmatists eventually gained the upper hand over the Maoists in political struggles and theoretical debates on the future of Chinese socialism between 1975 and 1979. As an articulation of Zhou Enlai worship's popular sentiments, the *xiaokang* ideology quickly gained a reliable constituency, riding on the three prevailing trends of material disaffection, the withdrawal into the family, and the pursuit for private wealth in urban China in the late 1970s.

Even as forced family separation ended in the late 1970s, the subsequent family reunion was no easy task. While the families of the political and intellectual elites experienced family separation as political persecution and the reunion as a "wound," ordinary families had to contend with bureaucratic hurdles and challenging situations unique to each family when they fought their

way back to rebuild their life. The process can take several months, a few years, or even a decade. After an exhausting negotiation with the state and within the families, the younger generation's collective feelings went from disillusionment, cynicism, anger to a resigned pragmatism. Most of the returned sent-down youths abandoned the Maoist years' political belief and identified family well-being as the most meaningful goal in life. This transformation of urban mentality provided a durable foundation for the *xiaokang* ideology as a state-society synergy in depoliticized economic growth. Endorsing a state-dominated path to material prosperity, most the urban working class cynically accepted, if not welcomed, Beijing's quiet abandonment of its Communist ideals.

The conservative shift of public opinion after prolonged austerity in China echoed and anticipated a recurrent feature of modern and contemporary history. In Weimar Germany, a large segment of the German electorates voted for the ultra-conservative Nazi Party in the fateful election of 1930 after a period of hyperinflation and economic instability. Whereas the bulk of Shanghai workers abandoned communist ideals, the turn to the right was most significant among the wealthy middle class. [725] Most urban Russian residents, who had suffered substantial economic loss under Yeltsin's liberalization in the 1990s, lent overwhelming supports to Putin, who vowed to restore economic vitality and public welfare under a centralized state.[726] In the United States, the ascendency of Donald Trump in 2016 was rooted in the populist discontent among working-class Americans who had seen their wages stagnant and jobs jeopardized during the neoliberal globalization and especially after the Global Financial Crisis in 2008.[727] In all these well-known

[725] Richard F. Hamilton, *Who Voted for Hitler*, Princeton, N.J., Princeton University Press, pp. 420-422

[726] Chris Miller, Putinomics: *Money and Power in Resurgent Russia*, Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North California Press, 2018, pp. 21-24.

[727] Barry Eichengreen, *The Populist Temptation: Economic Grievance and Political Reaction in the Modern Era*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2018, pp. 117-134.

cases, the conservative revolution almost always championed family-state synergy as essential to the new political order. What was truly exceptional about the Chinese case was that the urban working class embraced pro-market economic reforms but kept a distance from any form of mass politics.

Xiaokang Ideology and the Tiananmen Test

Although de-politicization has become a pervasive social trend in late Maoist China, they were far from complete even in the 1980s. While most of the peasants[728] and urban working class had already embraced the new ideology by the late 1970s, a pivotal group, namely, the college students and intellectuals, remained politically active in the 1980s.[729] A decade after its establishment as the official ideology, *xiaokang* faced its most serious challenge at the Tiananmen Movement of 1989. In April-June 1989, hundreds of thousands of colleges students in Beijing

[728] We have focused on the de-politicization in urban China in this dissertation, but the rural de-politicization and de-radicalization was no less significant for post-Mao China's transition. Despite several waves of radical mobilization, ordinary peasants found various ways to use state political projects for their economic interests without directly confronting the state. See David Zweig, *Agrarian Radicalism in China*, 1968-1981, Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press, 1989; Gao Wangling, *Renmin gongshe shiqi Zhongguo nongmin "fanxingwei" diaocha* (An Investigation into Peasant Resistance during the Era of the People's Communes), Beijing: Zhonggong dangshi chubanshe, 2006.

[729] Before the marketization of higher education in the mid-1990s, China's higher education system was a privileged avenue for upward social mobility between state and society, since most college graduates would automatically be assigned to cadre and professional positions under the aegis of the Party. The entrance into college was thus considered as the pathway to a state-recognized politically privileged status", similar to those who passed the Civil Service Examination system in late imperial China. See Yang Xuewei, *Zhongguo Gaokaoshi xulun* (A Study on the History of College Entrance Examination in China), Wuhan: Hubei jiaoyu chubanshe, 2000, Wuhan: Hubei Renmin chubanshe, 1999, p. 295.

gathered in Tiananmen Square to call for fundamental political reforms. Aided by workers and residents, the students rallied under the banner of the demoted former Party Secretary Hu Yaobang, who stood for the most liberal elements of the pragmatists in power since the late 1970s. After a period of intra-party debates and attempts at peaceful resolution, Deng Xiaoping sided with the Party hardliners and ordered the PLA to crash the few remaining protestors.[730] Outside Beijing, the student protests did not amount to a similar scale and intensity. For example, Shanghai was relatively quiet, as the peaceful demonstrations remained essentially a student movement. Counting on the conservative public to value above all social stability, the government mounted a successful counter-mobilization by amassing workers' patrols to "restore order." [731]

By the 2000s, Tiananmen has become collective amnesia. The older generation chose not to mention it even in their everyday talk, while the younger generation had little or only distorted knowledge. [732] One of the few groups in China that keep a lively collective memory of the bloodshed alive was called "Tiananmen Mothers." Ding Ziling founded the group, an intellectual whose seventeen-year-old son was killed by the PLA soldiers enforcing martial law on the streets of Beijing on June 3, 1989. Together with a dozen mothers and wives of the Tiananmen victims, the group grew to around 500 members in 2004. Since the 1990s, they have persisted in their daily struggles for the official "rectification" of the democratic movement, despite repeated detention,

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[730] Ezra Vogel, *Deng Xiaoping and the Transformation of China*, Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, Harvard University Press, 2009, pp. 595-610.

[731] Elizabeth J. Perry and Yan Xiaojun, "Suppressing Students in the People's Republic of China: Proletarian State-mobilized Movements in 1968 and 1989", in Grzegorz Ekiert, Elizabeth J. Perry, and Yan Xiaojun ed., *Ruling by Other Means: State-Mobilized Movements,* New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018, pp. 68-71.

[732] Louisa Lim, *The People's Republic of Amnesia: Tiananmen Revisited*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2018, p.1-2

threat, and detention from the Chinese authority.[733] However, if examined closely, their tenacity came less directly from democratic aspirations than their feelings for their loved ones. In a way, the bereaved mothers' perseverance was a testimony to the *xiaokang* ideology, which valued the children's future as the new sacred above everything. [734]

In both China and Eastern Europe, the year 1989 marks a definitive transition away from state socialism. While the decisive turning point away from socialism in China was 1978, 1989 accelerated and completed the process. After 1989, the last major politically active group in the Party-state----college students, intellectuals, and young cadres-----joined the broader social trend of depoliticized pursuit for material wellbeing. In East Europe, 1989 carried a different meaning. The democratic protestors symbolized a turning point in a brewing politicization that stretched back to the Prague Spring in 1968, if not earlier. The bottom-up political discontent surfaced as large-scale popular movement in 1989 and became institutionalized into new democracies in the 1990s.

Both Chinese de-politicization and European politicization had been in the making long before 1989. When Shanghai workers moved away from politics and identified with the family as the alternative to the ideal world order, Warsaw and Poznan workers and intellectuals gathered under the Solidarity banner in 1980. The Solidarity Movement attracted workers of all ranks,

[733] Ibid, pp. 109-119.

[734] Since Tiananmen, some exemplary cases of civic activism in contemporary China, such as the Sichuan parents' protest for their children who died of shoddy school buildings in the Sichuan Earthquake in 2008, and national networks of parents whose babies suffered from adulterated infant formula in 2009. These large-scale movements derived their power and broader popular supports from the acute social concern over the children's victimization. C.f. Bin Xu, The Politics of Compassion: The Sichuan Earthquake and Civic Engagement in China, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017, pp. 149-160; John K. Yasuda, *On feeding the Masses: Anatomy of Regulatory Failure in China*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017, pp. 29-31.

sectors, and age groups. Unlike Chinese working parents, who protected their children by non-participation, they still upheld the ideal of political rights through fundamental reforms, even at the risk of their family's well-being.[735] Urban residents in Prague, Budapest, East Berlin, Bucharest, and Moscow demonstrated the same pattern of political activism on the eve of the Communist collapse. Despite the divergent processes in various countries, the pro-democratic movements in Central and Eastern Europe in 1989 followed a similar civic uprising motif.[736] The Romanian case offered the most notable example. Its supreme leader, Ceausescu, turned the rule of the Communist Party to its personal dictatorship and anticipated the Dengist turn to family values by setting up conservative family values as an alternative, moralistic interpretation of socialism.[737] However, the stringent conservative social program and a surveillance state did not prevent the Romanians from rebelling in front of the dictator's eyes and overseeing his execution in a matter of days.[738]

The difference between the Chinese and Eastern European experiences of post-socialist transition has deep roots in history. Let us return to a moment in the Cold War, namely the Kitchen Debate of 1959, when the East and the West found convergence on the condition for peaceful competition. On July 24, 1959, Richard Nixon, the Vice President of the United States, showed his host Khrushchev a state-of-the-art kitchen for model American home appliances at Moscow's

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[735] Arista M. Cirtautas, *The Polish Solidarity Movement: Revolution, Democracy, and Natural Rights*, London: Routledge, 1997, p.189.

[736] Kelvin McDermott, Matthew Stibbe, *The 1989 Revolution in Central and Eastern Europe: From Communism to Pluralism*, Manchester, U.K.; Manchester University Press, 2010, pp. 1-19.

[737] Gail Kligman, *The Politics of Duplicity: Controlling Reproduction in Ceausescu's Romanian*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, C.A.: University of California Press, 1998, pp. 142-143.

[738] Dennis Deletant, *Ceausescu and Securitate: Coercion and Dissent in Romania*, London: Routledge, 2016, pp. 362-364.

Sokolniki Park. When Nixon suggested that these technologically-advanced kitchen appliances symbolized American superiority in technology and living standard, Khrushchev rebutted that the Soviet Union would have the same gadgets within a few years. He further affirmed, although the Communist model would eventually prevail globally, the two systems should engage in peaceful competition. [739] While the two superpowers never agreed on the best social and economic systems, they did reach a consensus on the material living standard as a crucial criterion for the successful in their peaceful competition.

Since Mao's position on the Communist movement differed markedly from Khrushchev's, it is worthwhile to speculate how would Mao react to the consensus of the Kitchen Debate.[740] Imagine Mao as a participant in the kitchen debate. What would Mao say to Khrushchev and Nixon? Although there is no record of Mao's comments on similar debates, we can reasonably expect that Mao would pour scorn on both sides. Rather than following the trace Nixon-Khrushchev's focus on the efficacy of the electrical gadgets, Mao would find the well-furnished private kitchen emblematic of the bourgeois aspirations. He would probably ask, what is an affluent society's point if it is devoid of the Communist spirits of sacrifice and egalitarianism? What was the end of human flourishing if the better-off "socialist" society simply gave up the communist ideals for bourgeois way of life?

Since Mao championed the primacy of politics in the struggle for communist ideals, he would prefer the revolutionary austerity to the "revisionist" good life, though he would probably think that the Communist Revolution would eventually bring about superior productivity and

[739] Sarah T. Phillips, Shane Hamilton, *The Kitchen Debate and Cold War Consumer Politics*, Boston and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014, p. 9.

[740] Chen Jian, *Mao's China and the Cold War*, Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 2001.

material prosperity.[741] To Mao and his more idealist colleagues, the choice was to compare the puritanical Yan'an and the corrupt Chongqing, the KMT capital during the Sino-Japanese War. But the Yan'an model of the Socialist New Person demands individuals and family's sacrifice for the nation regardless of immediate paybacks. Inspired by the Maoist spirit for revolution, urban Chinese families made enormous emotional and financial sacrifices during austerity of the 1960s and 1970s. Systemic resistance to the Maoist mobilization only emerged when such sacrifice became unsustainable due to its impacts on family life and the collapse of egalitarian principles.

The key difference between China and Eastern Europe was their different interpretations of socialism during the decades of the Sino-Soviet Split. In the Soviet Union, the Communist ideology already underwent a fundamental revision under Stalin. In the 1940s, socialism's pressing goal had already shifted from a utopian vision of an egalitarian society to a better material life for the Soviet citizens.[742] In Eastern Europe, the "Goulash Communism," broadly defined as a rising standard of living and security, has replaced the classical ideological contents of socialism after the Soviet suppression of the Prague Spring in 1968[743]. In China, the Communist Party pursued class struggles throughout the Maoist years and reoriented socialism to better material life only in

[741] Among the Communist world's prominent leaders, the Maoist case found a distant echo in Che Guevara. A couple of years after the revolutionary government seized power in Cuba, Che resigned from his posts in the Cuba Central Bank and financial industry. A true revolutionary, he opposed material comfort, insisted on a more idealist approach to revolution, and sacrificed his life as a guerilla in the Peruvian forests. Che Guevara's resignation is comparable to Maoist China's departure from the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe in the 1960s. For Che's resignation, refer to Jon Lee Anderson, *Che Guevara: A Revolutionary Life*, New York: Grove Atlantic, 2010, 593-600.

[742] According to Sheila Fitzpatrick, the Soviet Union has already moved away from class struggle to define social class as a non-political category in the late Stalin years. C.f. Shelia Fitzpatrick, "Ascribing class: the construction of social identity in Soviet Russia," *Journal of Modern History* 50 (4): 745-770.

[743] Thomas W. Simons, Jr. *Eastern Europe in the Postwar World*, Boston, and New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 1998, p. 141.

the late 1970s. The Eastern Europeans had sufficient ground to reject socialism in the 1980s, since the material prosperity was already the very essence of the socialist promise. The Chinese rejected revolutionary austerity but remained open to a "revisionist" redefinition of socialism, since the Maoist model upheld wartime communist virtues and selfless sacrifice rather than material prosperity as the first principle of socialism. Only in the 1979 did the promise for prosperity replace sacrifice as a defining feature of socialism. When the Berlin Wall fell, most rural and urban Chinese only started to experience the first period of sustained growth in their living standard since the 1950s. The end of the Cold War in 1989, if there was an end to the Cold War in China and Asia[744], had a different ideological meaning for China.

Whereas the Eastern European disenchantment with socialism brought about bottom-up democratization, the comparable Chinese disenchantment called for an end to mass mobilization. Although the Tiananmen demonstrators could mobilize some sympathy and moral support from workers and urban residents in Beijing, the alliance was based on the initiative of the students, rather than the organizations of workers and citizens.[745] Moreover, the students activists could hardly change the cynical majority among the older generation, whose sympathy to their moral

[744] I would be inclined to agree with Wallerstein in that "the Cold War in Asia" is a problematic and incoherent concept compared with "the Cold War" based on the European historical experience. We would at least need to account for the profound consequences of the Cultural Revolution in shaping transformations in China and the world, as Prasenjit Duara has suggested for the historical logics of the Cold War. See Immanuel Wallerstein, "What Cold War in Asia? An Interpretative Essay", In Zheng Yangwen, Hong Liu and Michael Szonyi ed, *The Cold War in Asia: The Battle for Hearts and Minds*, Leiden and London: Brill, 2010, pp. 1-13; Prasenjit Duara, *The Crisis of Global Modernity: Asian Tradition and A Sustainable Future*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014, pp. 111-112.

[745] The movement was able to mobilize students on a massive scale. Workers only played a very limited role. The only major union, the Beijing Workers Autonomous Union, was organized by a teacher and only had very few followers. This is the key difference between the working class mourning for Zhou Enlai in 1976 (also known as the 5 April Tiananmen Movement) and the student movement in 1989. For worker's limited role, refer to Zhao Dingxin, *The Power of Tiananmen: State-Society Relations and the 1989 Beijing Student Movement*, Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, 2001, pp. 172-175.

cause would not override the rational pursuit for the hard-earned family comfort after decades of revolutionary mobilizations. After the Socialist New Person's grand vision collapsed in the late 1970s, the dominant sentiment in urban China was about the family as the meaning of life. After all, few working families who had experienced the late Maoist years would risk their children's life for a new, revolutionary vision of society.

The state-society synergy *xiaokang* ideology recovered and grew stronger after Tiananmen. In the aftermath of the bloodshed and purges, the last remaining social groups resisting de-politicization, the students and intellectuals, joined the ranks of the long disenchanted urban working class and withdrew from the Square to their private study. Tiananmen inadvertently completed China's transition from a hyper-political society to a depoliticized economic society that the revolutionary austerity had started in the 1970s. After the Communist Party stepped up its co-optation of the intellectuals in the 1990s, China's intellectual atmosphere changed from public engagement to private wealth and professional success.[746] As the new stakeholder of the state-led economic growth, the post-1989 generation of Chinese students and intellectuals had little incentives to advance an alternative vision to the Party's depoliticized developmentalism.[747]

The Limits of the Xiaokang Society

Three decades after Tiananmen, Deng's bet on the depoliticized economic development seems to have worked for China. The Tiananmen interlude has not altered the course of China's march to a *xiaokang* society, though it did accelerate the conservative turn inside the Communist Party. By the second decades of the twenty-first century, "Communist" China has achieved one of the most

[746] Wang Hui, *The End of the Revolution: China and the Limits of Modernity*, London and New York: Verso, 2011, pp. 11-13.

[747] *Ibid*, pp. 49-69.

significant growth miracles in human history since it entered the global capitalist order centered on the United States in the late 1970s and then upon entry into the World Trade Organization in 2001. Since 1979, the Chinese economy has witnessed at least three decades of breakneck growth. The average economic growth of 9.9% and trade growth of 16.7% for three decades catapulted China from an economically backward country to an economic superpower, in contrast to the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe's sharp economic decline.[748] In terms of Purchasing Power Parity (PPP), China's GDP has already overtaken the United States in 2014. Even in terms of the current price, its economy was more than 70% of the United States in 2020.[749]

Unsurprisingly, the post-Mao Chinese state has survived and thrived on the *xiaokang* model, since de-politicization of bottom-up politics delegitimizes any fundamental challenge to the state from the society[750], as long as the government was perceived to deliver the promised material well-being to the families[751]. China's one-party political system has so far proved more resilient and durable than most observers would expect, exceeding even the Party elites' expectations in the 1980s and 1990s. In a survey by the Harvard Ash Center, Beijing's popular trust peaked at 95% in

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[748] Justin Lin Yifu, "Economic Growth and Development," Dwight H. Perkins, Gregory C. Chow ed., *Routledge Handbook of Chinese Economy,* New York: Routledge, 2014, pp. 76-77.

[749] International Monetary Fund, *World Economic Outlook 2020*, online edition, pp. 4-5.

[750] Strictly speaking, the Tiananmen challenge came mainly from the inside of the Chinese state, since the college students were candidates for state cadres. Amid the economic growth and especially rising incomes in rural China, the salaried class, such as the intellectuals and ordinary cadres, were the victims of the high inflation and elites corruption. Their political demands for Party reforms demonstrated that they were more strongly identified with the reformist wings of the Party-state, rather than their families or any social class.

[751] In an mirror image to the state in the *xiaokang* model, the family, often narrowly defined as a possessive nuclear family, rather than class, gender, profession, and ethnicity, became the only legitimate way of conceptualizing politics in post-Mao China. Real estate, job markets, and family planning all become important political arena. The remnants of Maoist-era mass politics, from Party state organs like Workers Union and All China Women's Federation to official political rhetoric like "proletarian dictatorship", have lost most if not all their functions.

2009 and stayed at 93% in 2016. [752] The containment of the COVID-19 pandemic further boosted confidence made the urban Chinese middle class superior to the "China Model" vis-à-vis liberal democracy. Most Chinese netizens support the government for its apparent efficiency and promise, even as China's national image has plummeted in recent years.[753]

However, the growth miracle only tells one side of the story. Besides the economic growth figures and overwhelming support rates, the Chinese economy is beset with structural problems. The promise for "rich for all" turned out to be an illusion since China's income inequality now ranks among Asia's highest. In May 2020, when the COVID situation was barely in control, Premier Li Keqiang, in a gesture of covert defiance of Xi's triumphalism, confessed at an official news conference that nearly half of China's 13 billion population still earned around 1000 yuan or $160 a month.[754] While the economic prosperity has increased the income and wealth across all classes, the Communist Party's strategic base of the urban "middle class" overwhelmingly concentrated in the professional and the state sector in a few coastal cities and provincial capitals. Even if some among the politically strategic class still favor a Western-style democracy, they are unwilling to participate or endorse collective political actions, lest mass politics will undermine social stability.[755]

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[752] Cunningham, Edward, Tony Saich, and Jessie Turiel, *Understanding CCP Resilience: Surveying Chinese Public Opinion Through Time.* 2020, Cambridge, M.A.: Ash Center for Democratic Governance and Innovation, pp.3-4.

[753] Sungmin Cho, "Covid-19 has Dimmed Xi's Approval Rates Abroad but not in China", *The Diplomat*, October 9, 2020, Available at https://thediplomat.com/2020/10/covid-19-has-dimmed-xis-approval-ratings-abroad-but-not-in-china/ (Accessed on November 14, 2020)

[754] Zhou Xin, "Is China Rich or Poor? Nation's Wealth Debate Muddled by Conflicting Government Data, *South China Morning Post*, May 29, 2020.

[755] Ying Miao, "The Paradox of Chinese Middle Class: Democracy, Social Stability, and Reform," *Journal of Contemporary Chinese Affairs*, 2016(1), pp. 169-190

As the Chinese state implemented the *xiaokang* model beyond the confines of mainland China, it found myriad challenges. The experiment to integrate a vibrant civil society and China's political model at a subnational level, which Deng initiated in the 1980s, ended in citywide civil disobedience in 2019. While the city's structural economic problems did play an essential role in motivating the protests, the widely-accepted view among the Hong Kongers attributed the city's crisis to the lack of political autonomy and electoral democracy. In July 2020, an unprecedented 63% of Hong Kong demanded free and fair elections despite introducing a National Security Bill in June.[756] In the ordinary Chinese understanding, however, the Hong Kong people's bid for democracy was a misguided movement under possible foreign influences since Hong Kong's problem was the economic complacency of the Hong Kongers.[757] The vast chasm between the worldviews across the Shenzhen River was at least partially accountable for Beijing's harsh course of action in June 2020.

Xiaokang also fared less well in rural China, where Mao's drastic collectivization in the 1950s and its equally radical reversal after 1979 left a deep imprint on the household economy. While rural China saw a brief period of rapid material improvement between the late 1970s and the early 1980s, the urban-rural income gap persisted and even worsened since urban China economic reform deepened. Institutionalized and entrenched by the household registration system, widening urban-rural divides have made rural China bear most of China's growth without

[756] "Hong Kong survey shows increasing backing for democratic goals, less support for the democratic protest," *Reuters*, August 29, 2020.

[757] For example, the most often read and commented WeChat article on Hong Kong protest in 2019 by a young Chinese writer argues that the roots of Hong Kong's problem were the lack of a centralized, coercive state to crack down on the "real estate magnate." See Zhao Haoyang, "Xianggang zhezuo Chengshi haiyoujiu ma?" (Is there a rescue in Hong Kong?), https://ressrc.com/2019/06/21/is-there-a-rescue-in-hong-kong/ (Accessed on December 20, 2019).

equivalent investments in rural families' education, health, and social security.[758] Inside the rural families, the economic reforms have weakened filial piety and patriarchal authority while strengthening individual rights and conjugal ties.[759] The younger generation's pursuit for better material life invariably led them to seek better-paid jobs in the cities, but the migrant workers found it hard to settle in the cities and bring along their children due to the hidden costs associated with their rural household registration status. The ubiquitous family separation among the migrant workers has caused a host of social problems, such as the lack of adequate parental care for left-behind children. As sociologists have identified, such family separation has significantly impacted the health and education standard of 40 million rural children, whose upward social mobility could be severely limited.[760] Although their stories were less known to the world, contemporary migrant workers' family separation generated by the pursuit for their *xiaokang* dream has far surpassed the scale of send-down movement under Mao's revolutionary austerity.

At the other end of the socio-economic spectrum, the upper middle class whose life had surpassed *xiaokang* vision likewise felt ill at ease. In urban China, a large chunk of business, professional, and even the Party cadres were uncertain about the future. Even as they enjoy many privileges and remain optimistic about the Chinese economy, they fear the security of their wealth and status.[761] No matter how securely guarded, the private wealth and properties of the middle-

[758] Scott Rozelle, Natalie Hell, *Invisible China: How the Urban-Rural Divide Threatens China's Rise*, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2020, pp. 155-160.

[759] Yan Yunxiang, *Private Life under Socialism: Love, Intimate, the Family Change in a Chinese Village*, Stanford, C.A.: Stanford University Press, pp. 162-190.

[760]Meng Xin, Yamauchi, Chikako, "Children of Migrants: The Cumulative Impact of Parental Migration on Children's Education and Health Outcomes in China," *Demography* 54 (5), 1677-1714.

[761] Chunling Li, "Insecurity and anxiety of the Chinese Middle Class," Christian Suter, S, Madheswaran, B. P. Vani, ed., *Middle Class in World Society*, New Delhi and London: Routledge, 2020, pp. 308-312

class families were no longer a haven insulated from politics in the age of the Internet. In recent decades, Beijing has developed a system of internet-based surveillance networks. The all-powerful surveillance state could freely intrude into their increasingly virtualized lifeworld through state-censored social media such as WeChat groups based on professional, friendship, and family networks. A recent study finds that WeChat can easily make invisible any politically sensitive messages even from international users.[762] While the future efficacy of the expensive surveillance network remains an open question, the omnipresence of panoptic surveillance clearly indicates that the tension between economic growth and social stability has increased significantly over the past decades.

Economic and social changes in recent years also augurs ill for the state-family synergy in economic growth. Forty years since the institution of the *xiaokang* model of development, Chinese families have moved away from the developmental family model of the early reform era, even as they still adhere to Beijing's official principle of socio-political "stability at all costs". The young generation of migrant workers, who live at the bottom of the urban society, could barely afford a decent standard of livelihood. Because of the rising living costs in the cities and especially skyrocketing property prices, they tended to have built less stable families and invest much less in their children's education than their parents' generation, even as their income has increased. [763]

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[762] Jeffery Knockel et al., *We Chat, They Watch: How International Users Unwittingly Build Up WeChat's Chinese Censorship Apparatus*, The Citizen Lab, the Munk School of Global Affairs. The University of Toronto, p.1-2.

[763] The China Urban Labor Survey in 2016 finds the new generation of migrant workers only spent 6.9% of their income on education, a sharp fall from 13.2% of the older generation. See Wang Meiyan, Xinshengdai nongmingong "Xiaofei shipping yu Xiaofei jiegou: yu shangyidai nongmingong de bijiao" (New Generation Migrant Labor's Consumption Levels and Structures: In comparison with the Older Generation), *Laodong Jingji yanjiu* (Research on Labor Economics), 2017 (6), 107-126.

For the young migrant workers who found it impossible to build a good life in the city, the disillusionment of their *xiaokang* dreams has begun to generate new ideological undercurrents. In April 2021, such disillusionment has found its most salient expression in the life philosophy of "laying-downism" （躺平主义）. Like the contemporary Japanese hermit youth culture of "Otaku," "laying-downism" advocates retreat from the labor market and family burden to singlehood living on the bare necessities of life. Coined by a second-generation migrant worker, who preferred his life as a single hermit to work, marriage, and child-rearing in the cities, "laying-downism" has gained currency among wide circles of young Chinese netizens.[764]

Even middle-class families committed to the *xiaokang* ideology of the good life have to face a steep rise in its costs. While the new urban middle class still invest heavily in their children's education, they tend to be heavily indebted due to undersupply of all public goods. While the first generation of "possessive" nuclear families have amassed huge wealth by acquiring properties, the urban property bubble has far exceeded the means of the younger generation. Also, the education expenditures for middle class families have risen much faster than their average incomes. From 2005 to 2019, the household debt-income ratio in China has climbed from 30% to 140%, surpassing even the United States, an advanced economy known for its high propensity for private borrowing. The lack of direct subsidy to urban households and small family enterprises during the COVID lockdowns will surely contribute to another surge in the debt-to-income ratio after the pandemic. [765] Far from the motors of consumption and economic growth in the late- and post-Mao

[764] Mashu, "Dangdai Qingnian tangping zhinan" (Guide to "laying-down" for Contemporary Youths), *The Paper*, April 29, 2021.

[765] Mike Bird, "Chinese Household Debt Surges Through the Pandemic," *The Wall Street Journal*, December 8, 2020.

decades, the economically unsustainable and rapidly aging cohorts of urban Chinese families could soon become a drag on an economy already mired in a debt-driven growth pattern for more than a decade.

Finally, the crisis of the *xiaokang* society was part and parcel of a more significant crisis in the global political economy. Spurred by the desire to achieve a *xiaokang* society, post-Mao Chinese state and society eagerly participated in economic globalization. The economic growth and the state domination the model has achieved in the last four decades by the liberal world order could have surprised Deng, whose initially crisis-driven response to radical politics turned to massive capital accumulation through privatization of state powers.[766] Amid the ascendency of the Chinese state capitalism in the peripheral, the heart of the liberal order was in a profound crisis. Unfettered market competition and stratification created winners and losers inside democratic countries. Many of the old middle-class society, such as industrial workers in the de-industrializing regions, saw a significant decline in their economic and social status, fueling a rise in populism and backlashes.[767] These political economy dynamics partially all contribute to rising tensions between the United States and China. China increasingly emerged as a long-term challenger to the liberal world order for Washington, whereas the United States seemed like a declining power thwarting China's rise in the eyes of Beijing.[768] While China is still officially committed to a path

[766] Yiching Wu, "The Strange Case of China: History, Class, and Chinese Post-socialism", *Boundary 2* (2019) 46 (2): pp. 158-159.

[767] Wu Guoguang, *Globalization Against Democracy: A Political Economy of Capitalism after Its Global Triumph*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017, pp. 295-301.

[768] For a typical mutual view of antagonism between the China and the United States, see Rush Doshi, *The Long Game: China's Grand Strategy to Displace American Order*, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2021; Wang Jisi, The Plot Against China: Beijing, *Foreign Affairs*, July/August 2021, pp. 48-57.

to national economic development based on further economic opening, will the depoliticized model of economic development survive the loss of its geopolitical bedrock?

The *xiaokang* ideology was a unique product of 1970s China. The extreme austerity of the late Maoist years left the reformers with three windfalls: a rapid demographic transition, a radical depoliticized society, and a favorable geopolitical environment. This extraordinary fortuitous constellation of forces powered an economic miracle and a remarkable comeback of state power after the political turmoil in the late Maoist years. Though the family-state synergy still functioned as an ideological common ground in Xi's China, this underlying sociopolitical dynamic has run out of steam. Under the current geopolitics and domestic politics, could *xiaokang* society morph into a new type of politicized austerity centered on radical fiscal restructuring and ideological mobilizations? The internal and external environment for China's economic development model are rapidly changing, just as Xi Jinping announces the attainment of the *xiaokang* society.

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Appendix A: Descriptions of the Family Letter Collections

Collection Name	Years	Numbers of Letters	Description
Zhang family collection	1962-1968	150	A small collection of letters that Zhang Ruirong, a researcher at a Shanghai university, received from his younger brother, his sister in Zhejiang, and his parents in Beijing. The letters covered a

			range of family issues from the father's retirement to Zhang's marriage deals.
Liu family collection	1958-1985	500	A collection of letters that Liu Zhiren, a teller at the Shanghai People's Bank, received from his elder sister in a Fujian county, a younger brother in Zhejiang countryside, a younger sister in Songjiang, and his friends and colleagues.
Hua family collection	1962-1976	805	The copies of the letters that Hua Zhongmin, a senior worker and member of the workers propaganda team in a Shanghai ship-building factory, wrote to his two sent-down daughters, friends, relatives, work unit, and other individuals. Sent-down movement, family finance, class status, local news, and paramilitary trainings featured frequently in the letters. His father, Hua Hengfa, used to hold capital stock in a workshop and received fixed interest between 1956 and 1965
Zhu family collection	1967-1995	2,400	A large collection of various letters that Zhu Jianguo, a sent-down youth and then a worker in Anhui, wrote to and received from his family in Shanghai, especially his father, an editor at a publishing house, from his participation in the sent-down movements to his return to Shanghai in 1995.
Wu-Zhou family collection	1959-1988	1,600	A large collection of various letters that the three Wu sisters and their mother Yu Limei, a cadre in Shanghai textile system, sent to and received from each others. Also included are letters from

			Yu Liqun, the younger sister of Limei to her sister and nieces in Shanghai.
Zhao-Qin family collection	1970-1995	1,210	A large collection of various letters that Zhao Minghua, a sent-down youth and a worker in Anhui, sent to and received from his family in Shanghai, especially his girlfriend and later wife, Qin Xiaowei. Most of the letters were from his sent-down years from 1971 to his return to Shanghai in 1985.
Zhang-Li family collection	1975-1979	105	A small collection of letters sent by Li Weiying, a high school teacher in Nanjing, to her husband Zhang Wenshou, a physician in Shanghai, during the period of family separation. Most of the letters were about the tedious negotiations over Li's work transfer from Nanjing to Shanghai.

Appendix B: Types and Timeline of the Major Austerity Policies in Shanghai[769]

Types of Policy	Starting Dates	End Dates	Policy Objectives and Target Population	A Brief Description of the Stages
Reduced Rations	1959	1964	All urban residents except the elites, such as cadres and top intellectuals	First introduced in 1959; all rations return to 1957 level in 1964.

[769] Compiled by the author from various gazetteers and official newspapers.

Lay-off and Rustication, known as "the Great Downsizing"	1961	1963	Recent factory recruits, idler, rural migrants, temporary workers, women workers in the neighborhood workshops; in total 520,000 rusticated	Implemented since July 1961; achieved the policy target in July 1963.
Hiring Freeze and Reduction	1961	1978	All new hires except for select sectors	Normal hiring in 1965 and 1968; labor market reopens in 1978
Wage Freeze	1963	1977	All urban wage earners; there was a for a small share of workers who experienced a pay rise in 1972	Nationwide wage adjustment in 1963; no wage adjustment between 1964 and 1976; re-adjustment in 1977 and annual adjustment thereafter
Reduction in Work Units Benefits	1963	1978	All state sector employees and their families	Radical reduction in work-unit-based amenities like daycare and kindergarten; reduced or zero supply of new housing for workers
The Sent-down Youths Movement	1968	1979	All urban high school graduates, except for the single child of the family and other rare conditions, such children of foreign parents	Universal sent-down, 1969-1971; less strictly implemented and family subsidies since 1973; mass social protests, 1978-1979; policy formally abolished in 1980
Birth Control	1964	2021	All urban Chinese families (with different policies for non-Han and overseas Chinese)	Promotion of birth pills and late marriage since 1964; "Two Child Policy" since 1968; "One Child Policy" since 1981; Conditional "Two Child Policy" in 2016; abolished in 2021

Appendix C: Shanghai Household Economy, 1957-1980[770]

[770] Wang Zhixiong ed, *Shanghaishi guomin jingji he shehui fazhan lishi Tongji ziliao, 1949-2009* (Collected Historical Statistical Materials on the National Economy and Social Development of Shanghai, 1949-2000), Beijing: Zhongguo tongji chubanshe, 2009.

Year	Total Employment in 1,000	New Jobs in 1,000	Total Wage In million Yuan	Average Wage in Yuan
1957	2,118	57	1,662	798
1958	2,539	529	1,821	803
1959	2,675	148	1,991	761
1960	2,860	316	2,032	718
1961	2,640	105	1,987	731
1962	2,333	148	1,802	759
1963	2,390	108	1,828	773
1964	2,565	214	1,940	775
1965	2,721	160	2,007	760
1966	2,738	18	1,974	735
1967	2,801	14	2,022	736
1968	3,046	275	1,975	680
1969	3,094	27	2,106	686
1970	3,075	26	2,063	676
1971	3,213	148	2,114	672
1972	3,328	158	2,208	672
1973	3,405	172	2,237	665
1974	3,507	173	2,280	660
1975	3,765	341	2,349	641
1976	3,992	293	2,479	633
1977	4,082	184	2,497	623
1978	4,228	164	2,812	672
1979	4,321	478	3,273	784
1980	4,470	231	3,810	873

Appendix D: Basic Demographics and Family Size in Shanghai, 1957-1980[771]

[771] Registered population refers to people whose household registration was in Shanghai. It was not an accurate measure for population before the system was strictly implemented in 1959. Between 1959 and 1993, however, it was a fairly accurate measurement of Shanghai's population, since household

Year	Registered Population in 1,000	Net Inward Migration in 1,000	Net Birth in 1,000	Birth Rates %	Average Size of Household
1957	6,897	284	265	4.60	4.7
1958	7,508	-320	228	3.79	4.6
1959	10,284	1.1	212	3.16	4.4
1960	10,563	-28	218	2.77	4.5
1961	10,590	-142	156	2.24	4.4
1962	10,579	-162	200	2.61	4.5
1963	10,736	-86	248	3.03	4.5
1964	10,862	-47	157	2.06	4.4
1965	10,938	-45	124	1.70	4.4
1966	10,958	-78	101	1.45	4.5
1967	11,057	17	81.7	1.25	4.5
1968	11,090	-78	106	1.49	4.5
1969	10,940	-275	111	1.48	4.3
1970	10,726	-312	96.9	1.39	4.2
1971	10,668	-127	74.3	1.22	4.2
1972	10,641	-59.8	56.1	1.08	4.1
1973	10,701	12.4	51.0	1.02	4.0
1974	10,738	4.80	36.0	0.92	4.0
1975	10,767	-5.10	36.7	0.94	4.0
1976	10,813	-1.90	44.1	1.02	3.9
1977	10,865	0.79	46.7	1.08	3.8
1978	10,982	6.70	55.4	1.13	3.8
1979	11,321	265	69.5	1.23	3.8
1980	11,465	76.7	69.2	1.26	3.8

Appendix E: Economic and Wage Trends in Shanghai, 1957-1980 (1952=100)[772]

registration status was tied to grain ration entitlement. Also, the population also included rural population, which accounted for 44% of Shanghai population in 1977.

[772] Indexed rather than actual GRP were used here because the PRC statistics often contained systematic errors. See: Arunabh Ghosh, *Making It Count: Statistics and Statecraft in the Early People's Republic of China,* Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2020, pp. 143-156

Appendix F: Residential Housing Space in Shanghai, 1957-1980[773]

Year	Gross Regional Products	Per-capita Regional Products	Total Wage	Average Wage
1957	191	166	161	105
1958	252	211	176	105
1959	344	286	193	100
1960	444	359	197	94
1961	280	224	192	96
1962	206	164	174	100
1963	232	183	177	101
1964	270	210	188	102
1965	330	255	194	100
1966	372	286	191	96
1967	341	261	195	97
1968	389	296	191	89
1969	447	342	204	90
1970	501	390	200	89
1971	531	418	205	88
1972	545	431	213	88
1973	598	472	217	87
1974	663	521	221	87
1975	691	541	227	84
1976	700	546	240	83
1977	767	596	242	82
1978	888	684	272	88
1979	954	721	317	103
1980	1,034	765	369	115

[773] Shanghai Bureau of Statistics and National Bureau of Statistics, Shanghai General Investigative Team, *Shanghai Lishi Tongji ziliao huibian, 1949-2009* (Collected Materials on Shanghai Statistics, 1949-2009), Beijing: Zhongguo Tongji chubanshe, 2009.

Year	Total Residential Housing Space in 10,000 m^2	Per Family Space in m^2	Per Capita Space in m^2
1957	2769	18.8	4.01
1958	3298	20.1	4.39
1959	3299	14.3	3.21
1960	3602	15.4	3.41
1961	3631	15.3	3.43
1962	3641	15.1	3.44
1963	3650	15.1	3.40
1964	3682	15.3	3.39
1965	3741	15.5	3.42
1966	3762	15.5	3.43
1967	3793	15.5	3.43
1968	3816	15.4	3.44
1969	3838	15.2	3.51
1970	3871	15.3	3.61
1971	3888	15.2	3.64
1972	3910	15.0	3.67
1973	3740	14.1	3.50
1974	3781	14.1	3.52
1975	3849	14.2	3.57
1976	3907	14.0	3.61
1977	3992	13.9	3.68
1978	4117	14.1	3.75
1979	4216	14.2	3.72
1980	4403	14.5	3.84

Appendix G: Household Economic Structure in Urban China, 1950-1980[774]

[774] Since there are no national data for the number and size of urban households, the income-to-consumption ratio here provides indirect evidence of the trends. For example, the ratio of 2.8 means that a breadwinner alone could almost support of family of 3, whereas 1.5 means 2 breadwinners are needed to support a family of 3. Since per-capita consumption rose much faster than per-capita wage since 1964, there must be a parallel decline in family size and dependency ratio.

Year	Per-capita Wage Rates	Per-capita Consumption	Wage-to-Consumption Ratio
1957	624	222	2.81
1958	536	212	2.53
1959	512	224	2.29
1960	511	236	2.17
1961	510	248	2.06
1962	551	248	2.22
1963	576	240	2.40
1964	586	253	2.32
1965	590	259	2.28
1966	583	262	2.23
1967	587	268	2.19
1968	577	266	2.17
1969	575	272	2.11
1970	561	281	2.00
1971	560	287	1.95
1972	588	315	1.87
1973	587	325	1.81
1974	584	334	1.75
1975	580	349	1.66
1976	575	365	1.58
1977	576	390	1.48
1978	615	405	1.52
1979	668	425	1.57
1980	762	489	1.56

Source: *Xinzhongguo 60 nian tongji ziliao huibian* (Compiled Materials on Statistics of the PRC, 1949-2009), Beijing: Zhongguo tongji chubanshe, 2009.