Recoding Capital: Socialist Realism and Maoist Images (1949-1976)

by

Young Ji Victoria Lee

Department of Art, Art History and Visual Studies
Duke University

Date: ____________________________

Approved: _______________________

Stanley Abe, Co-Supervisor

Kristine Stiles, Co-Supervisor

Fredric Jameson

Gennifer Weisenfeld

Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of Art, Art History and Visual Studies in the Graduate School of Duke University

2014
ABSTRACT

Recoding Capital: Socialist Realism and Maoist Images (1949-1976)

by

Young Ji Victoria Lee

Department of Art, Art History and Visual Studies
Duke University

Date:_______________________

Approved:

___________________________

Stanley Abe, Co-Supervisor

___________________________

Kristine Stiles, Co-Supervisor

___________________________

Fredric Jameson

___________________________

Gennifer Weisenfeld

An abstract of a dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of Art, Art History and Visual Studies in the Graduate School of Duke University

2014
ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the visual production of capital in socialist realist images during the Maoist era (1949-1976). By deconstructing the pseudo-opposition between capitalism and socialism, my research demonstrates that, although the country was subject to the unchallenged rules of capital and its accumulation in both domestic and international spheres, Maoist visual culture was intended to veil China’s state capitalism and construct its socialist persona. This historical analysis illustrates the ways in which the Maoist regime recoded and resolved the versatile contradictions of capital in an imaginary socialist utopia. Under these conditions, a wide spectrum of Maoist images played a key role in shaping the public perception of socialism as a reality in everyday lives. Here the aesthetic protocols of socialist realism functioned to create for the imagined socialist world a new currency that converted economic values, which followed the universal laws of capital, into the fetish of socialism. Such a collective “cognitive mapping” in Fredric Jameson’s words – which situated people in the non-capitalist, socialist world and inserted them into the flow of socialist time – rendered imperceptible a mutated capitalism on the terrain of the People’s Republic of China under Mao. This research aims to build a conversation between the real, material space subordinated to the laws of capital and the visual production of imaginary capital in the landscapes of socialist realism, for the purpose of mapping out how uneven
geographical development contributed to activating, dispersing, and intensifying the
global movement of Soviet and Chinese capital in the cultural form of socialist realism.
This study also illustrates how, via the image-making process, socialist realist and
Maoist images influenced by Mao’s romantic vision of the countryside were meant to
neutralize this uneven development in China and mask its on-going internal
colonialism. Through this analysis, I argue that, in the interesting juncture where art for
art’s sake and art for politics intersected, Maoist visual culture ended up reproducing
the hegemony of capital as a means of creating national wealth.
CONTENTS

ABSTRACT ......................................................................................................................iv

CONTENTS ....................................................................................................................vi

LIST OF FIGURES .........................................................................................................ix

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .................................................................................................xv

INTRODUCTION: Capitalism with Chinese Characteristics ........................................... 1

CHAPTER ONE ...............................................................................................................55

In the Beginning: The Origin of Socialist Realism ....................................................... 55
Uneven Development and Socialist Realism ................................................................. 71
Politics of Time .............................................................................................................. 81
Soviet Capitals and Oil Painting .................................................................................... 84
Elder Brother (lao dage) and Narrative of Socialism .................................................... 99
Maoist Myth and Paradox of National Allegory ......................................................... 111
Mao’s Third World and Sino-Centrism ........................................................................ 113
Black Africa and the Invisible Enemy .......................................................................... 119
Chinese Capital and Africa ......................................................................................... 129

CHAPTER TWO ............................................................................................................138

The Spatial Production of Socialism ........................................................................... 138
The Surreality of Reality ............................................................................................. 144
A De-Capitalist Utopia ................................................................................................ 147
Untouchable Beauty of Nature .................................................................................... 157
Little Men and Commodification of Labor Power ........................................ 160
Production of Nature and Infrastructure ..................................................... 167
Illusion of Self-Reliance and Dazhai Spatiality .......................................... 171
Revolutionizing Economy in the Countryside ............................................. 181
Labor and Terrace-Builders ...................................................................... 185
Representing Labor in a Socialist Utopia .................................................. 194
Moralizing Labor: Model Workers ............................................................. 200
Tractors, the Socialist Machinery ............................................................... 203
Music, Dance, Labor and Ethnic Beauties ................................................ 211
CHAPTER THREE ....................................................................................... 219
Typicality and the Fantasy of Socialism ...................................................... 219
Debate on the Typical ................................................................................ 220
Individuality and Typicality ...................................................................... 239
The Typical and Virtual Classes ............................................................... 243
History and Class Struggle ........................................................................ 247
War and Universality .................................................................................. 258
Ideology of Development and Economic Topology .................................. 268
The Typical and Memory Politics .............................................................. 272
The Typical in the Image of Tibet ............................................................... 279
The Typical and Beyond ........................................................................... 299
The Persisting Ego of Professional Artists and Their Self-Portraits .......... 300
EPILOGUE: Afterthought .......................................................................... 322
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: *the Soviet Union is Our Example*, poster, 1953, Collection of Stefan R. Landsberger. ............................................................... 356

Figure 2: *The Soviet Union's Today is Our Tomorrow*, poster, 1956, Collection of Stefan R. Landsberger. ............................................................... 357

Figure 3: Boris Ioganson, *In an Old Ural Factory*, oil painting, 1937.............................. 358

Figure 4: Fedor Shurpin, *The Morning of the Motherland*, oil painting, 1948.............. 359

Figure 5: Mikhail Khmelko, *The Unity of Russian People*, oil painting, 1948............... 359

Figure 6: Li Binghong, *Nanchang Uprising*, oil painting, 1959, Collection of the National Museum of China................................................................................. 360

Figure 7: Ilya Repin, *Reply of the Zaporozhian Cossacks to Sultan Mehmed IV of the Ottoman Empire*, oil painting, 1880-1891, Collection of the Russian Museum. ......................... 360

Figure 8: Vasily Surikov, *the Boyarynia Morozova*, oil painting, 1887.......................... 361

Figure 9: Issac Levitan, *March*, oil painting, 1895...................................................... 361

Figure 10: Arkhip Kunidzhi, *Lake Ladoga*, oil painting, 1873. .................................... 362

Figure 11: Valentin Serov, *The Girl with Peaches*, oil painting, 1887.......................... 363

Figure 12: Ilya Repin, *Ivan the Terrible and His Son Ivan*, oil painting, 1885 .................. 364

Figure 13: Dimitri Nalbandian, *The Great Friendship*, oil painting, 1950 (top), black and white image (bottom). ................................................................. 365

Figure 14: Issac Brodsky, *Lenin at Smolny Institute*, oil painting, 1930....................... 366

Figure 15: Feng Zhen and Li Qi, *the Great Meeting (weida de huijian), guohua*, 1950, Collection of the National Museum of China...................................................... 367

Figure 16: Ding Hao, *Study the Soviet Union's Advanced Experience to Build Our Nation*, poster, 1953, Collection of Stefan R. Landsberger. ........................................... 368
Figure 17: Li Zongjin, *Study the Soviet Union’s Advanced Production Experience for Our Country’s Industrialization*, poster, 1953, Collection of Stefan R. Landsberger.............368

Figure 18: Wu Dezhu, *Learn from Soviet Elder Brothers (xiang sulian lao dage xuexi)*, 1951. ..........................................................................................................................369


Figure 20: *Long Live Marxism, Leninism and Maoism*, poster, 1970..........................................................370

Figure 21: Wu Biduan and Jin Shangyi, *Chairman Mao Standing with People of Asia, Africa and Latin America*, oil painting, 1960..........................................................................................................................370

Figure 22: *Chairman Mao and His Friends*, photograph, reprinted in *China Reconstructs*, January, 1962..........................................................................................................................371

Figure 23: a cartoon image from Ahmed’s *The Bandung gentleman on an African Safari*, (New Delhi: Bhawnani, 1964)..........................................................................................................................372

Figure 24: *Friends from afar are Coming to Visit*, poster, 1961..........................................................372

Figure 25: image title *Break the Chain of Colonialism*, printed in *China Reconstructions*, August, 1960, pp. 20-21. ..........................................................................................................................373

Figure 26: *Arise!, sculpture*, circa. 1965........................................................................................................373

Figure 27: Long Xuli, *African Mother (feizhou muqin)*, sculpture, 1961..........................................................374

Figure 28: *Chairman Mao is the Great Liberator of the World Revolutionary People*, poster, 1968. ..........................................................................................................................374

Figure 29: *Revolutionary Friendship is as Deep as the Sea*, poster, 1975..........................................................375

Figure 30: Tianjin tielu fenju zhigong yeyu san jiehe changzuozu, *Serve the Revolutionary People of the World*, poster, 1971, Collection of Stefan R. Landsberger..........................................................375

Figure 31: Sun Xueni, *the Creation of the New World (kaitian pidi yi hui)*, guohua, 1958. 376

Figure 32: *All Reveal Genius Riding the Winds and Waves*, nianhua, c. 1958. ........................................377
Figure 33: Jiangsu painters, The People's Commune’s Dining Hall (renmingongshe shitang), guohua, 1958. .......................................................... 378

Figure 34: Song Wenzhi, The Workplace of Stone-Quarrying, guohua, 1958 (part)............. 379

Figure 35: Ying Yeping, The Lofty Mountains Bows Its Head, the River Yields to a Road, guohua, 1956. .................................................................................. 380

Figure 36: Shao Luoyang, the Whole People Make Steel (quanmin liangnag), guohua, 1959. 381

Figure 37: Song Wenzhi, Transformation of Mountain and River (shanchuan jubian), guohua, 1960. .................................................................................. 381

Figure 38: Jin Zhiyuan and Song Wenzhi, Pull Down Mountain and Bring Water, guohua, 1958. .................................................................................. 382

Figure 39: Lin Maoxiong, Water (shui), oil painting, 1958. .................................................... 383

Figure 40: Dazhai Landscapes from China Reconstructs, January, 1966......................... 384

Figure 41: Zhang Yuqing, Dazhai Aerial View, poster, 1975.................................................. 385

Figure 42: Xiyang Amateur Fine Art Production, Don’t Depend on the Heaven, poster, 1973. .................................................................................. 386

Figure 43: Lu Ruozeng, Autumn in a Mountain Village, poster, 1973................................. 386

Figure 44: Unknown artist, Spring is Everywhere in the Deep Valley, poster, 1973............ 387

Figure 45: Li Keran, Terraces on the Mountain Top, guohua, 1974................................. 388

Figure 46: Ye Qianyu, Fullshow by Xingtai Militia, guohua, 1966....................................... 389

Figure 47: Wang Wenbin, Tamping Song, oil painting, 1962............................................. 389

Figure 48: Tian Tian, a Record-breaking Team of Village Girls Tamp Down the Earth, photograph, printed in China Reconstructs, August, 1958, p. 4................................. 390

Figure 49: Li Fuyi, Morning in the Construction Site, oil painting, 1962.............................. 391

Figure 50: Leonid Heller, the Basic Conceptual Schema of Socialist Realism, in “a World of Prettiness,” Socialist Realism without Shores........................................... 391
Figure 51: Yin Rongsheng, *Learn from Camrade Liu Yingjun: Carrying forward the Highest Instruction*, poster, 1964 .......................................................... 392

Figure 52: Chao Xinlin, *Agriculture: Learn from Dazhai to Make Great Changes*, poster, 1975 .......................................................... 392

Figure 53: Li Qi, *Peasants and Tractors (nongmin he tulaji), nianhua*, 1949 .......................................................... 393

Figure 54: Wu Fan, *The Cuckoo’s Cry (bugunian jiaole)*, woodcut print, 1956 .......................................................... 393

Figure 55: Zheng Shengtian, *Irrigation by Feet*, oil painting, 1958 .......................................................... 394

Figure 56: *Benefits of Collectivization (hezuohua de haochu)*, poster, 1965, Collection of Stefan R. Landsberger .......................................................... 395

Figure 57: Sun Jingbo, *The New Song of Ah Xi*, oil painting, 1972 .......................................................... 395

Figure 58: Pan Shixun, *We are Walking the High Road (women zouzai dalushang)*, oil painting, 1964 .......................................................... 396

Figure 59: Zhu Naizheng, *Golden Season (jinse de jijie)*, oil painting, 1962-63 .......................................................... 397

Figure 60: Xie Jiasheng, *Lu Xun*, sculpture, 1956 .......................................................... 398

Figure 61: Wang Zhaowen, *Liu Hulan*, sculpture, 1950 .......................................................... 398

Figure 62: Cao Chongen, *Xiang Xiuli*, marble statue, 1961 .......................................................... 399

Figure 63: Pan He, *Arduous Times (jianku suiyue)*, sculpture, 1957 .......................................................... 399

Figure 64: Wang Shenglie, *Eight Women Martyrs (banütoujiang), guohua*, 1959 .......................................................... 400

Figure 65: Yu Jinyuan, *Eight Women Martyrs*, sculpture, 1958 .......................................................... 400

Figure 66: Xu Yun, *China-Korea Friendship (zhongchao youyi), guohua*, 1959 .......................................................... 401

Figure 67: Dong Xiwen, *Resist US Aggression and Aid Korea*, oil painting, 1951 .......................................................... 402

Figure 68: Liang Yulong, *Blood Transfusion*, oil painting, 1956 .......................................................... 402

Figure 69: Yan Han, *Freshly Picked Apples*, woodcut print, 1954 .......................................................... 403
Figure 70: Hua Tianyou, *Bulgarian Teacher and Korean Orphan* (bajinliantijiaoshi he chaoxiangue), sculpture, 1957. ................................................................. 404

Figure 71: Xiao Chuanjiu, Su Hui, Fu Tianchou and others, *The Tenth Anniversary of the 1945 Hiroshima Bombing* (andao beizha shiniandji), sculpture, 1955.................................. 405

Figure 72: Yang Meiying, Qu Naishu and others, *Long Live the People’s Commune*, sculpture, 1959. ................................................................................. 406


Figure 74: Jia Xiongtong, *Childhood*, poster, 1973. ................................................................................. 408

Figure 75: Hang Mingshi, *Continue the Revolutionary Tradition and Become Revolutionary Successors*, poster, 1965. ................................................................................. 409

Figure 76: Zhou Changgu, *Two Lambs*, guohua, 1954. ................................................................. 410

Figure 77: Dong Xiwen, *Spring Comes to Tibet*, oil painting, 1954. ..................................................... 411

Figure 78: Jiang Yan, *Studying Mather and Daughter* (kaokaomama), guohua, 1953. .............. 411

Figure 79: Yuan Xiaocen, *Studying Mother and Daughter* (muniixuewenhua), sculpture, 1955. ................................................................................. 412

Figure 80-1: Wang Keping, Cao Chunsheng, and others, *Wrath of the Serfs*, group sculptures, 1975. ................................................................................. 413

Figure 81: Wu Zuoren, *Portrait of Qi Baishi*, oil painting, 1954. ..................................................... 417

Figure 82: Liu Zhide, *Old Party Cadre*, guohua, 1973. ................................................................................. 418

Figure 83: Konstantin Maksimov, *Portrait of Qi Baishi*, oil, 1956. ..................................................... 419

Figure 84: Konstantin Maksimov, *Portriat of Wu Zuoren*, oil, 1957. ..................................................... 420

Figure 85: Wu Zuoren, *Peasant Painter* (nongmin huajia), oil, 1958. ..................................................... 421

Figure 86: Wang Shikuo, *Self-portrait*, oil, 1967. ................................................................................. 421

Figure 87: Yao Zhonghua, *Self-portrait*, oil, 1968. ................................................................................. 422
Figure 88: Sun Zongwei, *In My Studio* (self-portrait), oil, 1945. .............................................. 423

Figure 89: Gu Xiong, *Shattering Illusions* (self-portrait), drawing, 1974. ................................. 424

Figure 90: *Smash the Dog Heads of Soviet Revisionists* (*zalan suxiu de goutou*), poster, 1967. ........................................................................................................................................... 425
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I owe special thanks to my two advisors, Stanley Abe and Kristine Stiles, whose prolific international scholarship and critical minds have nurtured me and my research throughout my graduate years at Duke. By demanding clarity, Abe’s criticism helped me to considerably improve my research and writing. I learned from Kristine Stiles how to engage in visual materials with a keen analytical sense and earnest appreciation. Without their honesty, patience, and unyielding support, I would not have been able to explore the fascinating universe of the humanities, including art history, on my way to becoming a junior scholar.

I would like to extend my deepest gratitude and upmost respect to my two other committee members, Fredric Jameson and Gennifer Weisenfeld. Jameson’s critical Marxism, along with his lectures, inspired me to develop my art historical inquiries and methodologies. The transnational and cross-disciplinary approach of this dissertation is indebted to Jameson’s insightful theories of culture and capital that historicize the global expansion of capitalism. Last but not least, my heartfelt appreciation goes to Gennifer Weisenfeld who profoundly enriched my knowledge about art and visual culture in East Asia. She has also been my role model ever since I began to think about how to be both an outstanding scholar and a great teacher.

I have been extremely fortunate to have many teachers who challenged my way of thinking and nourished my research in numerous ways. First of all, I owe sincere
gratitude to my former advisor, Minglu Gao. He originally guided me into the world of Chinese art and established the substantial base of my scholarship on modern and contemporary art in China. Professors with whom I have taken seminars also contributed to this dissertation at the initial stages of my research. I am grateful to Annabel Wharton, Mark Antliff, Patricia Leighten, Richard Powell, Pamela Kachurin, Kenneth Surin, Irene Silverblatt, Liu Kang, Guo-Juin Hong, and Haeyoung Kim. I would also like to express my gratitude to my former professors Dorothy F. Glass, Martin A. Berger, Elizabeth Otto, Livingston Watrous, Charles Carman, Henry Sussman, Ewa Ziarek, Inhwan Kim, Youngsun Jin, Yongwoo Lee, and Sunmi Cho, whose teaching and advice remain with me and have been of great help at critical moments in my life. I appreciate the generosity of June Hee Kwon and SooHyun Mok for facilitating my field research in Jilin. I thank the artists Li Fuyi, Lin Maoxiong, Jin Yinghao, Jiang Zhonghao, Lin Hao, and Chunja Park of Yanji for their invaluable interviews. I owe thanks to Luo Zhou and Miree Ku at Duke Library and my friends and colleagues, Yasmin Cho, Jungmin Ha, Magdalena Kolodziej, Koonyong Kim, Chris Ahn, Kyun Kim, Sonja Kelley, Wayne and Debby Taylor.

Finally, I wish to thank my family for their unwavering love and patience. This project would not have been possible without the sacrifice of my parents and support of my two brothers, my grandmother, and parents-in-law. I thank my husband, Y.K. Kim,
and my son, Minsu, for filling my challenging life with joy and happiness. I dedicate this
dissertation to my late father, Hangmin Lee.
INTRODUCTION: Capitalism with Chinese Characteristics

Was capitalism something completely alien in Maoist China? Many have viewed China’s socialism under Mao as being outside of the orbit of global capitalism.¹ This dissertation begins by questioning both the prevailing assumptions and the lingering Cold War epistemology that place socialism in opposition to capitalism. In world history, socialism has taken a variety of political, economic, cultural and intellectual forms. Maoist China likewise underwent a distinctive socialist experience. China was never disconnected from global capitalism on either domestic or international terrain. Under the unchallenged dominance of capital, the country’s socialist economy remained, to a great extent, compatible with capitalism. China’s less developed market economy survived throughout the Maoist regime (1949-1976). The economic system retained commodity production and exchange. It allowed private sectors, and often lost centralized control over such economic praxes as commerce and barter in the (black) market. On the macroeconomic level, Maoist China continued international trade not only with the countries in the Soviet Bloc, but also with so-called non-socialist countries

such as England, Canada, and the British colony of Hong Kong,\textsuperscript{2} as well as African states such as Tanzania and Zambia. Loans, aid, labor, technology transfers, and commodity-credit exchange – in other words, capital circulation – took place. The whole body of the mixed economy was inseparable from the production of exchange value, which thus entailed a new form of alienation, reification, exploitation, commodification, and competition.\textsuperscript{3} These symptoms of a repressed capitalism, i.e. a state-led mixed economy, did not so much embody the ideal of socialism, but rather exemplified a mutation of capitalism in the territory of the People’s Republic of China. The recurring but sporadic moments of Mao’s radical revolution kept failing to create a brand new order. Instead, a strong desire for the country’s stability, state-imposed normality, and a fast-growing national economy quickly returned in the aftermath of disastrous revolutionary attempts such as the Great Leap Forward (1958-61) and the Great Cultural Revolution (1966-76). The quixotic transition to communism that Mao Zedong once dreamt of seems, as a result, to be postponed forever in today’s China.

\textsuperscript{2} Frank Dikötter, 2010.

\textsuperscript{3} For example, “in the twenty-eight factories run by the people in the Gulou District, ventilation was non-existent in the smaller concerns. Many of the workers were women who had joined during the GLF. Most had no work experience and were given very little protective equipment, some only donning straw hats. Exposure to chemical components and silicon dust commonly caused red eyes, headaches, itches and rashes. Heatstroke frequently happened. Some of the women had the cartilage separating their nostrils eaten away by constant inhalation of chemicals. In a health check carried out on 450 women working in a factory producing electron tubes in Nanjing, more than a third suffered from lack of menstrual periods, a symptom of malnutrition. In the Nanjing Chemical Plant a quarter had tuberculosis, while one in two suffered from low blood pressure. Half had worms. The salaries of the workers were eroded by inflation, and depleted by food purchases, necessary to complement the meagre rations they were given in the canteen. In the Shijiazhuang Iron and Steel Company, workers spent three-quarters of their salaries on food,” Frank Dikötter, \textit{Mao’s Great Famine}, (London, New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2010), 151.
Thus, the popular periodization that distinguishes post-socialist China from socialist China in a linear narrative of history is problematic. By marking Deng Xiaoping’s (1904-1997) “reform and open up” (gaige kaifang) policy as the departure point of a new China, the conventional historical framework overlooks socialist China’s subsumption into global capitalism prior to Mao’s death in 1976. This questionable overview disregards the notable historical continuity that ties post-Maoist China to Maoist China in terms of the country’s consistent struggle for/against the hegemony of capital throughout the twentieth century. By going beyond the pervasive scholarly tendency to theorize a historic transition, this dissertation demonstrates how the mutative quality of global capitalism – which, according to David Harvey, “modifies its behaviors through its encounters with environmental limits and ideological constraints with its enormous flexibility and adaptability” 4– actually materialized and was deeply embedded in the radical Maoist plan for China’s socialist construction. Meanwhile, it examines the ways in which socialist realism, the credo of Soviet-origin socialist art and literature, recoded the rules of capital. This research delves into how capital – its accumulation, circulation, and continuous flow – were encoded in the visual images produced during the Maoist regime (1949-76).

Rather than focusing on the capitalism vs. socialism distinction, this historical research carefully takes into account how capital works on both sides. What sustained

---

the reductionist duality between socialism and capitalism was the dominant geopolitics
that settled in around the time of the Second World War. The world was often perceived
as revolving around two superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union, and their
alliances. The hegemonic power relations of world politics reinforced this duality,
otherness, by positioning the league of liberal-democratic capitalism and its market
economy against states supporting communism and its planned economy. What is
overlooked beyond the surface value of this ideological and geopolitical configuration is
the underlying and structural force of global capitalism. The network of global
capitalism with which socialist countries and other non-aligned and post-colonial
countries in the Third World engaged was much more complicated than what such a
demarcated mapping reveals. With the advent of Empire (in Antonio Negri’s and
Michael Hardt’s conception), countries were involved in complex webs of inter-state
trade, loans and credit lending, technology transfers, and multi-national investments
and projects. By showing how global capitalism encroached upon socialist China, my
argument about capital aims to rethink false, incomplete and indeterminate
representations of the world.5

5 Representations of reality confront a deadlock primarily because of the “ultimate unknowability, the chaos
of the world, unrepresentability, indeterminacy and so forth in all kinds of undesirable ways.” In this light,
Jameson said that “allegory, [a mode of representation], happens when you know you cannot represent
something but you also cannot not do it,” Fredric Jameson, Jameson on Jameson (Durham: Duke University
Press, 2007), 195-96. The pictorial images of socialist realism are thus allegorical insofar as our new
consciousness, due to the historical changeability of the narrative structure, endows visual images about
socialist realities with a new set of meanings and relations. “Allegory is also the solution to the
representation of what is ultimately not representable, those being essentially totalities,” Ibid., 229.
Then, what is capital? When the social formations of capitalism and socialism were actualized, neither could avoid the law of capital and its innate contradictions.\(^6\) Capital accumulates, circulates, and continuously moves. It takes myriad material and immaterial forms ranging from money\(^7\) to the means of production (e.g., land, natural resources, tools, and machinery) to social labor. Capital is a thing of value and simultaneously “a process, a continuous flow of value through the various moments and across the various transitions from one material form to another.”\(^8\) Also, capital takes on different specific forms in historical periods with dissimilar modes of production. Under feudalism, landed property owners exercised enormous power. Later on, merchant capital and usury capital played an important historic role in the transition from feudalism to capitalism by accelerating the dissolution of the feudal order.\(^9\) Modern industrial capital and finance capital are also particular forms of capital that have

\(^6\) David Harvey designated such contradictions as the opposing forces that are simultaneously present within a particular situation, an entity, a process, or an event. These conflicting elements constitute and beset the economic engine that powers capitalism. My dissertation aims to develop David Harvey’s analysis of capital and capitalism and to examine if his analysis of capital and its contradictions can be applied to Maoist China and its socialist economy. Here Mao’s contradictions lie between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, and between the socialist road and the capitalist road. These are the principle contradictions according to Mao. Or, the contradiction in 1957 could be between China’s backward agricultural productive forces and the necessity of building an advanced industrial country (Mao at the Eighth Central Committee of the Party). Kong Hanbing, “The Transplantation and Entrenchment of the Soviet Economic Model in China,” *China Learns from the Soviet Union, 1949-Present*, (Lanham: Lexington Books, c.2010), 162-63.

\(^7\) Money used in a certain way, such as in profit-seeking investments in which output is greater than input.


appeared relatively recently.\textsuperscript{10} In this sense, different historical conditions, along with their distinctive modes of production and exchange, prioritize a specific form of capital.

According to Karl Marx, “the original transformation of a sum of values into capital was achieved in complete accordance with the laws of exchange.”\textsuperscript{11} The condition for the creation of capital basically requires two parties who have different commodities to exchange. In the capitalist mode of production, the exchange happens between workers and capitalists. The workers, who have nothing but their labor to sell, must exchange their labor for wages. The capitalists, on the other hand, own the means of production, subsistence, and money. They buy the former’s labor. They exploit the former (i.e., variable capital in Marx’s terms) in order to maximize the surplus value which potentially changes into capital in a never-ending circle of capitalist production (money is transformed into capital, surplus value is made through capital, and capital is made from surplus value). “The employment of surplus value as capital or its reconversion into capital – such as reinvestment, e.g. buying new means of production like raw materials and machines or employing more workers – is called the accumulation of capital.”\textsuperscript{12} Capital seeks expansion and reproduction in the capitalist production process that is in the hands of capitalists. Capital is in motion, as Harvey


\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., 727.
puts it, and capital becomes itself in the social relation between two parties, trapped in the endless circle of the capitalist production process.

The aforementioned definition of capital however does not perfectly fit the Chinese context because China, after the Second World War, was one of the poorest countries in the world. China never achieved a fully developed capitalist mode of production, especially in its production relations. When the People’s Republic of China (PRC) was established, it had not undergone a total transition from feudalism to capitalism, let alone from industrial capitalism to socialism. The mode of production was still backwards in this agriculture-based, pre-industrial (pre-capitalist) country, even though it claimed the title of socialism. In addition, China’s socialism did not emerge out of the negation of capitalism, as in the historical development outlined by Marx. Marx’s concepts, such as “the primitive accumulation of capital” and “the Asiatic mode of production,” do not fully explain what the PRC was experiencing. Then how

13 “Before 1949, China had a backward agriculture-based and largely self-sufficient economy, which reduced the impact of the western market economy. China was a truly poverty-stricken country. By 1949, its economy had reached the brink of collapse. In 1949, China’s total industrial output was only 14 billion current yuan. Food and agricultural production were reduced by more than a quarter compared to the peak year before 1949. Both urban and rural residents were suffering from dire poverty,” Kong, 155.

14 Karl Marx outlined the key stages of historical development based on the distinctive modes of production: the ancient period based on slavery, feudal society based on serfdom and capitalist stage based on wage labor. “He added to these “the Asiatic mode of production” in the Grundrisse (1857-1858), the Preface to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy (1859) and Capital volume 1 (1867). The chief characteristic of it is that it is a stagnant society. There is no private ownership of property, with ownership of property, and land in particular, in the hands of the state or taking a communal form. Marx also attributed to ‘the Asiatic mode of production’ an essentially despotic form of government and very low-level technology with the economy centered on agriculture and simple handicrafts. He also suggested that a dependency on irrigation requiring a centralized administrative apparatus to organize it gives the Asiatic state enormous power. The
do we locate capital in China’s historical context? The process by which capital was accumulated, circulated, and continuously moved during the Maoist regime requires a new approach for explaining capital.

During the Maoist regime, capital was accumulated, intensively mobilized, distributed and circulated according to Mao’s (the CCP’s) economic agenda, which partially adopted the Soviet development model. China, nevertheless, followed the general rule for capital accumulation, just like the rule operating in feudal (or pre-capitalist) and capitalist societies. In *Capital I*, Karl Marx explicates how the common process of capital accumulation extracts surplus value, which inevitably deprives producers of “the ownership of the condition for the realization of their labor.”15 A total separation between immediate producers and the means of production happens under capitalism; but even in the pre-capitalist stage, i.e., serfdom and the guild system, separation gradually took place. The latter is called the primitive accumulation of capital. The transition from feudalism to capitalism, i.e., from primitive accumulation to capitalist accumulation, exactly parallels the “historical process of divorcing the

state characteristic of ‘the Asiatic mode of production’ is exceptional in that it does not represent the power of a dominant property-owning class as in other modes of production, but instead has an independent, autonomous character,” David Walker, Daniel Gray, *Historical Dictionary of Marxism*, (Lanham, Toronto, Plymouth: The Scarecrow Press, 2007), 17.

15 Marx, 874.
producer from the means of production.”16 The means of production are not capital when “they remain the property of the immediate producers.” They become capital when “they serve at the same time as means of exploitation of, and domination over, the worker.”17 Through this separation, through this historical process, capital comes into being and accumulates. The ahistorical condition of capital accumulation may be the expropriation of the immediate producers. The difference between primitive and capitalist accumulation lies in the increasing scale of the reproduction of this separation. Marx states:

As soon as capitalist production stands on its own feet, it not only maintains the separation [between producers and the ownership of the conditions for the realization of their labor], but reproduces it on a constantly extending scale... This process “operates two transformations, whereby the social means of subsistence and production are turned into capital, and the immediate producers are turned into wage-laborers.”18

Close scrutiny of China’s economic system under socialism tells us that it was difficult for Chinese producers to own the means of production and subsistence; this was due to the socialist economic system that entailed large-scale collectivization and communal

16 Ibid., 875.
17 Ibid., 933.
18 Ibid., 874.
economic projects and political campaigns. The means of production, i.e., land, natural resources, tools, tractors, and even utensils, were turned into collective or public property (capital), especially during the Great Leap Forward. Producers often lost “ownership of the condition for the realization of their own labor,” accompanied by forced mobilization, dislocation (e.g., xiafang or the rustication of urban youth), long working days, and political agitation for socialist construction, as well as heavy state taxation and procurements. This type of socialist separation (i.e. universal alienation) was prevalent. The process of such a separation corresponded to socialist construction and revolution.

In this light, China’s state-socialist economy and continued commodity production and exchange (e.g., between communes and also between the communes and the state) did not break the pre-existing law of capital accumulation. Rather, under the strong intervention of Mao and the one-party state, because of the nationalization of the means of production, socialist capital accumulation, in a similar way, caused producers to be separated from the means of production and subsistence. I will explain how this separation happened during the Great Leap Forward as a result of the internal colonialism that exploited peasants and farmers in the countryside for the benefit of urban heavy industry. The unequal exchange between agricultural products and industrial goods via this unfair mode of exchange often alienated peasants and farmers from their products and the means of production. As I argued above, Maoist China did
not free itself from the hegemony of capital by following the general rule of capital accumulation. This is one of the symptoms that signals the mutation of capitalism in socialist China.

In spite of having different modes of production, all countries around the globe, whether socialist or capitalist, agriculture-based or industrial, interacted with and were troubled by the power of capital and its contradictions. “The definition of capital,” as Harvey puts it, “cannot be divorced from the human choice to launch money-power into the mode of circulation.”19 Marx in Capital I uses the metaphor of seeing capitalists as the embodiment of capital. What capitalists do with capital to some extent became the nature of capital itself. Likewise, how communists arranged money-power and handled the contradictions of capital – between use value and exchange value (the commodity is a contradictory unity between use value and exchange value), capital and labor, private property and state intervention, and so forth – provides us with a significant clue for understanding the character of socialist capital per se.

In Maoist China, capital was often in the hands of high-ranking party leaders, bureaucrats, technocrats, and local party cadres. Decreases in private property, increases in collective and public ownership, strong state intervention for (commodity) production and exchange, the socialist or Maoist mode of production (e.g., the People’s Commune (renmin gongshe)), and, finally, production relations (which determined how

19 Harvey, A Companion to Marx’s Capital, 89.
people worked together, e.g., work units (danwei) and the division of labor), these were socialist elements of China’s mixed economy. Whereas capitalists – i.e., landowners, industrialists, bankers, financiers, and discounters in dynamic tension with the state and the central bank – negotiated and modulated such contradictions under capitalism, socialism did this work via the central plan of the socialist state and the state apparatus. As a result, capitalism and socialism are two types of social formation. Yet capital is commonly hegemonic and dominant on both sides in constructing the material, social, cultural, and intellectual bases for social life. Even though socialism and capitalism seem mutually exclusive, they both followed the universal process of separation/alienation. And both had to cope with the contradictions of capital that transcend specific social formations. These contradictory forces were the locus of both capitalism and Chinese/Soviet socialism.

Drawing on Harvey’s analysis of capital and capitalism, this dissertation focuses on some key contradictions of capital that played a leading role in China’s socialism. The conflicting elements and opposing forces of capital were present in socialist China, in that the country originally had an unresolved paradox in the matter of production and distribution. China’s socialism intensively spurred production for the purpose of the rapid growth of the underdeveloped country’s national economy. The intention was to create the surplus value necessary for socialist modernization and industrialization, mainly by appropriating and exploiting labor power. Under these circumstances, the
socialist way of distributing the products of labor – distribution according to labor – could not be realized. The exchange value of agricultural commodities, as a result, often overruled their use value. The products of peasants and farmers left their hands without fulfilling any use value (so millions of immediate producers starved during the Great Leap Forward); this was owing to state procurements and other malfunctions of central and local management.\textsuperscript{20} The capitalist self of socialist China produced such a self-contradiction because of its inability to implement the socialist principle of distribution. This caused the ensuing contradiction between use and exchange values.

The contradiction between labor and capital intensified during the Maoist regime when labor power was the essential source of compensation for the state’s lack of other forms of capital, such as infrastructure and agricultural commodities. The party-state was the key agency of exploitation and alienation. China’s socialism fostered high productivity, speed, and competition between provinces, towns, and work-units. To produce more and faster, the party-state utilized Soviet socialist and Maoist organizational tactics.\textsuperscript{21} The latter located the workforce in different sectors/sites of the

\textsuperscript{20} “By imposing a monopoly on the sale of grain the state undertook a task of mammoth proportions. State employees had to buy the grain, store it, transport it to different destinations across the country, store it again and distribute it against ration coupons – all according to a master plan rather than the incentives created by the market,” Dikötter, \textit{Mao’s Great Famine}, 136-137.

\textsuperscript{21} “China transplanted the Soviet economic model in the 1950s. Because the centralized control from top to bottom facilitated the mobilization and centralized allocation of resources, capital. The superiority of the Soviet model lies in its capacity to accomplish large undertakings in a short time by concentrating human, material and financial capitals,” Kong, 254. The speed attracted economically backward countries that were eager to catch up with the developed countries.
national economy, and mobilized and disciplined it in a communal and often military way for the purpose of increasing productivity. The capital of labor power was also allocated and mobilized in constructing built environments (such as the People’s Commune and State Farms) and infrastructure (bridges, roads, railways, sewers, dams, electrical grids, factory buildings, schools, and hospitals). This immobile capital was fixed in space. The spatialized channels for a smooth capital-circulation were intended to orient the social life of laborers toward production and the efficient reproduction of capital. In relation to the first contradiction, the conflictive tension between capital and labor was exacerbated when labor power became a commodity not at the market, but at the site of socialist commodity production and exchange.

China’s socialist economy focused on the production of exchange value after China adopted the Soviet economic model along with the First Five Year Plan. As the Stalinist model of socialist development stressed heavy industrialization, it drew the necessary capital from the countryside. This discriminatory mode of exchange between city and countryside led to so-called internal colonialism. According to Alvin W. Gouldner:

Internal colonialism refers to the use of the state power by one section of society to impose unfavorable rates of exchange on another part of the same society. The control center governs by using the state to impose unequal exchange through decisions governing capital allocations,
investments, prices and price controls, access by visitors, taxes, tax exemptions and deductions, credit, loans, labor drafts, military conscription, rates of interest, wages, tariffs, custom duties, access to education, passports and visas [such as the household registration system (hukou) in China] and electoral representation.  

During the Great Leap Forward, the cheap labor of farmers and peasants available in collective farms was forced into the service of creating a surplus that was used to pay for industrialization. A regional division of labor existed in which peasants in the countryside produced grain to feed the urban population and fuel an industrial expansion in the city. “Farmers were treated as an hereditary caste deprived of the privileges given to city dwellers, which included subsidized housing, food rations, and access to health, education and disability benefits.” This inter-regional dependency for China’s industrialization intensified the labor-capital contradiction in rural areas.

Capital’s relation to nature generated an important contradiction in Maoist China. Mao’s adversarial attitude toward nature, as a means of production, led to the reshaping and taming of nature by mass mobilization. Nature became the battlefield

---

22 Alvin W. Gouldner, “Stalinism: A Study of Internal Colonialism,” Telos, No. 34, (Winter, 1977-78): 13. “As the state was in charge of the distribution of goods, it had to have a rough idea of the needs of different sectors of the economy. If large flows of people moved about the country in complete freedom it would upset the production quotas and distribution charts so meticulously mapped by central planners,” Dikötter, 191.

23 Dikötter, 192.
where human willpower was tested and tempered. To Maoists, nature was a vast store of potential use values (for fuel, timber, and backyard steel-making) that could be used directly and indirectly for China’s socialist construction. For instance, people in Dazhai, the model production brigade in Shanxi province, created a unique spatial pattern of terraced fields. This changed the local geography, achieving the monumental modification of nature as a means of overcoming frequent floods. This geographical transformation, with its man-made water control system, was to increase grain output. It seemed that the people were capable of mastering nature.

Yet capital’s relationship to nature was not simply unilateral. Nature often appeared insurmountable when Mao’s war against nature (borrowing the metaphor from Judith Shapiro) ended up being a failure. The steel campaign, irrigation schemes, dam constructions, and emulation of Dazhai-style terraces throughout the whole country caused severe deforestation. This led to soil erosion, water loss, and the disruption of ecological balance. The state did not intervene in these environmental catastrophes, worsening the impact of inundations and droughts and eventually rendering the land useless and barren. Throughout this period, the production of nature was reshaped and re-engineered by the actions of socialist capital. Capital, as Harvey
puts it, “was a working and evolving ecological system within which both nature and capital were constantly being produced and reproduced.”

In relation to the contradictions of capital, this dissertation places an emphasis on space, because space was the locus where the aforementioned contradictions of capital unfolded, intensified, and were temporarily resolved. The spatial construction of socialism – its ecological system of nature and geography – demonstrates how capital was concentrated, decentralized, or centralized. What usually supports the supremacy of capital is the ideology of global development. Soviet and Chinese socialisms were located on the wide spectrum of development theories concerning self-reliance and rural development. Socialist construction was, in reality, intertwined with the complex process of modern nation-state-building, the exponential growth of the national economy, modernization, and industrialization. These national projects inscribed their traces – such as the operation of the central plan, the repetitive gestures and serial actions of productive labor and machine power, the technical and social division of labor, production and property relations – in space. Socialism was a spatial production insofar as the state intended to realize socialism through the medium of space.

---

24 Harvey, Seventeen Contradictions and the End of Capitalism, 247.

25 In this light, Soviet and Chinese socialism constituted a technique and strategy for each country’s modernization, as scholars such as Fredric Jameson in Marxism beyond Marxism (1996) and in Jameson on Jameson (2007), Arif Dirlik in Marxism in the Chinese Revolution (2005), Wang Hui in “Contemporary Thought and the Question of Modernity,” (1998) and Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri in Empire (2000) have claimed.
On the other hand, the spatial construction of socialism coincided with the neutralization of the uneven geographical development and modernization occurring between city and countryside. The countryside became a semi-autonomous unit of China’s planned economy along with decentralization (in terms of the distribution of capital which was already available and functioning).\textsuperscript{26} The countryside became the essential hub for overcoming China’s backwardness because the periphery possessed latent use and exchange values and a rich source of capital that included the rural population. In line with this, Mao implemented so-called agrarian radicalism to develop a decentralized economic system based on grass-roots mass mobilization and political participation in the countryside.\textsuperscript{27} This politico-economic scheme led to labor transfer from the city to the town as a means of capital formation. In order to realize the potential value of capital, China first had to create the physical infrastructure and built environments for the free circulation of capital in the rural sphere. This project also demanded new means of transportation and communication. The mobile forms of fixed capital, e.g., trucks and tractors,\textsuperscript{28} were sent to the countryside for the purpose of

\textsuperscript{26} Marx, 777.


\textsuperscript{28} The mobile forms of fixed capital, such as ships, trucks, planes, railways engines, machinery, and office equipment, went all the way down to the knives and forks, the plates and cooking utensils, used on a daily basis.
speeding mechanization and increasing agricultural production. Such a (re)allocation of capital, spread over China’s vast under-developed land, exemplified decentralization.

The centralization of capital also accompanied the state’s search for self-reliance in the 1960s. Compared to the First Front (coastal areas) and the Second Front (central China), a geopolitical concept of the Third Front was actualized to secure industrial capacity in the event of war in the interior. This military-industrial geographical strategy somewhat reflected the national elites’ effort to “maximize their ability to extract resources, particularly grain, from the countryside while minimizing the input costs to agriculture.”

The people were mobilized to build up a massive industrial base for national defense in the mountains and caves of Northwestern provinces, including Shaanxi, Gansu, Ningxia, and Qinghai, and Southwestern provinces such as Sichuan, Chongqing, Yunnan, and Guizhou. The strategic choice of remote underdeveloped mountainous land was to protect China’s industrial base from possible air strikes by its enemies. The concentration of the means of production naturally took place in these areas along with the corresponding control over the strategic, albeit not economically efficient, regional development. The intense industrial development of the Third Front signified state-led centralization under a socialist economy, insofar as capital – which could be used by others and for/in other areas – was spent in these specific territorial

---

29 Zweig, 65.
units and economic sectors. This was put into practice not by capitalists, as with a market-economy, but by the state and its bureaucrats.

To summarize, Maoist China implemented both decentralization and centralization, depending on what economic and political goals it was seeking at the moment. In order to satisfy its contingent and urgent needs, the central government attempted new spatial arrangements across the territory of the nation-state. The landscapes of socialist realism often portrayed the territorial expansion of capital and its centralization and decentralization through depictions of the worksites of socialist construction. The aesthetic protocols of socialist realism, including revolutionary romanticism and optimism, beautified the land where intense production and exchange were occurring for the purpose of capital accumulation. The scenes of socialist reality not only deploy productive space, but shed light on the political and economic praxis performed by people within state-owned property. The visual production of spatial capital, a de-capitalist utopia free from capitalist maladies and pathologies, results in dislocating China out of the orbit of global capitalism. This imaginary setting played a key role in the construction of a social reality that shaped the public perception of socialism itself as a reality.

---

30 If capital is intensively directed to heavy industry, the development of light industry and the food industry is delayed or declines. In order to increase grain production, peasants’ compulsory sales to the state and a reduction of the agricultural tax should be implemented.

31 As Henry Lefebvre puts it, human bodies are also spatial.
Why does socialist realism matter? Research on socialist realism and its border-crossing moves across the world provides us with a historically important case study to show how capital interacts with the dominant mode of representation. In Maoist China, capitalism was a taboo. People struggled to eliminate capitalist seeds and to avoid taking a capitalist road – achieving prosperity through private methods – by continuing permanent revolution and class struggles. Under this circumstance, the visual images of socialist realism became a spectacle where mutated capitalism along with the discontinuous movement of global capitalism are turned into a socialist utopia. The topic therefore touches on how capitalism represents itself in history and how the hegemony of capital becomes invisible in the fields of “high art” and “low mass culture.” Socialist realism played a significant role in, borrowing from Louis Althusser’s definition of ideology, representing “the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence.”32 All kinds of representation can be a form of ideology in this sense. Every ideology requires a mode of representation. In line with this, Maoist images, the visual images that served, constituted, and reproduced Mao Zedong Thought or so-called Maoism, were the representation of the Chinese people’s public perception about themselves, their surroundings, and the world. They were also the mode of representation by which people saw the present and the future. The images

mirrored how the people spatially located themselves in the capitalist world by betraying “the phenomenological experience of the individual subject,” in Fredric Jameson’s words.\textsuperscript{33} This research, I believe, will answer the following critical question: despite all the historical facts proving the mutation of capitalism (i.e., its less developed market economy, commodity production and exchange and the universal process of capital-accumulation and alienation among others) in socialist China, why did people believe that they were living under socialism?

Scholars in different academic disciplines have approached the subject of socialist realism within the frameworks of regional studies, cultural studies, and the civilization model of art history. Specialists in Slavic studies and Soviet Russian art and literature saw socialist realism as part of Stalinist culture, or more broadly as part of Russian art and literature. Art historians such as Matthew Cullerne Bown have traced the origin of socialist realist paintings back to the nineteenth-century Russian realism of \textit{the Wanderers} and have found the roots of socialist realism in the aesthetic theories of Russian revolutionary democrats such as Nikolai Chernyshevski (1828-1889) and early Marxist revolutionaries like Anatoli Lunacharski (1875-1933).\textsuperscript{34} Scholars such as Boris Groys have similarly tried to envision the historical affinity between the Russian avant-garde of the 1920s and Stalinist socialist realism, putting them together in a linear

\textsuperscript{33} Jameson, 1990.

\textsuperscript{34} Bown, 1998.
To scholars like Evgeny Dobrenko, early Soviet cultural theories are very important because “the profound naturalness of the genesis of the socialist realist aesthetics, its synthetic nature,” originated in the early Soviet revolutionary culture developed after the turning point of the 1905 Revolution. “The revolutionary culture” according to Dobrenko, “congeals in socialist realism.”36 Such views certainly echo the “official” Soviet version of the origin of Socialist realism that claims three major arguments as follows:

First, socialist realism in art is a logical development of nineteenth-century realism. Second, the principle of allegiance to the Party is properly attributable to Lenin. Third, the theory of socialist realism as formulated in the thirties was firmly rooted in the practices of the twenties.37

Lenin’s essays and speeches provide authoritative documentary evidence to support the official view above. Lenin’s 1912 speech, “In Memory of Hérzen,”38 established the historical and theoretical foundation associating socialist realism with previous epochs.

38 Alexander Herzen (1812-1870), known as the father of Russian socialism.
Lenin’s 1905 article titled “Party Organization and Party Literature” was a harbinger of the orientation of future Soviet art – socialist realism and its party-mindedness. Lenin’s worldview, his preference for comprehensible realistic art and the Russian native tradition, penetrated into the aesthetic theory of socialist realism. In the same vein, scholars have put an emphasis on the cultural heritage of the pre-revolutionary and early Soviet eras in connection with socialist realism. Through this lens, socialist realism has been historicized. However, this diachronic approach, while it helps us to understand the ingrained roots of Soviet socialist realism, does not demonstrate the multi-faceted impacts of Soviet socialist realism and its afterlife in other locales around the globe – i.e., the divergent border-crossing movements of Soviet cultural capital.

Against this mainstream scholarship, Antoine Baudin and Susan E. Reid, among a few others, have paid attention to inter-regional and inter-state analyses of socialist realism. First of all, Antoine Baudin places the Soviet Union at the epicenter of socialist realism under the rubric of Zhdanovism, the 1946 doctrine of Soviet culture outlined by Andrei Zhdanov (1896-1948). Baudin, in his essay “Why Is Soviet Painting Hidden from Us?: Zhdanov and Its International Fallout,” discusses the varying degrees of Soviet influence on the arts of the Eastern Bloc through a complex network of international New Realism movements in the west. In particular, he introduces the important role

39 James, 1978.

played by the French Communist Party in disseminating socialist realism in France and
inviting such big names as André Breton, Pablo Picasso, Fernand Léger, André
Fougeron, and other alien realists such as Diego Rivera and David Alfaro Siqueiros. Yet
the ways in which he elaborates on such international phenomena places a focus on the
incongruities between the rigid, bureaucratic, and somewhat imperialistic character of
Soviet graphic arts and the modernist tradition melted down in the styles of local artists.
The limited Soviet influence signifies that Soviet-party art (graphic arts) was not
attractive enough to totally transform or eliminate the national or local characteristics of
modernist styles in Eastern European countries. His argument is that, while the styles
remain as significant indicators of how much Soviet cultural imperialism influenced
local arts, Soviet art remains confined within the framework of modernism vs. socialist
realism and the exchange between them. The main claim of his essay does not so much
reflect on the political economy that characterized Soviet cultural capital, but rather
focuses on the artistic and political exchange between nation-states. He sees socialist
realism as a global phenomenon in which many pro-Soviet international artists joined
and networked in an anti-Fascist climate. This international coordination was to some
extent possible through travelling agents: individual artists, touring exhibitions and
fairs, and circulating graphic magazines and propaganda periodicals.

Susan E. Reid is one of the few scholars who has done inter-state analyses of
(post) Stalinist Soviet art and visual culture. In her argument, the Cold War situation is
substantial mainly because she applies the inter-state reading of Soviet art and the art world to two international expositions: The Brussels World Fair (1958) and the American National Exhibition in Moscow (1959). The Cold War turned into a crucial reference point in the cultural competition between the United States and the Soviet Union after their rivalry provoked a war over the representations of the two conflicting systems. According to Reid, such international and cultural exchanges did not so much become “a site of convergence” which “engendered dialogue, reconciliation and rapprochement between the two camps,” but rather turned into “sites of identity formation.” The expositions enabled Soviet self-representations and projections to take shape. “The [Soviet] identities were constituted through difference and dialogue, in the antithesis of the two world camps of communism and capitalism.” Here, otherness is important and the two opposing political and economic systems of communism and capitalism are key players in acquiring an international sense from the Soviet art world. The territorial or geopolitical distinction is necessary in order to elevate the discussion of Soviet arts to the inter-state or global dimension. Reid’s analysis displays a typical Cold War paradigm. Both Baudin’s and Reid’s arguments, as well as their international views,

\footnote{Reid published many essays on Soviet art and visual culture in which she took a diachronic approach to the subject. Here I mentioned only two essays of her in which she examined the international dimension of Soviet art in a synchronic way.}

address the art-cultural-political exchanges without paying much attention to the economic factor of global capitalism that was encroaching or had already been absorbed into communist countries.

The general tendency of scholarship on Soviet socialist realism contrasts modernism with socialist realism. Each represents the political system to which it belongs. Modernism is for the democratic-capitalist camp and socialist realism for the communist league. Based on this view of modernism vs. socialist realism, scholars have developed their arguments using the popular tool of visual analysis. Some explore the question of how much modernism survived in the local arts of satellite countries. They show how modernist traditions of local art – such as the geometric and abstract shapes of the German Bauhaus and Cubist and expressionist styles – survived in East Germany, Poland, and Czechoslovakia. They resist the violent categorization that classifies all arts in the Soviet Bloc as one unitary body of monolithic propaganda – as the offspring of Soviet socialist realism. These scholars therefore emphasize the diversity of local arts and their national characteristics that are different from official Soviet art. On the contrary, Soviet art historians like Susan E. Reid (2007), Christina Kiaer, and Alison Hilton examine how Soviet artists employed styles of western modern art, such as impressionism, in their quasi-socialist realist paintings during the de-Stalinization period, Khrushchev’s so-called “short thaw.” They tend to claim that not all Soviet socialist realist paintings were propagandistic and non-artistic. As I mentioned above,
such debates on modernism and socialist realism echo Cold War geopolitics and its knowledge production, while the unit of the nation-state assumes an important role in their insistence upon the persisting national character of art in individual countries and the signs of (in)visible resistance against the “stale” rigidity of Soviet norms. As a result, the historical narrative confirms the importance of the nation-state, even as it defines socialist realism as a pandemic phenomenon across the Eastern Bloc and other western countries such as France. The diversity of local arts argues against the totalitarian nature of Soviet cultural imperialism.

Similarly, art historians in Chinese art, including Julia F. Andrews, Kuiyi Shen, Ellen Johnston Laing, John Clark, Michael Sullivan, Lin Xiaoping, Lü Peng, Xi Jingzhi, and Maria Galikowski, have adopted the civilization model of art history to stress the sinicization (zhongguohua or minzuhua) of socialist realism. Rather than delving into socialist realism as a single subject, they take into account the influence of Soviet socialist realism in the grand narrative of Chinese art since 1949. In this framework, socialist realism is considered to determine the most prominent characteristics of the 1950s Chinese art world at state-sponsored art schools like the Central Academy of Fine Arts (the CAFA). The most conspicuous tendencies of their research are basically a China-centered periodization and a media-based analysis that focuses on different genres and forms of visual materials such as oil paintings, nianhua (new-year prints), guohua (national painting, ink and brush painting), woodcut prints, and posters. They often
focus on political events, such as the Anti-Rightist Campaign (1957) and the Great Leap Forward (1958-61), during which Soviet-origin socialist realism encountered a crisis or was nationalized fully enough to flourish in China.

Another way to elaborate Chinese socialist realism has been to associate its history with influential individuals, including Jiang Feng (1910-1982) who took on the administrative responsibility to reform the pre-Liberation academic system based on the Soviet model, and who considered socialist realist oil paintings as a desirable art form for new socialist China in the early 1950s. Konstantin Maksimov (1913-1993) is equally important because he taught Chinese art students socialist realist oil painting at the CAFA from 1955 to 1957. He played an important role in transmitting the advanced skills of Soviet oil painting. In my view, the complexity of the border-crossing movement of Soviet socialist realism is revealed in the conflicting views of Jiang Feng and Konstantin Maksimov. Whereas Jiang Feng accused impressionism of being bourgeois, formalist art for art’s sake, Konstantin Maksimov encouraged his students to adopt his impressionist styles for expressing light and air. Jiang’s “conservative” attitude toward impressionism was more in tandem with the 1948-49 anti-impressionism campaign in the Soviet Union, while Maksimov’s “liberal” stance reflected the recent political climate of the Soviet Union during the post-Stalinist
The recent scholarship on socialist realism in Chinese art history does not convey, in even simplified form, the irony, complexity, anxiety, and paradox of Soviet influence upon China’s dialogical relation to Soviet socialist realism. The popular, problematic periodization simply renders socialist realism as a short-lived art trend of the 1950s within the chronological order of Chinese art history. The historicization of socialist realism distinguishes Soviet socialist realism from Mao’s idea of liangjiehe in order to place China’s combination of revolutionary realism and revolutionary romanticism as a developed stage of Soviet socialist realism that was achieved through the sinicization of Soviet-origin socialist realism.

Partly because most art historians designate Chinese socialist realism as the Soviet-style/influenced art of Post-Liberation China after the establishment of the PRC in 1949, they exclusively put emphasis on Mao’s 1942 Yan’an Talk on Literature and Art. Mao’s historic lecture at Yan’an – due to the legendary leader’s foundational ideas of Chinese art and literature – became the only reference point that theoretically links the pre-1949 period with the art of the PRC. However, as early as 1933 Zhou Yang initiated the debate on socialist realism and revolutionary romanticism. As Chen Shunxin (2000) and Mark Gamsa (2010) argue in the field of literary theory, the issues of socialist realism raised by Zhou in 1933 – such as the nationalist re-interpretation of the Marxist-

---

43 This type of disparity also happened in China’s economic sector. While Mao and Maoists in the party wanted to implement Stalin’s 1920 short cut, Stalin in the 1950s advised China to implement a gradual transition to socialism. Stalin in the 1920s and the 1930s is different from him in the 1950s because his progressive and radical tendency in economic and political planning diminished.
Leninist worldview, issues of romanticism, and the problem of blind worship for foreign socialist realism – anticipated all kinds of conflicts, problems, and controversies that surfaced decades later in 1950s China. In art history, art historians have not traced the origin of nationalist anxiety in China’s reception of Soviet socialist realism back to the 1930s, although China’s first encounter with Soviet socialist realism happened at that time. In the same vein, the 1938 debate on national form (minzu xingshi) was overlooked in the post-revolutionary history of Chinese art. The ways in which art historians have articulated socialist realism is often limited by their conception of socialist realism as the Soviet-influenced art of the PRC.

In Chinese art history, many scholars, including Julia F. Andrews, Kuiyi Shen, Ellen Johnston Laing, John Clark, and Lü Peng, emphasize the nationalization of socialist realism, although their research focuses differ. There are several factors that led to the sinicization of socialist realism in China: first, the deteriorating Sino-Soviet relations since the late 1950s; second, the resonance of China’s cultural nationalism with the civilization model of art history; third, Chinese artists’ innermost desires to experiment with versatile artistic expressions and styles; fourth, the inconsistent and shifting art policy of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and Propaganda Department; and finally, the intra-party power struggle between Maoists and non-Maoists. The composite of these variables begot the nationalization of Soviet socialist realism. The combination of revolutionary realism and revolutionary romanticism, which Mao
Zedong conceptualized at the 1958 Chengdu Conference, exemplifies one of these cases. Julia F. Andrews has focused on the conflict between guohua (traditional ink painting, literally national painting) and socialist realism in elaborating the process of sinicization that happened in the early 1960s. The socialist reform of Chinese traditional ink painting was intertwined with the transformation of Soviet socialist realism into Chinese art. The ink paintings of socialist realist landscapes, a hybrid amalgam of socialist content with Chinese traditional and indigenous media and formats, seem to complete the total sinicization of socialist realism, thus creating Chinese socialist realism. Art historians, including Julia F. Andrews and Lin Xiaoping, formulate the national identity of Chinese socialist realism partly by shedding light on the influence of the traditional form of ink and brush painting. Yet, ironically enough, this unique version of Chinese socialist realism literally realizes the Stalinist tenet of socialist realism, “socialist in content and national in form.”

In the previous scholarship on Chinese socialist realism, Chinese folk arts, i.e., nianhua and reformed nianhua, have played an important part in articulating the nationalization of socialist realism. But in my understanding, there is an ambiguity in simply regarding Chinese artists’ creative reinterpretations of folk art and national heritage (emphasized by Mao and Zhou Yang in the early nineteen sixties again) as the historical proof of sinicization. This is so because the aesthetic principle of Soviet socialist realism, just as in the Chinese case, selectively embraced national forms from
the past. As Leonid Heller’s basic conceptual schema for socialist realism demonstrates, “national and popular spirit” (narodnost, literally, “people-ness”) – one of the key components of Soviet socialist realist aesthetics – likewise cherished the tradition of Russian folk arts and century-old Russian realist paintings. Therefore, Chinese artists’ use of traditional folk arts and the convention of ink painting can be used to prove two contradictory historical assumptions. That Chinese artists experimented with and innovated the folk art and traditional forms of painting can be used to support the strong influence of Soviet socialist realism, since both Chinese and Soviet socialist realisms sought the creative application of native arts and the national heritage of each civilization. On the other hand, if scholars emphasize the centrality of Chinese media and forms and offer a historical account that insists on the consistency of Chinese art, the historical facts can be used to deny a strong Soviet influence on Chinese art. This stance by a future generation of art historians is inseparable from the intense cultural nationalism prevalent among party-elites during the Maoist regime.

For instance, Lin Gang’s 1950 nianhua “Zhao Guilan at the Conference of Outstanding Workers” depicted the historic meeting of heroic model workers with Chairman Mao. This reformed socialist nianhua integrated socialist content into the national form, thereby constructing China’s national identity through socialist realism. The form of nianhua is truly Chinese whereas the content – a popular subject matter of socialist realism is portraying the people meeting with communist leaders such as Stalin.
and Mao – is also genuinely socialist. Although many scholars argued in this way that socialist realism was sinicized in China, this socialist nianhua can be seen as a typical example of Soviet socialist realism that follows the Stalinist catchphrase, “socialist in content, and national in form.” Lin Gang’s print might embody the Soviet principle of “popular-national spirit” (narodnost), which stresses the intimate relationship between art and the masses (James, 1973). Similarly, Li Puxing, in his book entitled Weapon and Tool: Chinese Revolutionary Art (2008), saw nianhua (the new-year print) as the art of the masses. Li interestingly connects the Chinese new-year print to world revolutionary art, which originated in eighteenth- or nineteenth-century French history paintings such as Jacques-Louis David’s Death of Marat (1793) and Eugène Delacroix’s Liberty Leading the People (1830). Where to locate the origin of Chinese socialist realism is a complicated matter that reflects scholars’ own positions in history. In spite of the ambiguity and intractability, most art historians seem to follow one of two mainstreams.

Many art historians, like Lü Peng, Kuiyi Shen, and Julia F. Andrews (2012), basically distinguish two different historical periods in Chinese art history. The first period is roughly the 1950s when China actively absorbed Soviet art before creating its own version of socialist art. In introducing this early post-revolutionary stage of the PRC, scholars follow the official Soviet version that I introduced above of the origin of socialist realism. They highlight the nineteenth-century realist paintings of the Wanderers and Russian landscape artists and the Russian native tradition of Soviet socialist realism.
Then the second period, which goes up through the Anti-Rightist Campaign (1957-8) and the Sino-Soviet split in 1960, is defined as the age when Chinese artists under the leadership of Mao innovated new socialist art. The latter is considered to show less Soviet and more Chinese characteristics.

In contrast to the historical perspective that addresses China’s autonomous transformation of socialist realism, other art historians try to find a visual and stylistic affinity between Soviet socialist realism and its Chinese counterpart, in order to demonstrate Soviet influence. In “Chinese Peasant Painting 1958-1976: Amateur and Professional,” Ellen Johnston Laing analyzes the influence of Soviet socialist realism on peasant paintings. Laing regards the compositions of “large, dramatic, sweeping arcs” as “socialist realist compositional and general presentational schemes and principles.”

Julia F. Andrews (1994) also mentions the visual effects of Soviet socialist realism on Chinese ink paintings. Her ambiguous definition of socialist realism is condensed into several sets of formal characteristics, i.e., robust female bodies; geometric forms rendered with vanishing point perspective; and the figures that form complex compositional groups. Andrews contends that Ya Ming’s Peddlers (ink and colors on silk, 1958) “bore many evidences of a background in socialist realism” basically on the

---


ground that the hanging scroll demonstrates the formal qualities of traditionally non-Chinese, western, and Soviet modes of representation. These three modes are interchangeable. By abstracting the pictorial elements of compositional schemes and a set of qualitative values from the historical context of socialist realism, these scholars attempt to find sporadic visual evidence of Soviet socialist realism in Chinese visual materials. In contrast to the scholarly view that underlines the sinicization of socialist realism, the compulsive gaze of art historians tends to exaggerate the indiscernible influence of Soviet socialist realism on Chinese visual images.

One more important issue for Chinese socialist realism stems from the debate on revolutionary realism and revolutionary romanticism. Dmitry Pisarev (1840-1868), a radical writer and social critic, provided Lenin with an appealing idea: a vision of the inspiration that generates and strengthens the drive of the working man in overcoming the gulf between reality and vision – “a contact point between dream and life.” According to James, Pisarev’s idea was “the germ of that revolutionary romanticism that was to later capture Maxim Gorky’s imagination and to find its way also into socialist realism.”46 Inspired by Gorky, Zhou Yang in his 1938 essay titled “Thoughts on Realism” took into account the importance of romanticism in invoking heroism and pathos. By differentiating negative and positive romanticism, Zhou argued that:

46 James, 25.
Negative romanticism is intuitive, uselessly hidden deep inside the individual’s own inner world, including a return to the past, whereas positive romanticism strives to strengthen a person’s will, arousing strong feels of resistance against reality and against everything else that inhibits the will.\textsuperscript{47}

Zhou’s view of romanticism was tied to China’s war situation, which required the heroic ethos of the masses. As Mark Gamsa puts it, historical records show that the commanders of the Chinese Communist troops used Soviet (proto-)socialist realist novels as a manual for military practices and as a therapeutic treatment for inducing a military and heroic mindset on the battlefields. Romanticism conveyed moral value in war situations.

In art history, examples of China’s initial formulation of the discourse of romanticism, such as the 1932 essay on revolutionary romanticism by Qu Qiubai (1899-1935), a leader of the Chinese Communist Party, are often omitted. And only a few scholars, such as Ellen Johnston Laing and Maris Galikowski, touch upon the theory of revolutionary romanticism conceptualized by Mao during the Great Leap Forward (1958-61).\textsuperscript{48} They point out the sentimentality of the revolutionary romanticism that

\begin{flushright}

\textsuperscript{48} They may keep in mind Mao’s 1958 essay, titled “The Synthesis of Realism and Romanticism in Contradiction,” (translation is mine) (\textit{xianshizhuyi he langmanzhuyi de duili tongyi}).
\end{flushright}
stressed “heroic, idealistic ambition, romantic imagination and human subjectivity at the expense of real conditions and objective laws.”49 This refers to the cognitive function of idealized realism in human thought. John Clark misses the indispensable side of romanticism when he discusses socialist realism in “Realism in Revolutionary Chinese Painting,” despite the fact that romanticism was an integral part of socialist realism. Some art historians skip explaining the process of how concepts of art criticism such as revolutionary romanticism were translated into the visual languages of Chinese artists.

Against this backdrop, Maria Galikowski pinpoints the strong association of the idea of socialist construction with that of revolutionary realism and revolutionary romanticism. Galikowski argues that:

Revolutionary romanticism, as an aesthetic concept brought to prominence during the Great Leap Forward, was a direct manifestation of Mao’s ideas concerning subjective idealism and his belief that initiative and enthusiasm could overcome and transcend all objective conditions, and thus realize Communist ideals. Those with an idealistic and romantic revolutionary spirit, with imagination and determination, could transform romantic ideas into reality.50


50 Ibid., 100.
Her argument actually concurs with Georg Lukacs’s 1956 criticism of Soviet revolutionary romanticism in that both point out the issue of how “subjective” human desire overcomes the “objective” law of historical progress. Lukacs denounces Stalinist revolutionary romanticism because “the dogma of revolutionary realism claimed a higher reality for false and untypical images of reality to support Stalin’s erroneous perspective of the imminence of communism in the Soviet Union.”\textsuperscript{51} Compared with Ulrike Goeschen who attempts to change our view of socialist realism to “art in socialism,” \textsuperscript{52} and other scholars of Chinese art who uncritically use “socialist construction” and never question what socialism actually meant in Maoist China, I think Galikowski leaves room for rethinking what socialist construction by distinguishing the concept of socialist construction from the actual condition of it in her argument.

Galikowski suggests a more layered explanation of the difference between socialist realism and revolutionary romanticism, if these are two different things. She analyzes the discrepancy between the two as one of degree – “the latter involved an over-emphasis on the romantic dimension, often to the point of absurd and implausible exaggeration, while the former attempted to maintain some degree of balance between the objective representation of certain features of reality and emphasis on specific


aspects of that reality.” By translating the literary theory of revolutionary romanticism into the visual expression of exaggeration in scale, she argues that the exaggerated characteristics of revolutionary romanticism appeared most clearly in the folk arts, particularly in the new folk songs, murals, and new-year pictures of the Great Leap Forward era. While Laing limits the scope of socialist realism to a composite or list of visual expressions and compositional schemes in her analysis of socialist realist influence on Chinese peasant paintings, Galikowski enlarges the application of socialist realism and revolutionary romanticism into diverse fields of popular culture, including folk songs full of vivid verbal imagery. The revolutionary culture of the Great Leap Forward era described the superhuman efforts of the Chinese people to change their environment and lauded their power to master nature.

While Galikowski distinguishes revolutionary romanticism from socialist realism through her visual analysis of Great Leap Forward imagery, the literary theorist Xudong Zhang differentiates the Maoist idea of revolutionary mass culture from the later phenomenon of socialist realism. He claims that the dissimilarity arises because “Mao saw revolution as permanent; for him, time was a Heraclitean flow and history is always in the making, whereas socialist realism stressed the representation or revision of


54 She demonstrates the ways in which revolutionary romanticism is visualized in peasant paintings that “depicted an idealized world of the future, in which wheat and corn and other grain crops grew several meters high and in which vegetables attained such prodigious proportions that children were able to play games inside them” (Maria Galikowski, 102).
reality as a time-less spatialization.’’\textsuperscript{55} In Zhang’s view, China’s Maoist mass culture was charged with an endless revolutionary impulse, thus making permanent revolution itself the telos of history, while Soviet socialist realism remained static, “manifesting the projected completion of an ongoing socio-economic and ideological construction.’’\textsuperscript{56} Yet it is difficult to apply Zhang’s characterization of China’s uniqueness to Maoist visual images (they are very similar to the Soviet posters depicting collective farms) insofar as the peasant paintings and posters of Maoist populist revolution, like Soviet socialist realism and other derived visual images, vividly pictured “the projected completion of an ongoing socio-economic and ideological construction” (for instance, a moment of harvest and a realized classless utopia). Here Maoist revolutionary romanticism played a crucial role in projecting a utopian fantasy into the cognition of reality.

On the other hand, Lin Xiaoping sheds light on Mao’s “military romanticism” and “public romantic vision of the Korean War” in the discourse of Chinese revolutionary romanticism. Under the banner of the Resist America and Assist Korea Campaign (1950-53), Chinese artists including Qian Shoutie and Pan Tainshou conveyed the public perception of military romanticism imposed by Mao during the Korean War. According to Lin’s analysis, the Korean War paintings by these two painters “fancied that the People’s Voluntary Army could use horses and ox-drawn carts and camels to


\textsuperscript{56} Ibid., 290.
battle against the powerful mechanized forces of American imperialism in an effort to convey the nation’s pride that a new China had finally stood up in the world.” This left room for a new interpretation of “romanticism” in Chinese visual culture as a mixture of romanticism and Chinese nationalism. In my view, the dynamics of the seemingly oppositional elements of realism and romanticism reflect our perception of a reality in which the unreal and the real, and the fictional and the factual, always coexist. The mythic dimension of the imagined unity of the nation manifested itself not only in Chinese paintings but in the socialist realist paintings of the Soviet Union during the Second World War. In Chinese art history, nineteenth-century European romanticism was often incorporated into the slippery definition of realism, a realist mode of representation. Rather than indicating a specific visual style, romanticism was often translated into a revolutionary spirit. In this way, Mao’s poems were considered to embody revolutionary romanticism. In comparison with Lü Peng who associates romanticism with idealism and irrationality, Lin understands romanticism as a spiritual and moral value. The way in which Lin characterizes Chinese socialist realism as being more humanistic than its Soviet counterpart reveals his stance about projecting moral value into Chinese socialist realism.

In the same vein, some scholars, including Xi Jingzhi and Wen Fong, underline the “didactic” view of art in their discussion of socialist realism. Xi Jingzhi, in an essay entitled “Socialist Realist Art and Its Contemporaneity,” remarks that “socialist realism as a doctrine and slogan disappeared from the stage of history along with the dissolution of the Soviet Union; but the core contents, i.e., the expression of the bright side of life, sublime and idealistic qualities, admiration for nature, humanity’s richness and complexity, these were the benefits the creativity of Soviet artists brought us. Those values will exist eternally and become the spiritual heritage for all human beings.” Like Lin Xiaoping, who insists that the “Chinese version of socialist realism in the 1950s seemed to [him] more humanistic than its Soviet model,” Xi Jingzhi understands socialist realism as a set of moral values that are entangled with aesthetic qualities. Similarly, in *Between Two Cultures*, Wen Fong claims that Chinese socialist realism was influenced by the “didactic Confucian view of art.” For Wen Fong, in his effort to find the historical origins of Chinese socialist realism in China’s own traditions, Chinese socialist realism conveys the ingrained Confucian value of art.

This questionable relationship between socialist realism and China’s pre-modern traditions requires a violent de-contextualization of twentieth-century socialist realism.

---


59 Translation is mine, Ibid., 60.

60 Lin, 41.
one that even goes against Mao’s revolutionary drive to reform, not destroy, pre-modern “feudal” and “bourgeois” culture. Similarly to Wen Fong, who suggests a contradictory combination of socialist realism with Confucianism, Lin Xiaoping associates Chinese socialist realism with Chan Buddhism, although the connection is not based on philosophy but on the common subject of the “smiling face.” Lin treats the “smiling face” as an important visual theme in Chinese socialist realism and traces its origin back to the Chan Buddhist portraits of the Song Dynasty (960-1279). The temporal gap between China’s tenth to the thirteenth centuries and its twentieth-century requires a questionable assumption about what can be supported by such notions as “tradition” and “collective unconsciousness.” Also, the scholar’s emphasis on the “smiling face,” the value he places on visual representations of the face within the historical debate about socialist realism, weakens his argument when we begin to ask how important the “smiling face” has actually been in defining the “Chinese” characteristics of socialist realism.

Another type of de-contextualization that designates Chinese realism as a belated “fashion” of European realism occurs in John Clark’s essay, “Realism in Revolutionary Chinese Painting.” Clark begins his essay with a composite list, borrowed from Linda Nochlin, of the defining features of realism. But by eliminating the temporal and spatial context, he renders ahistorical his of inventory of the qualities of realism. Clark argues that Nochlin’s “analytical conceptions of realism were a useful comparative frame since
much of the conception of realism of Chinese oil painting derived from Russian and later Soviet, experience which was itself based in large part on that of Western Europe.”

Among art historians, there is hypothetical consent to a reductionist discourse that places Europe as the origin of modern art, even though it is difficult to historically prove that a direct relationship exists between individual artists in different locales and countries; for instance, between the Russian realists of the nineteenth century (the Wanderers) and European artists whom Linda Nochlin discusses in her book, *Realism*. Clark distorts Linda Nochlin’s intention to historicize nineteenth-century European realism. Nochlin not only discusses Impressionism as part of the historical lineage of nineteenth century realism (she allocates many pages to a discussion of the paintings of the Impressionists) and finds a commonality between realism and “formalist” modernism, in her conclusion she also emphasizes the transvaluation of realism that differentiated socialist realism from nineteenth-century Realism (Nochlin uses the capitalized Realism when she is referring to nineteenth-century European realism).

Linda Nochlin’s analysis aims at historicizing the European context of nineteenth-century realism, whereas John Clark treats Nochlin’s contextualization as an analytical schema for categorization. Realism in China was not confined to the European trend of nineteenth-century realism insofar as Chinese realism encompassed a

---

wide range of Japanese, Western, indigenous, and non-abstract expressions that embraced Japan’s understanding of nineteenth-century European romanticism and the Soviet Union’s acceptance of the “progressive” Italian Renaissance, as well as the ancient Chinese realism found in the Qing dynasty terracotta soldiers. In spite of the amalgamated complexity of Chinese realism, Clark attempts to de-contextualize realism on a global scale by uncritically eliminating Nochlin’s argument.

One more issue that can be raised about John Clark is his insensitive use of the term realism. In China, there are two different words to denote realism; xieshizhuyi (写实主义) and xianshizhuyi (现实主义). The former is equivalent to the realistic mode of representation that pursues mimesis and verisimilitude and is often based on drawing from life (xiesheng, 写生). The latter is interchangeable with a realist but somewhat illusionistic and mythic depiction of reality that embodies the more aggressive human will to master and transform reality. Socialist realism (社会主义现实主义) did not simply reflect a socialist world view of “truthful” reality, but was thought capable of creating the revolutionary power to construct socialist reality in actuality. Although the visual images of socialist realism incorporate xieshizhuyi into the corpus of non-abstract modes of representation, the orientations of the two concepts are totally different in theory. What is noteworthy in Clark’s argument is that he points out the cognitive and

---

62 The element of xieyi, abstract concept and human mindset expressed in somewhat abstract forms of ink and water and brushstrokes, can be included.
ideological functions of realism. Clark elaborates that “if realism privileges its subjects, then it also privileges those who determine what those subjects will be, and indeed what is to be the “reality” of their representation.” 63 By alluding to the inseparable connection between party-state patronage and realism, Clark points out the hidden role of realism and its ideological utility in the construction of reality as shaped by human thought.

Lü Peng is the scholar who reminds me of the problems of so-called “influence theory” that are caused by the inevitable epistemological limits, mistranslations, misinterpretations, and prejudices, as well as indiscernibility in tracing the historical origins of artworks, given their multi-directional global circulation in numerous reproducible forms. Lü Peng argues that for Chinese artists in the 1920s and 1930s Chinese art-world, most of whom lacked art historical knowledge, there was no perceivable difference between western and Soviet realist oil paintings (xieshiyouhua, 写实油画). His standpoint is different from that of John Clark, who assumes a European influence on Chinese art but neglects to maintain any critical distance regarding individual artists and their different perceptions. Lü alludes to a qualitative transformation in Chinese art history with respect to the terms for realism (xieshizhuyi, not xianshizhuyi). Following his argument, the realism of the Wanderers (peredvizhniki) is indistinguishable from European realism in the mindset of Chinese artists in the 1920s and 1930s because they did not have the so-called “class consciousness” with which to

63 Clark, 15-16.
differentiate works of art based on the political ideologies that the country of origin represents. Lü Peng however does not state that there was a change in the consciousness of Chinese artists, who later became able to judge works of art from the perspective of Marxism-Leninism. Following the official Soviet view of the genealogy of socialist realism, Lü Peng simply explains that realism (xieshizhuyì) underwent a historical transition under Stalin’s rule, for the purpose of reforming consciousness and imbuing xieshizhiyi with a socialist spirit and party-mindedness in pursuit of communism. According to Lü, realism (xieshizhuyì) turns into socialist realism (xianshizhuyì) by acquiring new aesthetic values such as theatricality (xijuxing), story-telling (gushixing), plot (qingjiexing), and ideological orientation (sixiangxing) (Lü Peng, 455-456). For Lü Peng it was xieshizhuyì (realism) that transformed into shehuizhuyì xianshizhuyì (socialist realism) in Chinese art history. Nevertheless, he mentions that there was no perceivable difference between European and Russian realism in pre-Liberation China that would allow us to conjecture about the historical circumstances of the Chinese art world, where Chinese “realist” painters such as Xu Beihong, Wu Zuoren, and Dong Xiwen remained non-Communists.

What Lü Peng, among many other art historians, pays attention to mainly is the European and Soviet influence on Chinese art. He argues about how the foreign realism of the Soviet Union affected Chinese indigenous paintings, and how Chinese painters assimilated foreign realism into native arts such as socialist realist national painting
(guohua). This dissertation, while not disregarding the arguments of previous scholarship, focuses on the structural factors of global capitalism – or more generally, the structural factors of development – in the shaping of the dominant realist mode of representation called socialist realism. As I explained above, uneven geographical development plays a pivotal role in activating the international movement of visual images, the mobility of artists, and the shaping of representational modes in certain locales. The Soviet Union appears not to be the epicenter of socialist realism, given that the hegemony of capital – including political, economic, cultural, and symbolic capital – exercises its power throughout the entire globe without relying upon an absolute center. Capital produces, moves and gathers, and disperses images. The processes of capital accumulation, circulation, and reproduction, – i.e., the endlessly repetitive life cycle of capital – changes, transforms, and diversifies art and visual production.

Here uneven development means two things: first, capital is unevenly distributed and, second, it is unevenly distributed in space. Space is a concept and is also material base that transcends the boundaries of the nation-state: capital can be unevenly accumulated, distributed, concentrated, decentralized, and centralized all over the earth, let alone within the territory of a single country. Art and cultural production happen via space. Thus, how can we characterize the intrinsic nature of space – the field and material substratum of art and visual culture? Henri Lefebvre elaborated on the interconnection between capitalism’s survival and space as follows:
[Capitalism, more generally development]’s survival depends on their being able to extend their reach to space in its entirety: to the land (in the process of absorbing the towns and agriculture, an outcome already foreseeable in the nineteenth century, but also, and less predictably, creating new sectors altogether – notably that of leisure); to the underground resources lying deep in the earth and beneath the sea-bed – energy, raw materials, and so on; and lastly to what might be called the above-ground sphere, i.e. to volumes or constructions considered in terms of their height, to the space of mountains and even of the planets. Space in the sense of the earth, the ground, has not disappeared, nor has it been incorporated into industrial production; on the contrary, once integrated into capitalism, it only gains in strength as a specific element or function in capitalism’s expansion. This expansion has been an active one, a forward leap of the forces of production, of new modalities of production, but it has occurred without breaking out of the mode and the relations of capitalist production system; as a consequence, this extension of production and of the productive forces has continued to be accompanied by a reproduction of the relations of production which cannot have failed
to leave its imprint upon the total occupation of all pre-existing space and upon the production of a new space.⁶⁴

From this perspective, China’s socialism is about spatial expansion. China’s socialist construction can be seen as a spatial development. Socialist development is a local expression of global capitalism and its survival via the land of China. Although above Lefebvre might not have specifically taken into account China’s mutated capitalism, Maoist visual culture and Chinese socialist realism interact across the same entirety of space described above. The mode of production and exchange were active in producing Maoist material and visual culture. The putative socialist mode of production remained compatible with the capitalist mode, although the productive force of China’s national economy remained relatively low. The reproduction of capitalist relations of production, albeit through Mao’s ambitious and unyielding effort, persisted in its socialist form and appearance because of China’s less developed market economy, commodity production and exchange, the ensuing production of exchange values, international trade, etc. The dynamic interplay between the state ideology of socialism and the mutated capitalist mode of production under China’s state capitalism shaped the particular characteristics of Maoist visual culture, including art. This dissertation demonstrates how socialist realist and Maoist images recoded capital, creating the appearance of socialism. In line

with this, my dissertation maps out and integrates different but inter-connected registers of academic research – i.e., an economic history of China and its international relationships, cultural studies and art historical inquiries, as well as visual analyses.

This dissertation is composed of three chapters. The first chapter, after briefly introducing the origin and definition of socialist realism, examines how the uneven geographical development and modernization of the Soviet Union and China affected China’s reception of Soviet socialist realism. Transplanting “advanced” Soviet art and literature into the soil of Chinese culture was undertaken as part of China’s modernization process. I introduce how this unevenness – the spatial embodiments of the concentration, centralization, and decentralization of accumulative capital and its valorization – materialized in socialist realist images in the inter-state dimension of space. The second chapter delves into the spatial production of socialism on the terrain of the Chinese nation-state. A variety of landscapes from the Great Leap Forward era and the campaign called “Learn from Dazhai in Agriculture” illustrate the ways in which the ideologies of socialist development and later self-reliance are visually constructed in Maoist rural utopianism. Labor is an important subject because the question of how to represent labor was a crucial matter for China as it sought to establish its national identity as socialist. Labor was also the main source for increasing productive forces and for capital accumulation, partly due to China’s shortage of capital. The last part of Chapter Two demonstrates how socialist realism contributed to the
aestheticization of labor through Chinese artists’ versatile artistic experiments. The final chapter narrows down the scope of spatial Marxism to socialist subjectivity. The Maoist plastic arts, which portray diverse groups of socialist subjects, appear to be typical, given the impact of the aesthetic principles of socialist realism. Among these principles, typicality (dianxing-xing) played a significant role in the construction of the virtual concept of class and in the misrepresentation of China’s state capitalism as socialist. In spite of the hierarchical stratification of Chinese society, typicality and other socialist realist principles virtually constructed such revolutionary and egalitarian classes as the workers, peasants, and soldiers. On the one hand, typical socialist subjects appear to embody labor power, which represents the individual economic sector of China’s national economy. On the other hand, under the overarching influence of socialist realism and Maoist mass culture, typical ethnic minorities are depicted as citizens of the Chinese nation-state. The visual representations of socialist subjects illustrate Maoist China’s identity politics and memory politics, because China’s state power shaped historical memory and imposed it upon its citizens. The citizens and revolutionary classes created an interesting conflict by producing socialist patriots and socialist citizens in the Maoist plastic arts.

I do not confine the scope of my argument to socialist realism as Soviet-style oil paintings. The scope of my research includes myriad visual images that depict a socialist reality; and make socialism tangible, visible, audible, and real, while turning the
mutation of capitalism into something imperceptible, unspeakable, and taboo. Therefore, the definition of socialist realism in this dissertation is looser and more comprehensive than its general or rigid definition. Chronology is important to my dissertation, more so at the beginning of each chapter. Chronology forms a basic structure in this dissertation because, although my research is not all about a history, it does deal with a history. Thus, chronological order is significant.

Finally, socialist realism is an ideology about time. Socialist time is created by politics and the ensuing geopolitical unconsciousness. What I would like do in this dissertation is relevant to space, economy, and capital. My aim is to show how the politics of time dominates space and profoundly misrepresents both socialism and capitalism under the rules of capital.
CHAPTER ONE

In the beginning, was the Word, which is to say, the signifier. Without the signifier, at the beginning, it is impossible for the drive to be articulated as historical. Jacques Lacan

In the Beginning: The Origin of Socialist Realism

Socialist realism became the official doctrine of Soviet literature and art at the First Writers’ Congress held in Moscow in 1934. However, considering that the term “socialist realism” made its first public appearance prior to 1934, socialist realism did not come into being on the spot. It is difficult under these circumstances to pinpoint where socialist realism originally began. Meanwhile, the 1972 letters of Ivan

1 The Congress took place in Moscow between August 17 and September 1, 1934, in 26 sessions according to Régine Robin, Socialist Realism: An Impossible Aesthetic, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), xv. Artist Igor Grabar was the only painter among the 600 delegates and represented the visual arts at the Congress (Elizabeth Valkenier (1989) and K. Andrea Rusnock (2010)). According to Alison Hilton: “Igor Grabar had managed to retain his position in the Soviet art world, producing official portraits and scenes of revolutionary history as required, while continuing to paint evocative landscapes and serving as an artistic advisor and spokesperson and chief editor and contributing author of the Academy of Sciences’ thirteen-volume History of Russian Art, Grabar’ was one of few members of the art establishment who could have written a serious discussion of impressionism and its role in Russian art.” So during Khrushchev’s thaw, he began reassessment of Impressionism and re-defined Russian realism,” Alison Hilton, “Holiday on the Kolkhoz: Socialist Realism’s Dialogue with Impressionism,” Russian Art and the West, (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2007), 211.

2 The term, socialist realism, appeared in Literary Newspaper on 25th May, 1932.
Mikhailovich Gronsky\(^3\) seem to confirm the general belief among scholars that Joseph Stalin (1878-1953) coined the term. According to Gronsky’s published memoir, 1932 was the year \(^4\) that socialist realism was invented by Stalin. He coined the term to replace the dialectical materialist creative method of the RRAP (the Russian Association of Proletarian Writers), after the latter was dismissed by the party in 1932. The former head of the organizational committee claimed that Stalin, the creator of socialist realism, summarized the virtue of socialist realism in the following three points:

The virtue consists, firstly, in its brevity (just two words), secondly in its ready comprehensibility and thirdly, in the way it indicates a continuity in the development of literature (the literature of critical realism which arose in the period of the bourgeois-democratic social movement, changes over, develops beyond that during the period of the proletarian socialist movement to a literature of socialist realism).\(^5\)

Stalin’s last two points are redundant in that they echo Lenin’s view of Russian literature and art. Socialist realism however was different from the preceding literature in terms of the influential role of the party. In contrast to the “dialectical materialistic creative

\(^3\) Gronsky was a party journalist and administrator, chief editor of Izvestia, head of the Organizational Committee of the Writers Union and of the union’s ‘party faction.’

\(^4\) It is possible that socialist realism was born during the first plenary session of the committee held in Moscow from October 29 to November 3, 1932.

method” of the RAPP, socialist realism was intended to orient all literary and art-cultural production to serve the party.⁶

Two years later at the 1934 Congress, socialist realism was officially reborn, although there were diverse, even conflicting, views about what socialist realism was to be. Here I quote a paragraph from the statutes of the Writers’ Union’s statement, which addressed the most foundational and official attributes of socialist realism un-reinterpreted by later scholars:

Socialist realism, the basic method of Soviet literature and literary criticism, demands of the sincere writer a historically concrete presentation of reality in its revolutionary development. Thus the veracity and the historically concrete aspect of the artistic representation of reality have to be allied to the task of ideological change and the education of workers in the spirit of socialism. Socialist realism guarantees to creative art an extraordinary opportunity to manifest any artistic initiative and a choice of various forms, styles, and genres. The victory of socialism, the rapid growth of productive forces unprecedented in the history of humanity, the burgeoning process of the liquidation of classes, the elimination of all possibilities of exploitation of man by man

⁶ Ibid.
and the elimination of the contrasts between city and countryside, and, finally, the progress of science and culture, create limitless possibilities for a qualitative and quantitative increase in creative forces and for the expansion of all types of art and literature.\footnote{I quote from Régine Robin’s \textit{Socialist Realism: An Impossible Aesthetic}, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992). 11.}

To rephrase the statement, socialist realism intends to present a certain type of reality, “a concrete historical reality in its revolutionary development.” Its function is inseparable from the political education of workers, teaching them the spirit of socialism in accordance with ideological change. The victory of socialism is an already established fact. Socialist realism is a literary method for realizing this presumptive truth. Yet socialist realism intends to portray an ongoing, not yet completed process – i.e., the rapid growth of productive forces, the liquidation of classes, the elimination of exploitation and urban and rural divisions, and the progress of science and culture.\footnote{What is actualized in the list are the progress of science and the increase in productive forces only.} Its fully charged optimism opens up a whole horizon of new possibilities for exploring and experimenting with new creative genres, forms, and styles. This is how socialist realism initially takes shape in the Soviet Union.

Another operational definition for socialist realism is that it endows the country with a socialist identity. Socialist realism leads to a self-identification that imposes a

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
  \item What is actualized in the list are the progress of science and the increase in productive forces only.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
socialist identity upon the nation-states that are at stake. The historical imagination that designates a quasi-capitalist country as being socialist reflects the inside view of a self-defined socialist country. In line with this, Georg Lukács defines socialist realism as a realism that uses “the concrete socialist perspective to describe the forces working toward socialism from the inside.”9 “Socialist society is seen as an independent entity, not simply as a foil to capitalist society, or as a refuge from its dilemmas – as with these critical realists who have come close to embracing socialism.”10 From this idea, we can draw two important presuppositions apropos of socialist realism: first, socialist realism mirrors the inside view of socialist countries that consider themselves socialist. In this light, these two entities, the nation-state (or the geopolitical unit of the Soviet Bloc) and socialist realism, constitute one another by binding with each other through socialism.11 Second, socialist realism functions to impose the constructed negativity of socialism as non-capitalist, and also of capitalism as non-socialist, even though sometimes the distinction is blurred.12 The heterogeneous, elastic, de-territorializing and re-

---


10 Ibid., 93-94.

11 This view is exactly opposite to my perspective, which focuses on the mutation of capitalism in socialist countries within the broader network of global capitalism.

12 Socialist realism is inclined to underrate the possibilities of “socialist” interventions in capitalist countries; for instance, the state-led economy plan under the New Deal in the aftermath of the Great Depression (1929).
territorializing forces of global capitalism, making it more likely for these forces to remain inarticulable and unspeakable to and by the people in Maoist China.

The birth of socialist realism has multiple historical meanings and symbolic significance. From the perspective of political economy, socialist realism is the product of the Stalinist regime’s attempt to intensively centralize politics and economy under the tight control of the Stalin-led party-state. Through forced bloody collectivization (1921-1937) in the countryside, Stalin achieved early success in industrialization during the First Five Year Plan (1928-1931) via “the short course.”13 This brought increased self-confidence to the leader of the world’s first socialist country concerning the acceleration of large-scale socialist development. The statements of the Writers’ Congress above convey such an orientation. What the Stalinist Soviet Union wanted to achieve through socialist realism was socialism itself. In line with this, Evgeny Dobrenko contends that “socialism did not produce socialist realism to ‘prettify reality’: rather, socialist realism itself produced socialism by elevating socialism to reality status, giving it material form.”14 With its official canonization in 1934, socialist realism signified, promised, and even actualized the imagined new phase of social reality and historical development. In this scenario, the Stalinist Soviet Union has already realized socialism, and is continuing

13 Achieving socialist transition for eight years.

its unprecedented historic march toward communism based upon the rapid economic
growth of its national economy. Stalin’s Soviet-centered view of state socialism provided
the essential precondition for the development of socialist realism and its transfer to
other neighboring countries such as Maoist China.

During the 1930s, Stalin’s idea of socialism was narrowly confined within the
boundaries of Soviet Russia. Lenin believed that if a large-scale Western European
revolution joined the October Revolution, a worldwide proletarian revolution could
happen. Lenin’s international vision of socialism, however, faded with the failure of the
communist revolutions in post-World War I European countries, especially Germany.15
Witnessing the defeat of European communists, Stalin concluded that the uneven
economic and political development of the world prevented communist revolution from
happening everywhere simultaneously as a single act. Replacing Lenin’s blueprint,
Stalin’s theory and policy of “Socialism in One Country” became the official line of the
Comintern in 1928. This directed him to concentrate on increasing the productive forces

15 Marx’s original theory and philosophy is Eurocentric. Lenin and Stalin hardly escape from the Europe-
centered paradigm for explaining history, since the material base of revolution comes from advanced
capitalism and antagonism within it. Europe is the space of capitalism with its advanced capitalist system.
So Germany, among other European countries, should have been a country that could have supported the
revolution that happened in an under-developed country like Russia in order to lead to a world-wide
revolution. According to Zizek, “Lenin’s theory of the ‘weakest link of the chain’ accepts that the first
revolution can take place not in the most developed country but in a country where antagonisms of the
capitalist development are most aggravated, even if it is less developed (like Russia which combined
concentrated modern capitalist industrial islands with agrarian backwardness and pre-democratic
authoritarian government). The October Revolution was still perceived as a risky breakthrough that could
succeed only if it was soon joined by large-scale Western European revolution and all eyes were focused on
Germany in this respect” in Slavoj Žižek, “Revolutionary Terror from Robespierre to Mao,” Positions: 19:3,
within the territory of the Soviet Union. Building up socialism inside a single country required that enormous capital be invested in economic sectors such as the heavy industries. The state-centered paradigm of socialist development, i.e., state socialism, emphasized the rapid growth of the national economy within an individual country. More significantly, the Stalinist outlook on socialism presupposed the unevenness of political and economic development between the nation-states as the pre-given condition of the world. This logically led to the historical view that anticipated and confirmed uneven socialist development among socialist countries. Such a stance implicitly justified and naturalized a world order in which the world’s first socialist country, the Soviet Union, becomes the leader. Developed from “Socialism in One Country” at the beginning, the Stalinist view of the global proletarian revolution shaped the embryonic form of Soviet-led “socialist globalization” for the next decades.\(^\text{16}\) The uneven socialist development between the Soviet Union and Maoist China considerably influenced China’s view of Soviet socialist realism.

When China adopted Soviet socialist realism around 1953, the classical Marxist vision of proletarian internationalism, which instigates the inter-state coordination of workers, had been tarnished in the real world. Instead, the global expansion of Soviet capital dispersed the Soviet economic model (including state-led industrialization, the

\(^{16}\) A regime of the production of identity and difference, or really of homogenization and heterogenization as described in Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 45.
Five Year Plan or Stalin’s so-called “short course”\(^\text{17}\). The Soviet Union, the advanced socialist country, invested or donated economic, military, technological, and cultural capital across the world. Socialist internationalism or globalization delivered the gospel of the Stalinist myth as the key to the future prosperity of “backward” countries in the Eastern Bloc and of postcolonial countries in the Third World. In the territorial units of self-defined non-capitalist countries, Soviet-style socialism became a strategy and technique for modernization.\(^\text{18}\) To adopt socialism turned into a symbolic gesture for proclaiming political and economic sovereignty and self-reliance in relation to the First World. Against the emerging Empire, socialism seemed to propose an alternative to the capitalist model of development.\(^\text{19}\) The growing power of the Soviet Union around the globe activated the inter-state mobility of socialist realist images and aesthetics.

Given the historical circumstances, neither the Soviet Union nor Maoist China ever challenged the hegemony of capital or liberated themselves from capital’s universalizing tendency based on the universal value of abstract labor. On the domestic level, Soviet and Chinese socialisms internalized the paradigm of development, which, 

\(^{17}\) “Mao formally accepted the time period required for socialist transformation in the Short Course as that is largely valid for China. The Short Course claimed that by the end of 1925, that, four years after the onset of the NEP, the Soviet Union, having recovered from its civil war, began to industrialize already in 1926. It attained a “decisive victory” in 1933, so that eight years were required for the transition” in Thomas P. Bernstein, “Introduction,” China Learns from the Soviet Union, 1949-Present, (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2010), 11.


as Arif Dirlik puts it, is the product of capitalism. Socialist construction coincided with the processes of modernization and industrialization on the expanding scale of the national economy. These processes demanded the reproduction of capital by increasing production, exchange, productive forces, and productivity, and invented a new organizational method for labor exploitation as a means of accumulating capital through generating surplus value and vice versa. The socialist economy, sustained by collectivization (1955-56), mechanization, the construction of infrastructure, and mass mobilization for strategic economic projects, conformed to the general rule of capital accumulation and reproduction. Wang Hui addresses China’s socialism as being both “a method and an embodiment of China’s modernization. And it leads to an even harsher form of state domination over society and people than has ever existed under capitalism.” Here the state becomes the key agent of the quasi-socialist production machine in carrying out the extreme modernization of the disciplinary productive model.

The socialist states, however, easily masked the intrinsic nature of the authoritarian polities that were following the same rule of capital. This was possible on

Dirlik, 2005.


two different levels. When the worldview of Marxism-Leninism supported the Stalinist development model, the impact was enormous. Marxism-Leninism, as a historical paradigm, provided the rhetorical plausibility needed to switch over the processes of modernization and industrialization to the progress of socialism. Here the Marxist outlook was used to justify the intense development of the national economy stressed by “Socialism in One Country” as the theoretical first step for a global communist revolution. On the more structural level, the nation-states were able to maintain their socialist personas in international society, owning to the newly reorganized and redefined world system called the Cold War. Nonetheless, the unbreakable wall of ideology still failed to totally block inter-state commodity exchanges across the artificially dissected world. Imports and exports between socialist and capitalist countries, let alone between socialist countries, occurred in spite of trade embargos. The new network of post-colonial African states complicated this international flow of global capital. The Soviet Union expanded its influence economically and politically to the African continent. China, in the mid-1950s, launched its historic railway construction project to connect Tanzania and Zambia. Such a transnational movement of “socialist” capital, along with labor transfers to the less developed African countries, signaled that

23 The socialist character of Soviet/Chinese capital is nominal in that “capital did not need to invent a new paradigm because the truly creative moment had already taken place. Capital’s problem was rather to dominate a new composition that had already been produced autonomously and defined within a new relationship to nature and labor, a relationship of autonomous production” in Hardt and Negri, 276.
the socialist countries were already involved in transnational capitalism, so long as they were directly and indirectly participating in the growing global market economy.\textsuperscript{24}

In China, socialist realism becomes a means of building socialism in that backward country. The gap between the actual conditions of China’s politics and economy and the ideal goal of socialism played a crucial role in characterizing China’s socialist realism – including the surrealist and mythic dimensions of China’s social reality. Before discussing the characteristics of Chinese socialist realism through visual analyses in this dissertation, a brief sketch of China’s economic situation helps us to understand the particularities of Chinese socialist realism. The replacement or utter transformation to the socialist mode of production was never successfully accomplished during the Maoist regime (1949-76).\textsuperscript{25} When the CCP takes state power in 1949, “China’s industrial production is only 30 percent of the nation’s best record, while light industry and agriculture no more than 70 percent. The transportation system is hardly functional.” \textsuperscript{26} China was an agriculture-based country with weak industries. From 1949

\textsuperscript{24} Even during the high point of China’s communist revolution, the Great Leap Forward, China’s trade with England, Canada, Japan, and Hong Kong continued.

\textsuperscript{25} Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri claim that the Soviet Union’s “structural incapacity to go beyond the model of disciplinary governability, with respect to both its mode of production, which was Fordist and Taylorist, and its form of political command, which was Keynesian-socialist and thus simply modernizing internally and imperialist externally” caused the Soviet system to go into crisis and fall down (Hardt and Negri, 277). I think this point is also applicable to the Chinese case because it emulated the Soviet model of industrialization/modernization in many areas especially heavy industries.

\textsuperscript{26} “More than 5,000 miles of railroads were crippled, 3,200 bridges and 200 tunnels of rail lines were severely damaged; less than 4,000 miles of vehicle roads were barely useable; air and maritime transports capability
to 1953, roughly the period of New Democracy (1940-56), the CCP’s official policy resembled Lenin’s New Economic Policy (the NEP). “The major industries are already stat-owned, but coexist with a sizeable sector of private manufacturing and trading enterprises, as well as a private handicrafts industry. Agriculture, once landlords have been violently dispossessed, is dominated by the individual, private-property owning small-holder peasantry. Private property in the means of production is not abolished.”

Mao adopted Stalin’s general line for socialist transition (outlined in 1929) and implemented a socialist transformation alongside state ownership and market forces.

From August 1952 to May 1953, Zhou Enlai along with a Chinese delegation composed of top-level planning and industrial officials went to the Soviet Union to learn the Soviet-style Five Year Plan. They visited Soviet enterprises to learn the specifics of the operations of large-scale industrial undertakings. After that, China’s industrialization accelerated, based on Soviet assistance, as China initiated its own First


27 “Liu Shaoqi believed at that time that agriculture could not be collectivized before industry could supply machinery. Instead, he advocated the promotion of supply and marketing cooperatives, also very much in line with the Lenin-Bukharin project. Liu wanted to encourage the individual economy, including rich peasants, in order to maintain the incentives necessary for agricultural growth, until the conditions for a rapid future transition to socialism had been created” in Bernstein, 9.

28 Jiang Feng might join the Soviet trip.

29 Bernstein, 12.
Five Year Plan (1953-57). China’s industrial system centered on more than 100 heavy industry projects around 1953. Meanwhile, along with China’s collectivization (1955-56), Mao’s “On the Ten Great Relationships” (April 1956) insinuates China’s future separation from the Soviet model in Mao’s criticism of the uncritical acceptance of Soviet advice under Khrushchev. Mao also started questioning the Stalinist policy of assigning the top priority to heavy industry. While he admitted that heavy industry should continue to be a priority, he felt that more investments should go to light industry and agriculture. The priorities of a national economy shift depending on changes in central planning. A socialist economy decides how much capital should go to its three major economic sectors: heavy industry, light industry and agriculture; centralization is arranged in this way.

The Great Leap Forward (1958-61) and the Great Cultural Revolution (1966-76) were two of the high points of China’s socialist experiments and Maoist revolutionary projects. They were also the two economic and political events that ended up negating and nullifying the existence of the socialist mode of production in Chinese modern history. During the Great Leap Forward, the new people’s communes appeared, symbolizing the beginning of China’s socialist industrialization. In 1956, China’s first automobile factory, the first aircraft factory, the first machine tool plant, and the first electronic tube factory were commissioned. Their output filled major gaps in the country’s industrial system. In 1957, the Wuhan Changjiang Bridge was completed and opened to traffic” (Kong, 161).

According to Kong Hanbing: “in December 1953, the large-scale rolling mill, the seamless steel tubing mill, and the seventh iron-making furnace of the Anshan Iron and Steel Company began operations, symbolizing the beginning of China’s socialist industrialization. In 1956, China’s first automobile factory, the first aircraft factory, the first machine tool plant, and the first electronic tube factory were commissioned. Their output filled major gaps in the country’s industrial system. In 1957, the Wuhan Changjiang Bridge was completed and opened to traffic” (Kong, 161).

Bernstein, 14.
provoking a rural transition from collective to state ownership and quickening China’s entry into communism ahead of the Soviet Union. The mixed economy that guaranteed private ownership and markets seemed to vanish because of Mao’s economic radicalization in the countryside. Yet the nation-wide economic campaign aimed to overtake England in steel-production in fifteen years. The disciplinary governability needed to achieve this goal in such a short time turned the rural communes into highly institutionalized production units. In name, they operated for the peasantry and China’s agriculture, as well as for rural development through decentralization; however, this radical economic scheme turned out to be huge natural and human disaster and failed with the Great Famine (1959-61). When it came to the Great Cultural Revolution (1966-76) (wuchan jieji wenhua da geming), relatively speaking, only during the first three years (1966–1968) were economic incentives avoided amid the massive political agitation and turmoil. Overall, such nationwide economic campaigns as “Learn from Dazhai in Agriculture” and “Learn from Daqing in Industry” were put into practice in parallel with the Cultural Revolution. China’s mixed economy, i.e., a less developed market economy with private sectors, continued to exist.

Generally speaking, from 1956 to 1976, the year of Mao’s death, “there was a continuing struggle within the leadership of the party to find a proper balance point between the state-owned economy and market forces – according to Hua-yu Li, a balance that is ideologically acceptable to Mao, on the one hand, and to other more
moderate leaders.” This resulted from the intra-party struggle and shifting power relations between Mao and his followers, on one side, and the non-Maoists, later called “capitalist roaders” including Liu Shaoqi, Chen Yun, Li Xiannian, Bo Yibo, and Deng Xiaoping, on the other. As a matter of fact, Mao’s economic Stalinization, the Great Leap Forward, and other 1960s and 1970s economic plans – all of these, whether they were successful, remained uncompleted, or failed – did not go beyond the capitalist mode of production in a strict sense, although they changed the landscape of China’s substructure and more or less contributed to its economic development.

Socialist China neither completed the socialist mode of production nor fulfilled the historical development of socialism that Marx defined as the post-capitalist state, or as emerging tendencies within capitalism, because China’s socialism did not result from the negation of capitalism. In this light, historians such as Maurice Meisner (1982) see China’s socialism as utopian. In contrast to Marx’s ambivalent view of capitalism, China’s socialism does not demand the stage of capitalism as the prerequisite to socialism – the next level of historical progress. More importantly, China’s socialism does not refer to an economic condition transcending capitalism. Rather socialism is a term and a social formation used to veil the exploitative structures of production and


33 Both as a potential move toward socialism and a possible dead-end i.e., the endless reproduction of inhuman economic conditions without a messianic moment of revolution.
exchange operated by a nation-state in which capitalism is a taboo. Driven by the eagerness to outpace Anglo-American industrial strength, China, as a socialist state, searched for a non-capitalist path for modernization and industrialization. It generated a mode of representation to misrepresent the real. Thus far, I have briefly introduced Chinese economic history in order to explain the politico-economic background from which Chinese socialist realism emerged. Since the key word of this dissertation is capital, and since this research aims to read visual images from the perspective of capital and capitalism’s mutation in a socialist country, this chronological sketch is very important.

**Uneven Development and Socialist Realism**

A Chinese bricklayer gazes at the portrait of Joseph Stalin hanging on the wall of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Building in Moscow [Figure 1]. Although it is not clear

---

34 Mao in 1954 believed that “it would take fifteen years to lay down a foundation and roughly fifty years to build up a powerful socialist country.” He also asserted that China would soon catch up with the United States. He said that, “America only has a history of 180 years. Sixty years ago, it produced 4 million tons of steel. We are therefore only sixty years behind...[and] we will surely overtake it.” During his visit to Moscow on November 2-21, 1957, the CCP chairman boasted at a meeting of all the other leaders of Communist countries that China would overtake Britain in iron, steel, and other heavy industries in the next fifteen years and would exceed the United States soon thereafter in those areas as well” in Shu Guang Zhang, *Brothers in Arms*, 203.

35 It is significant for mapping out the politico-economic sphere in which Chinese socialist realism creates imaginary capital in the visual. The economic chronology helps to demonstrate how the visual images of socialist realism and Maoism recode capital and its contradictions, thus imagining a new world order transcending capitalism.
whether this event is happening in the real world or in the imaginary, the physical
distance between Moscow and a worksite in China seems meaningless. What is
important is that the Chinese worker is looking at Stalin, wherever he is. Because of its
dense historical message, the poster of *The Soviet Union is Our Example* (circa. 1953)
(*sulian shi women de fangyang*) is an important visual image for discussing Chinese
socialist realism. The main theme of this poster is a Chinese bricklayer; but, he is not
simply building a wall. The worker unnaturally turns his head toward Stalin’s portrait
to stare at the international leader of socialism, but he does not stop working. This
interpersonal relationship between a Chinese bricklayer and Stalin alludes to multiple
layers of the historical circumstances around 1953. The metonymic and metaphorical
readings of the visual languages employed in the image illustrate how the uneven
development between the two countries shaped the temporal and spatial conception of
historical progress.³⁷

As the title, *The Soviet Union is Our Example*, says, the poster reveals the CCP’s
policy circa 1953 when the country was eager to emulate the Soviet model of

---

³⁶ This building is one of the seven Stalinist skyscrapers, called the Seven Sisters (or Stalin’s high-rises),
which were built from 1947 to 1953 in Moscow.

³⁷ This poster implies many issues that I have already covered above, such as the defining role of socialist
realism, the pre-given condition of uneven development between the two socialist states in constructing the
spatial and temporal view of inter-state socialist development, the transfer of the Stalinist myth to future
prosperity, and finally the importance of the year 1953. How do these factors affect China’s reception of
Soviet socialist realism?
development. China’s capital was centralized in heavy industries, thus spurring industrialization. The poster-image expresses an interstate relationship conditioned by the unevenness in socialist development, i.e., China’s dependence on the Soviet Union in building up its national economy. This scene is composed of two areas of spatial distinction. In the foreground, the Chinese bricklayer is building a wall and, in the background, the historic edifice of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Building is standing. The relatively young Chinese worker is laying a brick at the site of on-going construction. He turns toward the monumental Soviet skyscraper and looks at Stalin, who is possibly already dead. By showing us some rows of bricks, the image insinuates that China’s construction is not yet completed, while its Soviet counterpart has already been accomplished. In other words, the spectacular architectural edifice is contrasted with a few rows of bricks.

The historical meaning of the poster is also tied to the uneven development of the whole world, leading to the Stalinist model of development and modernization. The Stalinist skyscraper, albeit in either Russian Baroque or Gothic style, resembles the monumental skyscrapers in Manhattan, New York City, the mecca of financial capital. The architectonical imagery of Soviet communism is very similar to the symbol of

---

38 Stalin died in March 1953. That the portrait is decorated with a white flower (ribbon) implies Stalin’s death.
capitalist modernity since the desire for modernity is common to both sides. “Through the 1920s and 1930s, the U.S. epitomizes the evils of capitalism, high unemployment, poverty and racism to the Soviet Union. But the capitalist country also symbolizes efficiency, technology, progress, success and modernity.” The schizophrenic stance of the Soviet Union toward the U.S. – the object of both love/admiration and hatred – alludes to the pro-modern and anti-capitalist nature of Soviet socialism. Ambivalent feelings about capitalist modernity seem to re-echo in the overlapping images painted by the Chinese artist of the Soviet and U.S. skyscrapers. Unevenness in terms of modernization, geographical development, and the growth of national economies around the globe become the essential conditions whenever a certain type of art, its principles, aesthetics, and reproduced images cross a border. Diverse forms of capital and their surplus value are attached to the material and immaterial forms of the visual world. The next section will explain how uneven inter-state development affected China’s reception of Soviet socialist realism.

39 Modernity refers to the time period and worldview beginning approximately in the eighteenth century with the Enlightenment, and reaching its peak in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century when broad populations in Europe and North America experienced urbanization and industrialization through the mechanization and automation of the Industrial Revolution (the capitalist mode of production). Modernity presupposes a time of innovative technological development within a linear timeline of progress.


41 Socialist realism is not exclusive to the Soviet camp but to the global capitalism of the world (modernity).
The year 1953 is important because Soviet socialist realism finally became an integral part of Chinese literary and visual culture at that time. It is ironic that China was not ready to imitate what Stalin had built in the Soviet Union until the builder of socialism (or the architect of communism) died in 1953. Under the influence of Mao’s New Democracy, which defined China as pre-socialist and supporting a mixed economy, China in 1953 was not wholly and officially socialist. Mao’s scheme affected the CCP’s position about Soviet socialist realism, since socialist realism usually represented the official line of the party-state. Although as early as 1933 Zhou Yang (1908-1989) introduced socialist realism to China, it took about two decades for socialist realism to assimilate into China. The delay was caused for a number of reasons.

The fact that the Soviet Union was more advanced than China in terms of socialist development led to the delay. The CCP did not proclaim socialist realism as the official tenet of Chinese literature and art until 1953 at the Second National Conference of the Representatives of Literary and Art Workers. Influenced by the quasi-Marxist periodization that defines socialism as post-capitalist, the CCP superimposed this

---


43 Hu Feng’s antagonist of 1955, post-1949 cultural policy leader until he was ousted in 1966 during the Cultural Revolution.

44 In Zhou’s essay titled “On Socialist Realism and Revolutionary Romanticism (guanyu shehuizhuyi xianshizhuyi yu gemingde langmanzhuyi).”
temporal perception of socialism upon China’s timeline. The CCP was to wait until the whole country became truly socialist – the opportune time for semi-feudal and semi-colonial China to prepare itself for advanced socialist culture. Preoccupied with Marxist teleology and Mao’s New Democracy (1940-56), Chinese intellectuals and cultural bureaucrats found socialist realism inappropriate for China, primarily because the national culture remained semi-feudal and semi-colonial. Mao, in his 1940 essay “On New Democracy” elaborated:

A national culture with a socialist content will necessarily be the reflection of a socialist politics and a socialist economy. There are socialist elements in our politics and our economy, and hence these socialist elements are reflected in our national culture; but taking on society as a whole, we do not have a socialist politics and a socialist economy yet, so there cannot be wholly socialist national culture.45

Mao’s scheme of imagining China at a certain stage of its revolutionary history determined China’s attitude toward socialist realism. This historical paradigm contained a geopolitical unconsciousness rooted in uneven development, i.e., in the differing amounts of capital and the dissimilar scale of capital reproduction. The Maoist mental map of comparative history, however, was irrelevant to the real conditions of China.

insofar as China in 1953, just as in 1976, had not achieved a socialist economy. The Soviet Union nevertheless became an extremely important reference by which China saw its own present and future. In line with this, Mao’s cohorts, the literary theorists, Zhou Yang and Feng Xuefeng contended that socialist realism was from the Soviet Union, which had already built socialism. Feng Xuefeng in particular said in the early 1950s that, “only after Chinese writers achieve proletarian standing and carry out popularization campaigns, can we begin to be influenced by the theory of socialist realism of the Soviet Union.” To Feng, Chinese writers were not yet ready for this advanced form of Soviet literary theory. There were prerequisites for Chinese writers – such as “proletarian standing” and “popularization” – for becoming socialist realist writers.

Reflecting Mao’s view and judgment about China’s current state, the term socialist realism appeared intermittently in articles published in the early 1950s. In 1951, Zhou Yang used “revolutionary realism” in a lecture at the Central Institution of Literature. Zhou claimed that “revolutionary realism” was “a proletarian method of art and literature which constantly meet the needs of the masses and of the practical

---

46 Feng wrote the epilogue of Ding Ling’s socialist realist novel titled, *The Sun Shines over the Sanggan River*.


48 For instance, socialist realism appears in Zhou Yang’s 1951 essay in *People’s China*. 

77
struggles.\textsuperscript{49} His definition of “revolutionary realism” was similar to Mao’s “proletarian realism” mentioned in Yan’an in 1942. As Yang Lan argues, the diversity in terminology following the popular formula “x” realism, reflected the decades-long history of Chinese discourses on realism.\textsuperscript{50} But the absence of terminological uniformity, as Lorenz Bichler puts it, implied the unsettled authority of Soviet socialist realism prior to 1953.

In addition to the uneven socialist development between the Soviet Union and China, the inner anxiety of Chinese elites and political leaders about absorbing a foreign and allegedly superior culture affected China’s hesitation. China’s cultural nationalism operated like a mythic bastion for preserving the purity of Chinese civilization, despite the surge and encroachment of foreign cultural, political, and economic capital. Elitist loyalty toward Chinese tradition and civilizational heritage comprised a crucial component of Chinese cultural nationalism. In Zhou Yang’s 1933 article, this kind of nationalist drive is detectable when Zhou advises his readers not to uncritically accept the Soviet literary theories. Mao and his cadres’ 1938 debates on “national form” (\textit{minzu xingshi}) also reveal the tension between Chinese native, vernacular, and folk traditions (“old form”), and modernized socialist art, poetry, and literature (“new form”).


\textsuperscript{50} Since the years of the May Fourth Movement in 1919.
On top of that, Mao’s use of “proletarian revolution” in Yan’an in 1942 (he is determined not to use the Soviet term) possibly mirrors the intra-party power struggle that intensified during the Rectification Campaign (1942-44).\textsuperscript{51} In order to consolidate his own authority, Mao eliminated or re-educated Soviet-trained rivals and party members who had returned from the Soviet Union. This political action, however, confronted a paradox since the legitimacy of the CCP heavily depended on the authority of the Stalinist Soviet Union, especially before the CCP took state power in 1949. Whereas the CCP was still fighting against “capitalist” nationalists, “the ideological and social system of capitalism [had already] become a museum piece”\textsuperscript{52} in the Soviet Union, according to Mao in 1940.

Another reason for China’s belated adoption of socialist realism is relevant to the CCP’s wartime strategy of making an effort to embrace more of the non-communist population of China. In line with Mao’s New Democracy, during the Civil War (1927-49) and the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937-45) the CCP supported a mixed economy, which meant that because of its capitalist substructure the CCP did not fully promulgate socialist culture. However, what may be more reasonable to say is that the CCP remained relatively passive in publicly promoting socialist realism because the

\textsuperscript{51} Bichler, 1996.

communist party, as Chen Shunxin notes, did not want to stir unnecessary antagonism or discomfort among the non-communist populace during the war.⁵³

Leaving the pre-Liberation polemics surrounding socialist realism behind, about four years after the establishment of the People’s Republic of China, in 1953, China publicly announced that the party supported and promoted socialist realism. Zhou Yang, in a 1953 essay entitled “Socialist Realism: The Way forward for China’s Literature” (shehuizhuyi xianshizhuyi: zhongguo wenxue qianjin de daolu), enunciated the CCP’s standpoint in welcoming Soviet-origin socialist realism into the domain of Chinese culture. In his article, Zhou considers socialist realism to be a substantial principle for new Chinese art and literature. He tries to discover quasi-socialist realist characters in ancient literary pieces from the dynastic period, including the novel, shuihuozhi, from the Yuan and Ming Dynasties. The ways in which he presents his argument demonstrate typical methods for reproducing the ideology of cultural nationalism – the paradigm assumes that everything foreign eventually serves China. In the continuous search for and re-discovery of the archetypes of the foreign in the enormous reservoir of the “five thousand year-old Chinese civilization,” nothing can be new. Zhou’s gesture foretold China’s shifting position towards socialist realism in the later period – which became more independently socialist and nationalist. Until Mao’s criticism of de-Stalinization

⁵³ Chen Shunxin, Socialist Realist Theory and Its Reception and Transformation in China (translation is mine), (shehuizhuyi xianshizhuyilun zai zhongguode jieshou yu zhuanhua), (Hefei: Anhui Jiaoyu Chubanshe, 2000).
and Khrushchev’s revisionism intensified, China remained favorable to Soviet socialist realism. The CCP’s attitude toward the central doctrine of Soviet literary and visual culture shifted, depending on the changing inter-state relationship. What is noteworthy is that the official standpoint of the CCP was incapable of totally controlling the entire production of literary and visual culture during the Maoist regime.

**Politics of Time**

*The Soviet Union’s Today is Our Tomorrow (sulian de jintian shi women de mingtian)* (1956) [Figure 2] illustrates how socialist realism involves a politics of time that makes socialism present. This public poster juxtaposes six scenes of Soviet life, introducing the socialist reality of Today’s Soviet Union. The scope of this visual montage is so wide that it covers both economic and non-economic sectors, ranging from the mechanization of agricultural production to the leisure activities of the Soviet people. What is obvious in this series of Soviet socialist life is that nobody is described as a hard worker. The first two scenes at the top show photographic images of agricultural production. In the first field scene, there is a tractor plowing on the collective state farm. The tractor driver is almost invisible, while agricultural mechanization has obviously been achieved. Likewise, the second portrayal of the Soviet countryside pictures a row of trucks – mobile forms of fixed capital – along with piles of grain and agricultural products. Next to one of the trucks, two people are chatting. Rather than portraying hardworking
socialist laborers, the images of idle Soviet life strikingly demonstrate the outcome of collectivization, mechanization, and industrialization. Tractors, trucks, and a dam – the means of production and also the method for enormously increasing production and productivity – are highlighted.

Moving to the non-economic sectors of Soviet life, the photographic images display leisure activities such as going to a classical music concert, having a family dinner in a cozy living room, and gardening. All these display cultivated middle-class lifestyles as benefits of collectivization and mechanization. Soviet women are represented as liberated from the traditional division of labor, since women are picking cotton while their children are collectively taken care of at the kindergarten. This wide spectrum of Soviet socialist lifestyles ultimately delivers the message that the Soviet development model has brought enormous economic benefits as well as a modernized, elegant, and carefree lifestyle to people in Today’s Soviet Union. The fancy socialist life is allegedly introduced as the natural outcome of Stalinist collectivization and mechanization, which increases productive forces, production, and productivity, and eventually liberates the people from the toil of labor. Drawing on Guy Debord’s explanation of spectacle, the inactivity of the Soviet laborers is by no means liberation from productive activity: “it remains dependent on it, in an uneasy and admiring submission to the requirements and consequences of the production system. It is itself
one of the consequences of the system.” By naming the poster *The Soviet Union’s Today is Our Tomorrow*, the wishful thinking behind the image conveys a strong motivation and desire to catch up with the Soviet Union. This visual assemblage of socialist realism was intended to spark the passionate voluntary participation of the Chinese people in implementing large-scale collectivization from 1955 to 1956. In this way, the Stalinist myth as the key to future prosperity encroached upon the domestic and private space of Chinese everyday life.

The photo montage also raises an issue as to the politics of time in socialist society. For ordinary people, socialism often becomes interchangeable with comfort and prosperity. The down-to-earth version of socialism addresses the collective hope for overcoming poverty, and furthermore, for enjoying high-living standards and welfare. Yet the moment of pleasure and happiness is delayed into the unreachable future because it is not “today” but “tomorrow” that we can enjoy the fruits of the painful socialist transition. The metaphorical expression of time – i.e., the use of today and tomorrow, rather than abstract and hypothetical concepts like the present and the future – often transforms the uneven spatial development between the two countries into a matter of time. Regardless of the particularities of national conditions, the universal epic

---

narrative of socialist development presumes the future moment when, together with the Soviet Union, China will be equally rich, developed, egalitarian, and socialist.  

**Soviet Capitals and Oil Painting**

Uneven socialist development exercised its influence on the Chinese art world through its shaping of the views of Chinese artists, art historians, critics, art professors, and students about Soviet-origin socialist realism. Socialist realism in the professional art world was inseparable from realist-style oil paintings. To receive an opportunity to learn drawing and oil painting from Soviet masters was a privilege. Amid China’s reception and acculturation of this foreign style and medium, an interesting phenomenon occurred due to the imbalance among types of Soviet capital. Soviet political, economic, and cultural capital were perceived as superior and authoritative. The symbolic capital of Soviet fine art, however, was not as powerful as other forms of capital, insofar as the hegemony of modern art and the tradition of oil painting resided in and were firmly rooted in the West, especially Europe. In spite of the Soviet Union’s

---

55 Young art students sometimes used the term “thematic painting” (zhutihua), which stressed the socialist content, subject matter of paintings, instead of the official name of “socialist realism.”
efforts to “steal” this hegemony and reestablish the authority of proletarian and socialist art, the field of fine art was not easily changed.

Oil and easel painting, had a symbolic significance as a means of modernizing and Sovietizing Chinese art in the professional art world. Since the Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship, Alliance and Mutual Assistance in 1950, people in each country had obtained more opportunities to see arts from other socialist countries. In July 1950, the Conference of Art and Culture Workers included the first Pan-Chinese exhibition of plastic arts with a multilingual catalogue. This international exhibition, which displayed Chinese prints and other graphic arts, toured many cities in socialist countries, including Moscow and Leningrad in 1950, and then Berlin and Warsaw in 1951. Comparing China to other European countries, the exhibition catalogue noted that Chinese art displayed the distinctive colors of Asian oriental art, e.g., in its ink and brush paintings and woodcut prints. In the international arena, traditional media and somewhat conventional genres came to represent Chinese art, whereas oil painting and realist sculpture represented socialist countries in Europe.

---


58 The exhibition catalogue stresses “the richness of China’s ancient traditions and vernacular techniques of graphic art at the expense of those from Europe, e.g. oil painting and realist sculpture” in Baudin, 242-243.
In the international climate of the early years of Maoist China, the Chinese art community encountered more chances to see original and reproduced images of Russian and Soviet art. For instance, a large-scale exhibition of the Soviet Union’s economic and cultural achievements (sulian jingji ji wenhua jianshe chengjiu zhanlanhui) was held in October 1954 in the new Soviet Union Exhibition Hall. The show toured several cities including Shanghai, Hangzhou, Guangzhou, and Wuhan. The exhibition consisted of 280 pieces, including oil paintings, watercolors, sculptures, cartoons, prints, and graphic designs. Oil paintings by Boris Ioganson (1893-1973), i.e., *In an Old Ural Factory* (1937) [Figure 3], and Fedor Shurpin, i.e., *The Morning of Our Motherland* (1948) [Figure 4], attracted Chinese audiences at the exhibition.\(^{59}\) Not only art exhibitions and international fairs, but art journals and Soviet publications\(^ {60}\) vigilantly introduced Soviet socialist realist art and its theories. For instance, in 1952, the Chinese art journal *meishu zuotan* (art symposia) translated the editorial column of a Soviet art journal in its “Annual Summary” (*yinian de zongjie*). The article printed famous Soviet oil paintings, including Mikhail Khmelko’s *The Unity of Russian People* (1948) [Figure 5], whose compositional impact perhaps remains in Li Binhong’s *Nanchang Uprising* (1959)

\(^{59}\) Hung, 2007.

\(^{60}\) Lun sulian de zaoxing yishu (1955), sulian meishulun wenji (1958), sulian meishujia changzuo jingyantan (1956), sulikefu de changzuo fangfa (Dec. 1955) etc.
[Figure 6]. In November 1957, even during the Anti-Rightist Movement, sixty-three oil paintings by Russian and Soviet artists were displayed in Beijing in order to celebrate the fortieth anniversary of the October Revolution (1917). Among the forty-five Russian painters exhibited, the show included oil paintings by the Russian realists Ilya Repin [Figure 7] and Vasily Surikov [Figure 8], and also the Russian landscapers Isaac Levitan [Figure 9], Arkhip Kuindzhi [Figure 10], and Valentin Serov [Figure 11]. As part of the commemoration program, Chinese artists opened a symposium to discuss how to learn from the heritage of Russian-Soviet art.

To Chinese artists, socialist realism often referred to the broad range of realist oil paintings—realism in style, and oil on canvas in terms of the medium and material. This included oil paintings by the nineteenth-century Wanderers and by contemporary Soviet socialist realists like Konstantin Maksimov. What made it possible for the Chinese audience to see both Russian realists and Soviet socialist realists as part of the same historical continuity was the Soviet Union’s official view about the origin of socialist realism. In Soviet history, the genealogy of Soviet socialist realism was actually reconstructed and rewritten by the Association of Artists of Revolutionary Russia

---

61 Jiang Feng, art administrator for implementing the Sovietization of art schools, curricula, and oil painting, was purged during the Anti-Rightist Movement, which was initiated right after the One Hundred Flowers Campaign that ended in July of the same year.

62 According to Jin Yinghao in an interview with me, Maksimov was selected to teach Chinese students at the CAFA because of his portrait of a high-ranking Soviet bureaucrat displayed at a show in China.

63 The Soviet Union, like Maoist China, cherishes national heritage (the realist tradition of nineteenth-century Russia).
(AKhRR). Founded in 1922, the members of the AKhRR believed that they belonged to the last generation of the Wanderers (peredvizhniki).\textsuperscript{64} This self-positioning was a strategic one in the 1920s as a way to defeat the Russian avant-gardists and their abstract forms. The AKhRR appropriated the revolutionary image of the early Wanderers in the 1860s.\textsuperscript{65} In fact, the Wanderers, from the early 1890s to 1917, turned into “guardians of a new academism under the patronage of the Tsar that mirrors the conservative nationalism of the Russian empire and the ascendant bourgeois fueled by an ambiguous distrust of the West with its manifold quest for new experience and expression.”\textsuperscript{66} It was opportunistic for the AKhRR to associate the progressive image of the young Wanderers with their “Heroic Realism”\textsuperscript{67} in support of the Red Army in accordance with Lenin’s agenda. The president of the group, Pavel Radimov stated:

Artists in our society must depict accurately in painting and sculpture the events of the Revolution. They must portray its leaders and participants,

\textsuperscript{64} The members include Isaak Brodsky, A. Gerasimov, Sergei Gerasimov, Boris Loganson, Evgenii Katsman, Georgi Riazhsky, and Yuon.

\textsuperscript{65} The Wanderers were not Marxists (they may be social democrats) but their narodnost (people-ness) buttresses exhibited a kinship with socialist realism.


\textsuperscript{67} Heroic realism aims to portray revolutionary scenes with great accuracy, according to Rusnock.
and illustrate the role of the People – simple toilers – the workers and peasants.\textsuperscript{68}

His statements sound similar to the goal of future socialist realism. The last generation of the \textit{Wanderers} highlighted the intelligibility of realist paintings in keeping with Lenin’s well-known tenet: “art belongs to the people. With its deepest roots, it should penetrate into the very thick of the toiling masses. It should be understood by these masses and loved by them.”\textsuperscript{69} “The heroic construction of a new society and heroic builders” should be realistic, “with the simplicity and clarity of pictorial language;”\textsuperscript{70} they must not be abstract. In this way, the \textit{Wanderers}, AKhRR, and the socialist realists form a historical genealogy of Russian-Soviet realism.

As a consequence of this Soviet historiography, Soviet mass media, publications, and exhibitions historicized and displayed realist oil paintings in a certain chronological and exhibitionary order, which was designed to highlight the historical development of the Russian realist mode of representation and to designate the paintings of the \textit{Wanderers} as the prototypes of socialist realism. This framework affected the individual responses of Chinese people in local areas and their conceptions of Soviet realism. To


\textsuperscript{70} Rusnock, \textit{Russian Art and the West}, 89.
Chinese art students like Li Fuyi, the boundary between Russian realist paintings and their Soviet counterparts seemed meaningless. Li said that when he was a poor young art student, he sometimes went to bookstores to explore art books. One day at a bookstore, Li found a reproduced image of Ilya Repin’s *Ivan the Terrible and His Son Ivan* (1885) [Figure 12]. This was a very shocking moment for him because the painting vividly conveyed the horror of the lunatic king who had just killed his own son – in the king’s tears; the congested, super-thin blood vessels in his eyes; splattered blood, etc. Repin’s technical virtuosity, which made this tragic event even more tangible and theatrical, moved Li, leaving him speechless. Another episode involving the Chinese artist, Jin Shangyi, illustrates how the perceptions of individual artists about socialist realism were bound up with oil painting and its European tradition. In recalling his visit to the Soviet art show held in 1954, Jin remembered that it was his “first time to see the original European oil paintings.” Oil painting had become a special genre and medium that reminded Chinese painters of European oil paintings – and was perhaps the indirect experience of European masterpieces. The subjective experience of being exposed to Soviet paintings at bookstores or exhibitions was an artistic stimulus and inspiration. For Jin, the realist oil paintings did not so much symbolize the national identity of Soviet Russia, as did they implicate the more inclusive idea and imaginary

【71】I interviewed him in July 2012.

entity of Europe. It is difficult to monolithically define what socialist realism means to individual artists since the empirical definition of it can vary. However, at least in the professional art world, the notion of socialist realism was firmly tied up with realism in oil painting, whose origin was not specifically Soviet Russia, but more broadly Europe.

Chinese responses to the credo of Soviet socialist realism relied on China’s recognition of its own lack, i.e., its backwardness in socialist development compared to the Soviet Union. Implied in this perception were the deficiencies that Chinese party members, including artists and art critics, found in the current situation of China, a premature socialist country in the 1950s eager to emulate the Soviet system. The comparative view of political and economic development impinged on the Chinese art world, including the art schools. The welcoming address of the vice-president of the CAFA, Jiang Feng, for Konstantin Maksimov illustrates how the uneven modernization existing between two countries affected China’s diagnosis of its own system, including its art education. Jiang elaborated in 1955:

Comrade Maksimov has come to China to extend to us the opportunity to study directly and systematically the advanced artistic experience of the Soviet Union. We believe that Comrade Maksimov’s guidance will be a

---

73 This does not exclude the Soviet Union because it is half-European and half-Asian.
major and valuable contribution to our fine arts, educational undertakings and the training of our oil painting teachers.\textsuperscript{74}

Jiang’s statement implies that China needed the advanced experience of the Soviet Union in those areas – i.e., in fine art, the education system, and training in oil painting. This primarily indicates a “socialist” modernization, not because the goal of modernization does not differ from its capitalist counterpart, but because the model of modernization comes from a socialist country. In the domain of art, modernization often means professionalization through institutional reforms of the educational system, curriculum, and pedagogy. This orientation conflicts with popularization based on amateurism. In considering Max Weber’s view on rationalization, bureaucracy, and professionalism – the conditions for the development of capitalism and further modernity – what Jiang wanted to implement under the guidance of the Soviet Union was not totally divergent from the processes of capitalist development and modernity.\textsuperscript{75}

When it came to oil painting, it was not easy for the Soviet Union to compete with the Eurocentric master narrative of art history and the power of Europe’s cultural and symbolic capital; for instance, the power of the Italian Renaissance and Impressionism. The influx of dynamic Soviet capital had intensified since the Sino-

\textsuperscript{74} Re-quoted from Lü Peng’s \textit{Ershishiji Zhongguo Yishushi}, (Twentieth-Century Chinese Art History), (Beijing: Beijing Daxue Chubanshe, 2008), 413. Translation is mine.

\textsuperscript{75} See Max Weber, \textit{The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism}.
Soviet Alliance of 1950. The PRC was indebted to Soviet political, economic, and cultural capital in its consolidation of state power. Soviet political capital included the legacy of the October Revolution; Marxism-Leninism; Stalin’s invincible power, authority, and even notoriety; the Red Army; the party bureaucracy; and overall, the Soviet military and political systems. Soviet economic capital took the forms of economic and military aid, loans, advanced technology, science, agricultural tools and instruments, weaponry, transportation and communication systems, and labor transfers such as China’s outsourcing of Soviet engineers, scientists, railway builders, dam constructors, and technicians necessary for implementing the Soviet development model – all mobile and immobile forms of capital. Soviet cultural capital ranged from the whole package of revolutionary mass culture and mobilization, including propaganda posters, music, dances, and films, to the high level of fine arts such as socialist realist oil paintings. In spite of the enormous impact of Soviet capital on every sector of Chinese society, the field of fine art tended to conform to its own operational rules and to maintain its “purity.” The domain of fine art was inclined to detach itself from politics and the economy, even in so-called totalitarian countries where politics and economy were intertwined. Fine art sought to remain apolitical and to avoid profit-seeking, even when that was impossible, through the agency of the members of the field who were professional artists. They struggled to pursue creativity, originality, and individuality,
sometimes against the party line. In this, European hegemony did not easily lose its power.

The controversial debate on Impressionism exemplifies the persisting influence of European modern art and oil painting and their symbolic capital, i.e., their international prestige, reputation, and recognition. The hegemony of modern art was geographically bounded by Europe and the U.S.\textsuperscript{76} Against this backdrop, the survival of Impressionism in the socialist countries was a crucial symptom which revealed that Soviet capital, even if superior in politics and economy, did not completely overrule Europe in fine art. In the same vein, the political value of socialist realism was easily accepted because it was considered politically correct and therefore in conformity with Soviet official line; but in the Soviet Bloc, let alone in Western European countries like France, its artistic value was not.\textsuperscript{77} At the beginning of the Cold War, severe Soviet criticism about Impressionism returned and accused Impressionism of being formalist. In 1947, Aleksander Gerasimov, president of the USSR Union of Artists and winner of several Stalin Prizes, regularly criticized the alien influence of Impressionism and demanded that desirable depiction of Soviet life in Soviet art be based on the realism of

\textsuperscript{76}During the Soviet Anti-Pollution Campaign (1948-49), New York comes under attack on the grounds that the “heir to the worst, decadent artistic currents of Europe demonstrates the state of degeneration reached by the bourgeois art of American and European capitalists,” Baudin, 232-233.

\textsuperscript{77}Baudin, 232-233.
the *Wanderers*. Under the rubric of Zhdanovism (1947-53), Gerasimov’s standpoint generated anti-cosmopolitanism. He associated the vestiges of Impressionist styles with subjectivism and anti-humanism. However, an ambivalent Soviet attitude toward Impressionism returned following the reassessment of Impressionism during Khrushchev’s thaw. The somewhat liberal atmosphere allowed painters like Vasilii Nechitailo and Aleksandr Guliaev to apply Impressionist techniques – i.e., expressions of light – to their landscapes of the Soviet homelands of Central Asia and Siberia. The reopening of the Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts in November 1955, with a major exhibition of *French Art from the Fifteenth to the Twentieth Century* gathered from Soviet collections, also signaled the changed attitude towards western modernism, including Impressionism.

What Konstantin Maksimov brought to Beijing in 1955 was not the conservative view of Zhdanovism, which had attacked the degenerative, but the capitalist art of

---


80 “The collection is moved to the Hermitage in Leningrad in 1956. The official attitude toward impressionism remained ambivalent. While early impressionism began to be assimilated to the realist tradition, conservatives still drew a line at the later work, maintaining that it had declined into formalist preoccupations, subjectivism, willful distortion, and the cult of accidental, fleeting perceptions. Even relative liberals discriminated between French and Russian impressionism: if the Russian school had used plein air as a means of enriching painting’s realist potential, this had nothing in common with Monet’s regrettable transformation of the technique into an end in itself. Beyond the early impressionism, French art was still officially formalist and subjective. This applied to some of the most vital influences on early twentieth-century Russian art, such as Paul Cézanne” in Susan E. Reid, “Toward a New (Socialist) Realism,” *Russian Art and the West*, 219-220.
impressionism. During his tenure at the CAFA (1955-57), Maksimov encouraged his students to explore the diverse possibilities of Impressionist expression – the optical impacts of *plein-air*, vivid combinations of colors, and sketchy and free-floating brushstrokes. In those years, Maksimov’s oil paintings, especially his landscapes and portraits (including the portrait of Qi Baishi), were reminiscent of Impressionism. Compared to Soviet conservatives, Maksimov’s painting styles demonstrated that this Soviet teacher had already incorporated Impressionist techniques and color uses into his works. Perhaps reflecting the post-Stalinist Soviet art world, in his essay “Oil Painting and Its Teachings” (*youhua he youhua de jiaoxue*) published in *Meishu* (fine art) in January 1957, he emphasized individual experience in learning oil painting. Developing the Chistyakov (契斯佳柯夫) drawing pedagogy,\(^{81}\) in the article Maksimov suggested a systemic, step-by-step curricula to train professional artists, and offered practical advice for art educators and students. Maksimov proposed that there was no absolute way to learn art and that the individual artist should explore and experience more, as well as learning essential skills, in order to reach a certain level of artistic creation. His approach to oil painting practice and fine art in general concurred with the somewhat liberal atmosphere of a post-Stalinist Soviet Union that was in pursuit of a new realism.\(^{82}\)

---

81 China adopted the Chistyakov teaching system in 1955 as part of the sovietization of art education.

Socialist realism and its discourses became more regressive in their inter-state border crossing. 1950s China was similar to 1940s Soviet Union in the sense that the official and dominant attitude toward Impressionism was colored by a strong ideological attack. In China, there were heated debates on Impressionism from 1956 to 1957. As with the Soviet Union, China’s official attitude toward Impressionism was not merely positive and was often ambivalent, although the general consensus was that Chinese artists should eclectically utilize the good aspects of Impressionist styles. In particular, Jiang Feng’s essay, titled “Impressionism is not Realism” (yinxiangzhuyi bushi xianshi zhuyi), criticized Impressionism on the grounds that it was a bourgeois formalism, a synonym of art for art’s sake. He contended that “denying the content of art and its social responsibility, moving in the direction of art for art’s sake, these are the fundamental systems of bourgeois art’s tendency toward decline.”83 What is noteworthy in Jiang’s articulation is his deep-seated “decline-phobia” in pursuit of progress – the historical drive to seek out development and advance. The political unconsciousness of inscribing “backwardness” – which, in Harvey’s words, “arises out of unwillingness or an inability to ‘catch up’ with the dynamics of a Western-centered capitalism” – manifested itself in Jiang’s psyche, albeit in distorted fashion. Jiang, in his address for Maksimov, designated the Soviet Union as more advanced than China. He mentioned

---

that the Soviet master can help China to overcome its backwardness in three areas of art education via “socialist” modernization. As a result, his speech internalized an unequal Sino-Soviet relationship. Jiang’s anti-capitalist rhetoric ironically confirmed, in a tautological manner, the dominance of European art.

The symbolic capital of European art remained invincible so long as the continued debates on western art from the Renaissance to Impressionism signaled China’s inability to completely transcend the alleged supremacy of “capitalist-bourgeois” art. Western journals and publications that printed images of western art, such as Vincent Van Gogh’s oil paintings, were internally and unofficially circulated. The mobile forms of European cultural capital stimulated Chinese artists prior to the Reform and Open-up Policy in the late 1970s. The worldwide influence of European art and its symbolic capital retained its power during the Maoist regime. The cultural and symbolic capital of Europe and America became even stronger with the end of the intense socialist experiments in the Soviet Union and Maoist China, when the ambiguous notions of liberty and democratization reappeared and the once-taboo styles of western art became more available.  

In this light, Arif Dirlik mentions that “The end of Eurocentrism is an illusion because capitalist culture as it has taken shape has Eurocentrism built into the very structure of its narrative, which may explain why, even as Europe and the United States lost their domination of the capitalist world economy, Europe and American cultural values retain their domination. It is noteworthy that what makes something like the East Asian Confucian revival plausible is not its offer of alternative values to those of Euro-American origin, but
To commemorate the Sino-Soviet Alliance of 1950, artists in each country provided a visual record documenting the historic meeting between Stalin and Mao in Moscow in 1949. On the Soviet side, in 1950 Dimitri Nalbandian (1906-1993) created an oil painting titled *The Great Friendship* [Figure 13], which recalled AKhRR member Isaac Brodsky’s famous painting, *Lenin at the Smolny Institute* (1930) [Figure 14]. Nalbandian’s painting portrays a typical office scene where political leaders sit next to one another and are presumably having an important meeting. Following the conventional manner, Nalbandian paints the semi-private space of the premier’s office occupied by the two political leaders of socialism. Based on the body language and facial expressions of each person, Stalin seems to be solemnly listening to Mao, while the latter, holding a book, attempts to explain something. The official setting alludes to a hierarchical relationship because, in an office scene, it is usually the junior person who visits the senior’s office.

On the Chinese side, Feng Zhen and Li Qi collaborated on a painting to commemorate Mao’s first meeting, as the leader of the entire country, with Stalin after the PRC was established in 1949. Titled *Great Meeting* (*weida de huijian*) [Figure 15], the Chinese national painting depicts not only the leaders of the two socialist countries, but the

Chinese delegation and Soviet officials walking together in a hallway.\textsuperscript{85} Rather than concentrating on a private conversation between Stalin and Mao, the Chinese artists focus on inter-state diplomacy. Stalin, with his thumb up, is in the lead on their casual walk and Mao is walking a little behind Stalin. Chinese officials such as Zhou Enlai and other Soviet politburo members\textsuperscript{86} follow the two national leaders. In this way, the understated hierarchy is visually coded in both paintings.

After Stalin’s death in 1953, the Soviet propaganda journal, \textit{Soviet Union}, in a special posthumous issue for Stalin (April 1953), recycled Nalbandian’s oil painting for an article titled “Standard-Bearer of Peace.” The author used \textit{The Great Friendship} to glorify the historical achievements of the legendary leader, now dead, as a peacemaker. The author appropriated Nalbandian’s image for use as historical proof by adding the following comments below the reproduced image:

The friendly alliance between the Soviet Union and China is an example of international relations of an entirely new type. These relations are based on Lenin’s and Stalin’s principles of internationalism, on the principles of equal rights, close cooperation and mutual assistance, on a

\textsuperscript{85} Mao and the Chinese delegation visited Moscow from December 1949 to February 1950.

\textsuperscript{86} The Soviet officials were possibly Molotov, Lavrenti Beria, Kliment Voroshilov, Mikhail Kalinin, and Anastas Miloyan.
general desire to preserve peace and prevent imperialist aggression.

Painting by D. Nalband[i]an.\textsuperscript{87}

Considering what Mao actually received after the meeting with Stalin in 1949, it is hard to say that this was an entirely new type of international relation. Although Stalin promised, as compensation for his favor, $300 million in military aid to be divided over the following five years, in return he asked for major territorial concessions, i.e., for privileges similar to the conditions of the unequal treaties back in the nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{88} This case study has shown how socialist realist images invented a new currency for switching the political and economic values of the real world into the idealized narrative of socialism. The next section discusses the ways in which the images of the Soviet elder brothers (lao dage) sent to China in the 1950s shaped a new type of production relation at the worksites of China’s socialist construction. My visual analysis illustrates how the inter-state visual production of socialism recoded the dominance of capital in the imaginary.


\textsuperscript{88} According to Frank Dikötter, “when Mao met Stalin in December 1949, all Mao got was $300 million in military aid divided over five years. For this paltry sum Mao had to throw in major territorial concessions, privileges that harked back to the unequal treaties in the nineteenth century: Soviet control of Lushun (Port Arthur) and of the Chinese Eastern Railway in Manchuria was guaranteed until the mid-1950s. Rights to mineral deposits in Xinjiang, China’s westernmost province also had to be conceded. What Mao obtained in 1949 was a treaty providing for mutual protection in the event of aggression by Japan or its allies, in particular the United States” in Dikötter, 5.
The Soviet power of capital accumulation and circulation were paramount for China in facilitating its own development. As Zhou Enlai’s 1949 report stated, “scattered, individual agriculture and handicraft made up ninety percent of the total output of the nation’s economy and the modern economy accounted only for less than ten percent of China’s Gross National Product.” China seriously lacked the material base for industrialization. Soviet technology transfer and military and economic aids were indispensable for China’s development. In order to facilitate total Sovietization, a large-scale labor transfer from the Soviet Union to China also took place. Thousands of Soviet advisors, technicians, and specialists were sent to China after the Soviet Advisors’ Program was launched in 1953. China used the metaphor of “elder brother” (lao dage) to signify the Soviet Union and more generally as a designation for the dispatched Soviet workers. This appellation denoted the special relationship between the two countries, defined as a family bond. It was an expression of China’s respect for the Soviet Union as the first socialist country ahead of it. The metaphor however insinuated a hierarchy, an unequal inter-state relationship between the advanced Soviet Union and backward

---


90 “Chinese publishers translated large numbers of Soviet books and pamphlets and made them available to the public. Local authorities in even the most remote parts of the country screened Soviet films, put on cultural exhibitions, and arranged language courses. As a way of becoming a strong industrial country, government officials at all levels study the Soviet experience in economy, administration, and law” in Odd Arne Westab, Brothers in Arms: the Rise and Fall of the Sino-Soviet Alliance 1945-1963, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 17.
China; as well as an unequal inter-personal relationship between Stalin and Mao, who needed Stalin’s approval and authorization.⁹¹ The elder brother, especially in the Confucian form of patriarchy, has more responsibilities and enjoys more privileges. Mixing this metaphoric personification with anti-capitalist rhetoric, China emphasized the Soviet Union’s leading role in the international communist movement against “American imperialism.” This narrativization appeared to create a new type of international relationship distinguishable from capitalism and imperialism.

When the inter-state labor transfer occurred, it created a narrative structure with a distinctive production relation characterized by how people worked together under socialism. Soviet technicians, engineers, and scientists were depicted in the diverse domains of Chinese socialist construction. They become not only human vehicles for China’s industrialization and construction of infrastructure, but also the embodiment of socialist virtue. The following essay by Li Po reveals how China’s official view typically characterized the Soviet elder brothers through images of them as selfless Soviet experts.

Moreover, Soviet experts have nothing “to sell.” They represent no private interest and work for no personal profit. They can have no motive for using high-cost materials imported from abroad when local materials

---

⁹¹ “The CCP’s subsumption under the political direction of the CPSU and the teachings of Vladimir Lenin has begun since the founding of the Chinese Communist Party in 1921. Soviet control over the CCP was always tenuous, even during the 1920s when the party could operate legally and when both it and its rival, the GMD, received Soviet advisors” in Westad, 4.
will do for the job. They are trained in the most advanced techniques; but at the same time their outlook and history have given them the knack of getting the most out of older processes and equipment wherever this is necessary. Finally, Soviet experts have no reason to perpetuate their jobs. Their convictions, which in no way contradict their own interests, lead them to strive to train their Chinese colleagues thoroughly and quickly.  

Li projected the ideal image of “new men” upon the Soviet experts. The elder brothers were economically productive, selfless, modest, not profit-seeking, and philanthropic. In his essay, Li introduced his interviews with Chinese workers. According to Li, “all who have worked closely with the Soviet experts stressed their modesty, their absolute sense of equality with their Chinese coworkers and their concern for human beings.” Such a description of the social imaginary shows how Soviet and Chinese workers fit together. Li portrayed the production relations differently from those of their counterparts under capitalism, i.e., workers as sellers. The sellers of their own labor – producers of exchange value, surplus value, and capital – were caricatured as money driven, exploited, and indifferent to human concerns due to the competitive market economy. In contrast, the Soviet workers are described as virtuous people who make no distinction between private and public interests, and for whom there is no contradiction between

---


93 Ibid., 15.
the personal and national spheres. The Soviet workers’ commitment to internationalism transforms their economic activities, i.e., training Chinese workers to engage in noble-minded, voluntary participation for the common good. In the master narrative of China’s industrial development, the roles of the Soviet workers are articulated as a historical mission – the “virtual miracle” overcoming “the problem of rapidly changing an agricultural county into an industrial one” with “the quick healing of war wounds.”

This historical narrative replaces the social Darwinist perspective of the modern world with the teleological unfolding of collective spirit.

The socialist discourse of economic aid and partnership created a narrative of human nature under socialism in which mutual cooperation between ideal human beings is undertaken not for “selfish individual profit but for the benefit of whole population.” Because of forced volunteerism in both countries, people experienced socialist alienation. Soviet specialists in fact complained about “the bending of technical rules in Soviet-delivered factories, the steel campaign, the ‘grain production satellites,’ and excessive production quotas around 1958.” This kind of cacophony continued until

---

94 Ibid., 11.
95 Song Qingling, “Friendship of the People and Peace,” China Reconstructs, (January-February), 1954, 2. Since modernity is a narrative category that unfolds toward the telos of the New, new technology and science as Jameson puts it, the narrativization of social and production relations converges into the narrative of socialist modernity.
the withdrawal of almost 1,400 Soviet experts in 1960. From the perspective of the Soviet Union, China’s economic growth was being substituted for Soviet growth because “Chinese trade means a forced transfer of [capital], i.e., resources from growth to consumption to the extent that they are not able to relocate their [capital].” In their interlocking economic structures, both Soviet and Chinese workers certainly underwent the universal process of alienation when capital had to be relocated by the party-state. Immediate producers lost control over the conditions for the realization of their labor, as well as the means of production. Inter-state labor outsourcing was undertaken in order to increase agricultural and industrial production as well as labor efficiency. The inter-state exchange and cooperation conformed to the law of capital and its accumulation and circulation; however, the narrative of socialism disguised this fact through the use of the rhetoric of family and friendship.

The Soviet elder brothers (sulian lao dage) also appeared in a variety of forms of material visual culture, including posters, stamps, and photographs. The posters Study the Advanced Experience of the Soviet Union to Build up Our Nation (1953) [Figure 16] and Study the Soviet Union’s Advanced Production Experience for Our Country’s Industrialization (1953) [Figure 17] visualized the inter-state and racial division of labor as putting the

---

97 Lüthi, 2008.

project of socialism into action on an international level. Although Soviet Communist Party membership was an important qualification for the Soviet advisors sent to China, visual images of Soviet elder brothers did not so much convey their political status, as did they depict the elder brothers as heroic missionaries of Soviet-type socialism. The production relations between Soviet experts and Chinese coworkers were visually defined by a mentor-pupil relationship. The posters portray Soviet specialists as teaching and guiding Chinese apprentices in the industrial worksites of China. The advanced Soviet Union is personified through the visual representation of the Soviet expert, his bodily movements, facial expressions, and clothing. In Ding Hao’s poster, the Russian advisor looks very modern and westernized as he shows a blueprint to the Chinese younger brothers. He is depicted as a western-looking gentleman wearing a suit with a white shirt and a necktie. The dress code of the Soviet expert is in sharp contrast with that of the Chinese pupils who are wearing Mao suits, caps, and badges. A tightened towel around a worker’s neck, a pen in a pocket, and their serious looks while listening to the Soviet mentor’s explanations disclose their willingness to follow the advice of the elder brother. Whereas the Soviet specialist is politically neutral or understated, with no signs of his party membership, the Chinese workers highlight their political engagement in Mao Zedong Thought and their loyalty to the party. The western-looking Russian has a well-built body and a neat suit, symbolizing masculinity, professionalism, and rationality, as well as the modern. This visual representation of the
Soviet worker differs from the popular and iconic image of the working class, i.e., the proletariat. Instead, it emphasizes the economic status of the Soviet Union as an advanced industrialized country.

While Ding Hao’s *Study the Advanced Experience of the Soviet Union to Build Up Our Nation* dissolves the uneven development between the two socialist countries into the behavioral codes of telling and listening, Li Zongjin’s poster *Study the Soviet Union’s Advanced Production Experience for Our Country’s Industrialization* spatializes it. The Soviet mentor is pinpointing something hidden from the perspective of the viewer. The Chinese apprentice is looking upward to see what the Soviet elder brother is pointing out. In this way, the Soviet and Chinese workers gaze far off into the distance, metaphorically looking at the future direction of China’s industrialization, as if the Soviet Union is “the living example of what the future holds for the Chinese people.”

The backdrop, which the two socialist workers are standing against, depicts the site of Tianjin’s industrialization. Similar to the Soviet specialist in Ding Hao’s poster, the Soviet expert is wearing a suit and a white shirt while the Chinese “amateur” worker is dressed in a Mao suit, a cap, and a badge. The difference between two posters is in their distinctive ways of representing how China follows the Soviet model – the former visualizes the voice through telling and listening, while the latter visualizes space through directing and looking.

---

The Soviet elder brothers sometimes become a symbol of advanced science and technology as an emblem of socialist modernity. The anti-capitalist and pro-modernity stance of Soviet and Chinese socialism is betrayed in the pictorial characterization of the Soviet elder brothers preaching the Soviet way of socialist development in China’s factories, laboratories, and industrial construction sites. Whereas the Soviet Union’s self-image in this inter-state relation is that of an advanced industrialized country, China is a backward country that needs Soviet support. The economic sectors where the Soviet elder brothers are placed (Soviet capital is centralized) are in areas where China is desperately demanding Soviet capital for its own industrialization, modernization, and growth of the national economy. This international division of labor and the ensuing mode of exchange (i.e., the Soviet Union’s technology, science, and engineering vs. China’s agriculture, handicrafts, and light industry) are recoded in socialist realist posters. Influenced by the aesthetics of socialist realism, the verbal and visual narrativization transposes the flow of capital and its spatial fixations within the diverse venues of China’s economy into a spectacle of brotherly cooperation between the two socialist countries.

The visual representation of the Soviet elder brothers is consistent with the narrativization of them in journalism, where text and image interact. Both posters and photographs of the Soviet elder brothers shed light on the Chinese people “attentively listening to all of [what the Soviet experts say] specially chosen to help China in its
Generally speaking, the poster images stress a more white-collar image of dressed-up elder brothers, in contrast to photographs, in part because of dress codes. For example, in the early 1950s, *China Reconstructs* captured photographs of Soviet experts working at actual sites in Chinese industries. These snapshots portray more realistic and casual-looking Soviet laborers, although the production relation defined by the “mentor and apprentice” or the “supervisor and student” relationship is just as dominant [Figure 18]. A photograph from 1955 in *China Reconstructs* [Figure 19] introduces Soviet engineer G. Bendukidze explaining the operation of an up-to-date boring machine to a group of Chinese visitors at the Soviet Exhibition in 1954. The reporter echoes the CCP’s official view of Sino-Soviet cooperation based on special fraternity. The article is composed of interviews and notes of Chinese engineers and peasants from the visitors’ book. Based on visitors’ comments, the staff reporter creates a signifying chain by associating several words – such as “collectivization,” “socialism,” “fairyland,” and “our tomorrow” – to conclude the article. This chain of signifiers is intended to construct the people’s unconsciousness of socialism, as structured like a language in a Lacanian sense. In this way, the idea of

---

100 Ibid.

101 Because the event happened in the exhibition hall, the Soviet engineers showed up in suits. The exhibition was opened on October 2, 1954 and was composed of three main pavilions devoted to agriculture, industry, and culture. According to the reporter, sixty Soviet factories and enterprises made and sent the machinery on display, including automatic looms, cotton-pickers, tractors, harvesters, motor vehicles, and mining machinery, as well as fine precision instruments – “all of it specially chosen to help China in [its] present stage of industrialization,” “Window to the Future,” *China Reconstructs*, (January, 1955): 23.
socialism and the narrative structure render as interchangeable, to ordinary people, popular perceptions about socialism and future affluence, well-being, and comfort.

**Maoist Myth and Paradox of National Allegory**

Since the 1960s, the Soviet elder brothers have been replaced by the peoples of the Third World. Such substitutes are symptomatic of the underlying dynamics of the global economy and of politics in the post-colonial world, once the Third World became a crucial player in the more complex global networks that appeared during the Cold War after the Sino-Soviet split in 1960. The new international relations formation demystified the utopian projection of Sino-Soviet brotherhood and friendship after Mao officially denounced Soviet revisionism under Khrushchev. Yet, in the post-colonial world the Maoist myth of proletarian internationalism became more intricately interwoven with transnational globalization. The underlying politico-economic logic of international relations as seeking self-interest and expanding national power still remained muted on the screen of socialist reality. In the continuing cycle of international capital transfer from the developed to underdeveloped countries, and vice versa, the Third World came to occupy an important symbolic position in the Maoist world order. The Maoist cognitive mapping relocated the Third World, the periphery of the world, to the center of international revolution. Maoist images, on one hand, depicted the people from the Third World as fighting against the First World by designating the First World
as the source of all evil, i.e., capitalist imperialism. China, on the other hand, portrayed itself as de-capitalist, as becoming a communist utopia. Under these historical circumstances the visual and verbal representations of Third World peoples became allegorical because of, in Jameson’s words, “the increasing gap between the existential data of everyday life within a given nation-state and the structural tendency of monopoly capital to develop on a worldwide, essentially transnational scale.”¹⁰² The inter-personal relationship between the Soviet elder brothers and the Chinese younger brothers was transposed, using the same allegorical structure of socialist modernization and proletarian internationalism, to one between Chinese elder brothers and African younger brothers. So when China’s mutated capitalism crossed national borders, it created a new form of socialist and Maoist myth that dislocated China out of the orbit of capitalism. It dispersed, as did the Soviet Union, China’s capital and labor-intensive model of development to other post-colonial countries. The visual images of Third World peoples became a national allegory through which China could aim to bridge empirical data given within the boundary of the nation-state (i.e., socialism as a strategy for modernization) and the global movement of capitalism. By visualizing the common enemy (the First World and the things it represented, such as capitalism and imperialism), Maoist images attempted to understand how the national conditions of each Third World country were connected to the imperialist invasion of global

capitalism into the domain of post-colonial countries. However, this type of national allegory is paradoxical, in that the images are never capable of representing the real conditions of the existence of Third World peoples – i.e., how the state becomes a key agent of exploitation and how socialism is compliant with expanding globalization. In this sense, the historical analyses of Maoist images demonstrate a paradox of the Maoist world vision.

**Mao’s Third World and Sino-Centrism**

After the Sino-Soviet split of 1960, the Soviet elder brothers disappeared from the terrain of China’s socialist construction. Instead, the egalitarian spirit of the socialist world economy that was being promoted was transposed into a new sphere of the Third World. By displacing the Soviet Union, Maoist China positioned itself as the new leader of proletarian internationalism. Mao’s Third Worldism was invented as a means of replacing the hegemony of the Soviet Union and establishing China’s authority and leadership in the post-colonial world. The most effective strategy for constructing the imagined solidarity of the Third World was to emphasize the shared experience and history of colonialism, in spite of the dissimilar national conditions of individual countries. In this light, L.S. Stavrianos defines the Third World as follows:

“Communality of conditions” obviously cannot be a distinguishing factor for a Third World that includes resource-rich Brazil as well as resource-
poor Haiti, and affluent Kuwait as well as debt-ridden Turkey. Nor is “communality of purpose” a distinguishing feature of an agglomeration that includes capitalist Mexico as well as socialist North Korea, and pro-Western Egypt as well as anti-Western Cuba. The Third World concept is indeed a “myth,” but only when it is based on static economic and ideological criteria. Which brings us back to the basic point that the nature and significance of the Third World can be understood only if it is viewed as a set of unequal relationships. More specifically, the Third World may be defined as comprising those countries or regions that are economically dependent upon, and subordinate to the developed First World.  

Indeed, it is a very complicated matter to define the Third World. Nevertheless, what is obvious is that the Third World is an actual and also an imaginary entity whose national economy depends upon and is subsumed by the First World. As Mark T. Berger put it, general Third Worldism “emerges out of the activities and ideas of anti-colonial nationalists and their effort to mesh highly romanticized interpretations of pre-colonial traditions and cultures with the utopianism embodied by Marxism and socialism specially, and ‘western’ visions of modernization and development more generally.”  

---

Maoist images, however, appropriated the geopolitical and economic conditions of Third World countries so that China could be their leader. These images reflected Mao’s world order, which stemmed from “the twin foundations of China’s foreign policy of uniting the Third World against the U.S. and the Soviet Union (two superpowers) and organizing the peoples of Africa, Asia and Latin America to form a new international order.”

The historical experience of former colonies produced the communality of the Third World in Chinese visual and material culture. Beginning in the late 1950s, the worldwide national liberation movement with its claims of political and economic sovereignty for the colonized becomes its main theme. In particular, Maoist posters juxtaposed anti-colonial and anti-imperialist slogans with pictorial images of peoples from Asia, Africa, and Latin America fighting against the invisible enemy. For instance, the poster Long Live Marxism, Leninism and Maoism (1970) [Figure 20] depicts a group of Third World peoples holding rifles up high against a big red sun. The sun, a symbol of Mao during the Cultural Revolutionary years, implies their strong revolutionary fever against First World imperialism. A Chinese worker in a white shirt and a pair of blue


overalls occupies the center in the revolutionary militia at the front. The Chinese worker is surrounded by other revolutionaries of the Third World. The white shirt and blue overalls of the Han-Chinese laborer have a more universal connotation as well; they represent the proletarian working class, which is not ethnically defined. Instead, the Chinese worker’s class identity is highlighted. In contrast, the peoples of the Third World wear their ethnic costumes; this emphasizes their ethnic, racial, or national identities. They play a supporting role in constituting the China-centered Maoist world. Distinctive dress codes betray ethnic and racial hierarchies since so-called propaganda posters generally put traditional costumes on non-Han ethnic minorities (see the people in the background). The visual signs aim not so much to discriminate against minorities as to keep them differentiated. Rather than seeing them as equal to the Han majority, the visual idioms operate to create differentiation – identifying ethnic minorities only in relation to the Han. The centrality of the Han nation remains intact, while the rosy egalitarian spirit is hardly dampened. Likewise, the images of peoples from the Third World inevitably apply racial, ethnic, and nationality factors to the Maoist mental map in order to retain the concept of the Third World. Foreigners are present in order to confirm China’s centrality in the imaginary world.

Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri in *Empire* have given me insight into how race is defined in the contemporary world.
Sino-centrism can be similarly detected in a variety of visual materials ranging from oil paintings to photographs. Peoples from the Third World usually appear to be visitors to China and worshipers of Mao. Wu Biduan’s and Jin Shangyi’s 1961 oil painting, *Chairman Mao Standing with People of Asia, Africa and Latin America* [Figure 21], shows Chairman Mao surrounded by a group of foreigners representing each Third World country. Their representativeness is highlighted by the ethnic and racial costumes of the foreign visitors. Mao holding hands with a black African becomes the major event of this scene. Everybody pays attention to Chairman Mao and his African guest. The photograph *Chairman Mao and His Friends* [Figure 22] also pictures Mao becoming a popular icon. Happy Mao, surrounded by a crowd of smiling foreigners, occupies the central position while the entire scene is filled with a multitude of foreigners. In contrast to the poster images, the people in the photograph are not wearing traditional outfits that indicate their racial and ethnic origins – a more realistic depiction. This photograph was reprinted in *China Reconstructs* in January 1962 with the comment that “we have friends all over the world: Chairman Mao with guests from Asia, Africa and Latin America.”107 Maoist images depict not so much Chinese people who serve foreigners, but foreigners who serve Mao and China.108

107 Supplement to *China Reconstructs*, January 1962, unpaged.

108 Philip Snow is right about this matter. He mentions that “the hero selected by Mao to inspire his followers to make a greater contribution to humanity should have been not a Chinese who served
When these two images were produced, China was undergoing the Great Famine (sannian dajihuang, 1958-62) during which forty-five million of the Chinese populace died of hunger.\textsuperscript{109} In spite of the severe shortage of grain, China continued to be very generous to its Third World friends. For instance, rice bought from Burma was sent directly to Ceylon to meet China’s outstanding commitments; and two cargoes of wheat, about 60,000 tons, were shipped as a gift directly to Tirana from Canadian ports. Other countries, aside from Albania, received rice for free at the height of the famine, including Guinea who received 10,000 tons in 1961.\textsuperscript{110} As Robert A. Scalapino characterizes it, the Sino-Soviet Cold War was injected into Africa and other Third World countries. China continued to ship imported grain and crops to its alliances and started “dumping goods in Africa as if they are all surplus to internal demand. The items include bicycles, sewing machines, thermos flasks, canned pork, fountains pens and etc. All sorts of goods are sold below cost to demonstrate that China is ahead of the Soviet Union in the race for true communism.”\textsuperscript{111} The Soviet Union and China never matched each other in real power and global influence, although Beijing claimed

\textsuperscript{109} Dikötter, 2011.

\textsuperscript{110} Dikötter, 112-113.

\textsuperscript{111} Ibid., 79.
equality with Moscow in 1956-57 [Figure 23].“In truth, Khrushchev is heading a superpower with increasing commitments around the world, while Mao is running a regional power that is progressively getting poorer and more isolated as a result of his own blunder.” Nevertheless, Maoist images visualized an imagined community where unequal power relations among nation-states were personified in the metaphors of family and friendship, replacing the social Darwinist and competitive law of the jungle. In this light, the poster *Friends from Afar are Coming to Visit* (1961) [Figure 24] reveals China’s concerted effort to present itself as both socialist and internationalist to the rest of the world. China’s national identity comes from its self-identification as an advanced socialist country. In the poster, Chinese people harmoniously walk together with multi-national groups of people who come to China, far from their countries. Their peaceful coexistence and foreigners’ willingness to visit and learn from China illustrates China’s wishful thinking about being the leader of the non-aligned countries.

**Black Africa and the Invisible Enemy**

In China’s productions of visual and material culture, black Africans were frequently represented. This was intended to ignite Africa’s strong antagonism toward

---

112 China cannot afford to compete with Western or Soviet-bloc countries as a supplier of economic aid, so China cannot do much for the relatively more developed states and concentrates on the poorest in Africa. Robert A. Scalapino, *On the Trail of Chou En-Lain in Africa*, 1964, v-vi.

its former colonizers, including the slave traders. The collective experience of being colonized was interpreted and historicized within the framework of the nation-states. Therefore, a metonymic relation that linked a single black African to Africa as a whole was often established in Maoist images. The metonymic associations connecting a black African to a list of words, including black Africa, Africa and the Third World, and the oppressed in general, dominated the visual and verbal texts of Maoist mass culture. Here, one individual represents the whole nation-state to which he or she belongs. Slogans on posters and the titles of visual materials helped the viewers to understand the intended message of this metonymic relation. Furthermore, Maoist visual culture and political discourse complemented each other, and reinforced one another under the totalizing influence of Maoism. In this imagined social reality, China leads to Africa’s enlightenment.

Among the many revolutionary iconographies, the self-empowering images of black Africa became a popular subject matter. *Break the Chains of Colonialism* (1961) [Figure 25] exemplifies how the “savageness” of male black Africans was associated with their militant and heroic revolutionary fever. This Maoist image portrays an enraged and awakening black African. The giant African figure is posed as if he has just broken the handcuffs that had fettered his masculine black body and his hands. While the yellow robe exaggerates the black skin, the enormous physical energy needed to break the iron manacles implies the compressed revolutionary power of the colonized.
The barbarian impulse is revolutionized and sublimated to the noble spirit of anti-imperialist resistance. This pictorial representation is meant to intensify Third World antagonism toward the First World and its dominance on the globe. The representation aims to visually construct the singular universality of the colonized. The symbolic body language – breaking the chains to embody strong resistance against the invisible oppressors – illustrates China’s strategy for utilizing memory politics that invokes the colonial past. The epic history of national liberation encapsulates the main narrative structure that binds both Africa and China into the same Third World category.

In Maoism, race, a component of identity politics, played a pivotal role in transferring the antagonism between classes to an antagonism between countries, e.g., the Third World vs. the First World, and in transposing the contradictions of capital within socialism into contradictions between socialism and capitalism. In this framework, Mao referred to “white imperialism” – imperialism led by the white Anglo-Saxon race. Intense black skin color was often used to describe the African people as a

---

114 According to the report by Robert A. Scalapino, the Soviet Union and China have different strategies for appealing to African states such as Mali. “Whereas the Soviet Union promotes itself as an advanced industrial country with improved agricultural implements and scientific machines in Mali, China boldly highlights the attacks upon the West which includes before and after pictures, before China is liberated and after, focusing on China’s elimination of imperialism. The two exhibitions, held during and after Zhou Enlai’s visit to Mali in 1964, show the different approaches of two socialist countries in winning friends and influence people in Africa. During the propaganda exhibition, China showcases materials on the Sino-Soviet dispute, and devotes a section to Comrade Stalin with a large picture of Stalin right in the center of the huge exhibition space” in Robert A. Scalapino, 11-12. Here Stalin, whose image as the unquestioned leader is destroyed in the Soviet Union, is important for legitimizing China’s foreign policies on Africa. In this historical framework, it is not Khrushchev, but Mao himself who follows Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Stalin to establish ideological legitimacy.
whole. Blackness formed a striking contrast to the whiteness of First World imperialism. This color use was intended to generate emotional and psychological antagonism. The artificial unity of representing Africa as racially black resulted in the construction of the pseudo-totality of the African continent, based on a romantic notion of Pan-Africanism that typically beautified the pre-colonial state.

The ritualistic self-victimization and self-empowerment of African peoples was used in a wide range of Mao’s revolutionary rhetoric and repertoires for envisioning nationalist socialism. Black Africans became depersonalized, allegorical figures that represented the situational consciousness of subaltern subjects under colonial oppression, and later under an imperialist global market economy. Collective identity appeared to be more crucial than the singularity of the self. Individual Africans were usually characterized as the victims of colonialism who had turned into revolutionary activists resisting against colonial rule. The sculpture *Arise!* (circa. 1965) [Figure 26] displays how China, the third party, defined the national culture of Africa as a form of self-empowerment. Rather than vicariously voicing African anti-colonial resistance, the sculpture resulted from China’s extension of its own national culture onto a third party, as China imposed its own national culture onto the Third World, as well as onto Africa. The popular image of a “noble savage” overlaps within this three-dimensional plastic art. The masculinity of the black African, with his O-shaped mouth, visualizes China’s desire for revolution through the voice of the nation-less black man. The anonymous
man was the embodiment of China’s discourse of national humiliation, which, according to William Callahan, was “by no means for a passive self-victimization; [it] rather involves an active notion of history and recovery as a modular form of Chinese nationalism.” 115

Maoist images embodied the Chinese conceptions of nationalism and internationalism. China’s being a victim of colonialism became a starting point for its internationalism, insofar as Mao’s idea linked China’s national liberation to the Marxist-Leninist internationalism that desired to reach out to the Third World. Mao’s idea of nationalism, as Arif Dirlik puts it, “is fashioned by Marxism and its tasks are defined by revolutionary considerations of class and class consciousness.”116 In other words, Mao injected class consciousness into national and international consciousness. He developed the idea of seeing world history as an unfolding of the class struggle between two opposing groups i.e., the First World and the Third World. In line with this, such Maoist black African artworks as Break the Chains of Colonialism, Arise! and African Mother (feizhou muqing) [Figure 27] reflect Mao’s account of, in Dirlik’s words, “a Third World revolutionary consciousness seeking to remake itself into an autonomous subject of this new world against the imminent threat of degradation into its marginalized object.”117


116 Arif Dirlik, Marxism in the Chinese Revolution, 130.
Third World revolutionary arts arose from Maoist memory politics and historicism. Through the lens of China’s nationalism or patriotism, the Maoist worldview divided the world into bourgeois and proletariat countries and positioned China as the leader of the international and emancipatory class struggles between the two groups of nation-states.

In the same vein as Mao’s Third Worldism, Long Xuli’s sculpture *African Mother* (1961) stresses a female militarism. Contrasting the masculine black Africans breaking, shouting, and attacking back, the mother soldier is portrayed as a defender. The young African woman is holding a rifle in her left hand and a baby on her back. The half-kneeling African mother, who is also guerrilla fighting for the country’s independence and sovereignty, turns around to fondle her baby’s little hands and press her cheek against her baby’s during a break in the fighting. While she is featured as a militant, her body language reveals the maternal love of the woman soldier. This artistic device softens the military aggressiveness that materializes in the stereotypical depiction of African men as heroic “noble savages.” The popular interpretation of this sculpture is that *African Mother* is meant to tell an intergenerational story about African revolution.

\[\text{117 Ibid., 75. In addition to the lived experience of colonial subjects, this common history constitutes the discourse of China’s nationalism in which the CCP saved China from its national humiliation. Here Mao’s nationalism is inseparable from his ambitious vision of internationalism as outlined in his 1938 essay, “Internationalism and Patriotism.” The socialist content of Maoist images is, in fact, patriotism.} \]
Growing up in the struggle, the baby on her shoulder symbolizes the future generation on which the success of African revolution depends. The uniqueness of Long’s sculpture, however, lies in the fact that it naturalizes African revolution, which, just like maternal love, is to be considered natural. If maternal love is attributable to a sort of propaganda of patriarchy that imposes men’s bio-politics upon women, it is a social product, not a pre-given, innate human condition exclusively applicable to women. Yet the sculpture of African Mother naturalizes both maternal love and African revolution together insofar as material love is the essential motive and simultaneously the historical drive for continuing Africa’s revolutionary war against the oppressors.

Maoist images apropos of Africa’s self-empowerment failed China’s effort to act on behalf of African states, most of which were either pro-western or pro-Soviet. Chinese Third World images were based on Maoist conceit of a self-appointed liberator, and ignorance of the fact that “the Maoist position [was] a minority view: the mainstream parties siding with China come from smaller nations such as Albania, Burma, Thailand and Indonesia.”118 In the early 1960s, the African continent was composed of numerous states that were largely in chaos and disorder due to conflicts among diverse races, different religions, and complex foreign policies in the west, the Soviet Union, and China. In western Africa, which was already independent and had

established its own governments, Soviet and Chinese interventions, let alone the
disputes between two, were not always welcomed. Nevertheless, posters like Chairman
Mao is the Great Liberator of the World Revolutionary People [Figure 28] pictured black
Africans as passionate practitioners of the Mao cult. In these images, they are reading
Mao’s books and living by Mao’s quotations. Third World peoples, especially black
Africans in China’s revolutionary arts, are empowered by the Chinese who wear the
mask of the African. The political leaders of their own countries do not appear in
Chinese posters that championed sovereignty for countries in the Third World. Instead
Mao is omnipresent in cultural forms – i.e., as popular icons such as red books and
badges, or as a symbol of red sun. Otherwise, Mao’s face or whole body is present as a
charismatic leader ready to awaken Africa.

The invisibility of the enemy may contain multiple meanings. The enemy usually
manifests itself as an abstract image so that the spectators are allowed to guess at the
common enemy via the accompanying slogans printed on the posters; for instance,
colonialism is the enemy in the poster titled Break the Chain of Colonialism. Otherwise, the

119 Scalapino, 1964.

120 The Maoist and Cultural Revolutionary posters were available in local stores in Tanzania and Zambia
during the Railway construction as well as American cities like San Francisco and Latin America including
Colombia. There the visual images of the Mao Cult invoked shared heroic and revolutionary imageries amid
student demonstrations or political agitations.

121 The visual representation of Mao’s aura reaches a wide range of the masses both inside and outside of
China during the Cultural Revolution, including Japan, Colombia, United States, Vietnam, Zambia, and
Tanzania. However, the overall impact of Mao’s agenda for Third World enlightenment, albeit strong in
some local areas, remains questionable.
viewers are left with no understanding of why black Africans are so enraged. The political discourse of Mao’s Third Worldism targeted a range of abstract concepts such as colonialism, American imperialism, the First World, and the revisionist Soviet Union as a First World imperialist country. The antagonism towards the general category of capitalists and capitalism also shaped the anti-colonial and anti-imperialist discourse of China’s socialism, communism, and Maoism. Individuals who appear in Maoist images fight against such abstract, intangible, and often undefinable enemies. This mechanism of cultural production took part in channeling social antagonism within China in another direction – the invisible enemies of ideological conflation. The moral economy enabled China to locate the source of its internal social, political, and economic problems outside China. The origin of all antagonisms – such as alienation, exploitation, and commodification – came from capitalists and capitalism. In order for China to be the savior of Third World peoples, China had to be represented as being liberated from the contradictions of capital and capitalism. Maoist images imprinted this idea upon viewers. The collective patriotic and moral sentiment was intended to charge the allegorical structure of Maoist Third World images, where individuals reincarnated the totality of Chinese society and the Third World, and were thus destined to fight against national enemies. Here, Maoist images became a national allegory for showing how Third World peoples’ everyday lives were connected with the capitalists of the West in the past and present.
If the individual represents the whole country in the narrative structure of national allegory, a paradox arises. Rather than “bridging the growing gap between the existential data of everyday life within a given nation-state and the structural tendency of monopoly capital on the transnational scale,”\textsuperscript{122} this specific type of national allegory, especially a Maoist one, functioned to dislocate China outside the influence of capital and global capitalism. The socialist state controlled the dominant mode of representation in such a way that people could perceive socialism as a reality. Under the intervention of the party-state, China’s socialist realism suggested a specific way of connecting the individual lives of the people with the external world of capitalism. So most socialist realist image was a national allegory in a way. Yet such a mental map excluded China from the structural tendency of monopoly capital. Therefore, viewers could not see the domesticated and mutated capitalism that was appearing in a new constellation of social and political forms on the terrain of the Chinese nation-state. Once Maoist images manipulatively associate the Chinese people’s lives with global capitalism, this ultimately prevented them from grasping the capitalistic nature of socialism conforming to the rule of capital. They experienced the violence, but did not have a legible means for expressing it, as the nation-state itself became a key agent of exploitation. Instead, the populace imagined itself in a pseudo-totality of socialism – the non-capitalist zone. The

\textsuperscript{122} Hardt and Weeks, 313.
paradox of the national allegory emerges when the people are forced to see capitalism as an alien phenomenon of another universe.

Leaving aside the old meanings of the Maoist allegorical images that were often read as the signs of socialism in the past, today the signs and symbols of Maoist images are read with a new set of meanings. The different temporalities, the past of the Maoist era and the Now, stimulate the allegorical spirit and consciousness, which are, in Jameson’s words, “profoundly discontinuous, a matter of breaks and heterogeneities, of the multiple polysemia of the dream rather than the homogeneous representation of the symbol.” This spirit and consciousness allow us to rethink the meanings of the socialist realist national allegory. This raises a critical question about how capitalism represents itself in history.

**Chinese Capital and Africa**

Chinese socialist realism was a vehicle for accelerating China’s modernization through a non-capitalist path. Mao as early as 1940 proclaimed that, “we must never establish a capitalist society of the European-American type.” China’s search for an alternative to the western democratic-capitalist model of development was the country’s


underlying motive in imitating the Soviet Union. In following the Soviet model, it inevitably internalized the Soviet-centered economic hierarchy. In the 1960s, however, Maoist China tried to change this Soviet-centered mentality by reinforcing a national policy of self-reliance and inventing a labor-intensive development model. In order to compensate for the lack of capital, China attempted to utilize human capital, the labor power of the huge Chinese population.

The Chinese development model was considered suitable for underdeveloped countries in Africa that were suffering from a shortage of capital. In 1964, China outlined the Eight Principles of China’s Economic Aid for managing Chinese capital abroad. The distinctive principles proposed a new approach to development that was socialist. These principles promised “mutual equality and benefits, respect for the sovereignty of the recipient countries, interest-free or low-interest loans, the road of self-reliance and independent economic development, quick results for the recipient country’s fast increase in income and capital-accumulation, China’s support of best-quality equipment and materials, assistance for the personnel of the recipient country to master techniques, and Chinese workers’ same standard of living as the experts of the recipient countries.”125 The mode of exchange between China and such African states as Zambia

and Tanzania is noteworthy in that China created a distinctive manner of circulating and accumulating capital on a transnational scale. The inter-state economic structure was based on China’s labor and technology transfers to Africa and a commodity-credit agreement that financed local costs – including worker wages, housing, foodstuffs, medical care, and local building materials – through sales of imported Chinese commodities at the local stores.\textsuperscript{126} The ways in which the Chinese model made use of the plentiful workforce led to a labor-intensive development model by which people worked in a disciplined regime according to hourly shifts in concentrated settlements.

China’s new approach to development was portrayed in Maoist visual images. The poster \textit{Revolutionary Friendship is as Deep as the Sea} (1975) [Figure 29] illustrates a group of African visitors taking pictures with Chinese friends in Dazhai, a production brigade in Shanxi province. Dazhai became a national model of China’s rural development and a pacesetting site for self-reliance after the remote commune recovered without the external state support and aid from the natural disaster of severe flooding in

\textsuperscript{126} In order to resolve pressure on China’s foreign currency reserves, the Chinese develop a way of covering the local costs of the TAZARA project. Through this arrangement, Chinese goods worth the full value of the portion of the commodity loan are imported into Tanzania and Zambia and the proceeds from their sale are used to pay for the local expenses. This requires a complex set of arrangements involving Chinese commodity traders, national banks in China, Zambia and Tanzania, and the Tanzania Zambia Railway Authority. Each of the two African partners would be committed to consuming around 8.5 million pounds of Chinese goods annually for a period of five years. By providing commodities that would work be sold through African government cooperatives, the commodity loan would ease the pressure on China’s own limited foreign exchange supply.” Jamie Monson, \textit{Africa’s Freedom Railway: How a Chinese Development Project Changed Lives and Livelihood in Tanzania}, (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2008), 30-31.
1963-64. The poster portrays African tourists who come to Dazhai to see China’s astonishing achievements in rural development and increases in grain output. Most of all, there are tractors, a symbol of China’s agricultural mechanization and urban industrialization. The African tourists gather around the China-made “iron ox” – the means of agricultural production and the mobile form of Chinese capital that brings about the self-sufficient way of living. Part of Dazhai’s built environment, the wall behind the Chinese and African people and the buildings in the middle ground, appears in the background of this poster, revealing China’s discourse of self-reliance that stressed the country’s economic and political sovereignty and independence. The interracial friendship between African visitors and Dazhai workers is implied in the depiction of their friendly smiles and body language of holding hands and putting arms around each other’s shoulders. The visual rhetoric of socialist humanism beautifies the uneven development between China and Africa in this image. This is no longer old-fashioned colonial rule that takes advantage of the “backwardness” of Africa for the profit of foreign invaders. The new paradigm of Chinese socialism opens up the possibility that the deficiency of African countries can provide a good opportunity for creating an ideal type of international cooperation and Sino-Africa solidarity. This becomes a symptom that signals the transformation of the modern imperialist geography of the globe and the realization of the world market.
Serve the Revolutionary People of the World (1971) [Figure 30] implicates the ever more complex and dynamic international environment of globalization in which China struggles to establish itself amid “a global civil society” of Empire. Maoist China attempted to challenge the “new imperial form of sovereignty that does not form the center of an imperialist project”\(^\text{127}\) by proposing to Zambians and Tanzanians China’s labor-intensive method for development. The poster illustrates China’s leading role in constructing the infrastructure of the inter-state railway linking Zambia and Tanzania. A Chinese laborer is carrying a wooden railway tie in the exotic setting of tropical Africa, surrounded by tall palm trees and the work camps. The fluttering red flags, along with the Chinese laborer’s red shirt, symbolize the zeal of Chinese workers and their enthusiastic commitment to the long-term construction. The TAZARA railway symbolizes the state-led development project representing socialism. The laboring body of the Chinese railway builder with his determined facial expression emphasizes the physical toil of moving a rail. In contrast to the Soviet elder brothers who usually tell, show, and pinpoint, the Chinese elder brother does labor. Whereas Soviet experts appear in the economic sector of China’s heavy industries and show the Chinese younger brothers a blueprint or teach them how to operate machinery, Chinese elder brothers in Africa participate in the construction of physical infrastructure – the foundation for smooth capital circulation. Through the energetic movement of the

Chinese worker, the poster shows a hardworking Chinese. During the TAZARA railway construction (1970-75), hard work was considered the most prominent essential needed for African development. China tried to teach work discipline, through so-called “teaching by example,” to African co-workers by having them practice disciplined work habits for the purpose of finishing their tasks early, building self-esteem, and cultivating self-reliance.\textsuperscript{128} The Maoist image of the TAZARA railway construction emphasized the significance of hard work. Under the red banner, the global vision of socialist revolution seemed to materialize at the site of the inter-state development project abroad.

The visual representation of China’s role in Africa is characterized by the manual laborer. It betrays China’s specific national condition that the country was eager to undertake large-scale construction projects for China’s international reputation in spite of its limited capital, especially foreign currency. The United States, Britain, the Soviet Union, and France, along with private enterprises, either refused to invest in the railway building or did not review the Stamp report,\textsuperscript{129} while the swift response of Maoist China to the inter-state development product appealed to the Zambian and Tanzanian governments. This was the result of China’s willingness, self-confidence, and hidden efforts to obtain a seat at the United Nations by attracting African voters. The China-led


\textsuperscript{129} Ibid., 208.
development project, however, not so much suggests a totally new approach to the international relationship and cooperation, as an attempt to insert China into the new formation of global politics and economy called Empire. The latter replaces the old form of oppression and destruction and instead inscribes its authority in juridical terms with “a new notion of right, a new design of the production of norms and legal instruments of coercion that guarantee contracts and resolve conflicts.” Chinese capital – wagons, locomotives, labor, loan, manufactured goods, credit, and ballast/rail transferred to Africa – moved through the global flow of capital, the new and complex regimes of homogenization and differentiation and de-territorialization and reterritorialization. The lesser availability of capital however caused China to take the specific path of using the less dominant manual labor-intensive production process.

Chapter One has examined the inter-state production of socialism and of socialist visual culture. The protocols of socialist realism and later Mao Zedong Thought recoded the rule of capital and the uneven geographical development between the nation-states in Asia and Africa. The global movement of capital, its transnational circulation and

---

130 However, it is true that the spirit of the Great Cultural Revolution inspired people in America, Japan, and Europe, as well as in Asia, Africa and Latin America. Mao’s revolutionary impulse provoked diverse forms of counter-culture and inspired military and student demonstrational events in different locales, for instance, movements in 1960s San Francisco and Japan’s left-wing movement of the 1960s. However Mao’s influence became weakened, partly with the beginning of China’s Ping-Pong diplomacy in the early 1970s. This does not mean that the afterlife of the Cultural Revolution has totally disappeared in the world, especially in pop culture.

131 Hardt and Negri, 9.
accumulation, which affected people’s everyday lives in local areas, were encoded in socialist realist visual culture. This became a national allegory because individuals from among Third World peoples homogeneously represented the nation-states to which they belonged. Principles of socialist realist aesthetics, such as optimism, people-ness, and revolutionary romanticism, designated the nation-state as the basic unit of the pseudo-totality of international socialism. This led people in China to overlook the mutative qualities of capitalism – its different density, speed, rhythm and intensity – in the territories of socialist countries. The traumatic core of fundamental antagonism within socialist societies became muted and state violence became invisible. Here a paradox of national allegory emerged during the Maoist regime. Rather than connecting the people’s empirical data, from their everyday lives in local villages, to global capitalism, the national allegory of a socialist realist type imposed a specific mental map upon people and defined a particular correlation between individual experiences and the global movement of monopoly capital. Thus the pseudo-totality of international socialism excluded Chinese people from the field of capitalism. Chapter One focused on the inter-state movement of capital and examined how the uneven development between socialist nation-states – the spatial and differential expressions of accumulative capital – affected the scenes of China’s socialist construction and development project abroad. In comparison to Chapter One, Chapter Two analyzes how the uneven geographical development within the territory of the PRC shaped the visual production
of socialist realism and spatial capital in a variety of landscapes. China’s internal colonialism restructured the production and mobility of socialist realist images in the dimension of the Chinese nation-state.
CHAPTER TWO

The Spatial Production of Socialism

Chinese people’s perceptions of socialism were constituted and mediated by space. Space on a metaphorical level became a locus for social imaginaries pertaining to socialism. Popular space-related or site-specific slogans such as “Moving the earth,” “Dazhai spirit,” “Learn from the old fool who moved the mountains,” promoted and shaped the collective understanding of socialism. The spatial and architectonic metaphors of building socialism often appeared in the public discourse of socialist construction. Space on the other hand was the material base where the idea of socialism was actualized by human agency. Sparked by revolutionary fervor, Maoist theory and practice considered space, especially nature (a sub-category of space), as something to be remolded and conquered by human will. Nature became the raw material to be orchestrated, regulated, and governed by the revolutionary people.

Under state socialism, the top-down policies and central planning of the party-state played a pivotal role in the spatial production of socialism. Factories, industrial worksites, the communes, state farms, schools, and labor camps, as well as

132 “With regard to state farms, in China’s post-1949 agricultural history, the Soviet Union literally supplied the blueprints. The official media announced to the Chinese people and the world that China’s state farms would be built following Soviet plans and methods for their sovkhoz farms. Russian and Eastern European
infrastructure – all were built in space in accordance with the urban and rural planning of the state. For instance, Mao’s idea for eliminating the difference between the countryside and city were materialized in rural space. As a result, space resulted in revealing the serious defects and malfunctions of Mao’s radical economic plans and expressed the struggle of labor power to reshape geographical features and inscribe a certain spatiality. People’s backbreaking communal efforts to implement Mao’s economic and political plans were embodied in space and performed by space.

Along with its circulation and accumulation, capital produced certain spatial patterns and left its trace across the land. The subterraneous history of China’s economy and its inter-state relationship with the Soviet Union affected the spatial formation of China’s socialism and coded its mutation in spatial terms. The countryside underwent large-scale collectivization based on the Soviet model, while cities built up factories for industrialization. Later during the Great Leap Forward (1958-61), China went through the enormous transformation of decentralization in rural areas after the Mao-led CCP envisioned a Chinese way of achieving communism ahead of the Soviet Union. Space advisors and technicians also prominently displayed elements of the Soviet model in the early 1950s. These farms themselves –guoying nongchang – would be China’s most advanced and most socialist forms of agriculture. They would produce bountiful surpluses especially because they used tractors to plant and harvest long rows of grains. The images of tractor drivers and the beautiful geometry of long furrows that filled the official media were unquestionably Russian in their origins and became similarly iconic in China,” Gregory Rohlf, “The Soviet Model and China’s State Farms,” China Learns from the Soviet Union, 1949-Present, (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2010), 197-98.
was the problem and, at the same time, the solution. Problems of capitalist, bourgeois, and natural space, i.e., the uneven modernization between city and countryside, had to be solved by the radical development of the countryside. China’s economic dependency on the Soviet Union had to be resolved by building up self-sufficient economic units in rural areas. China’s national security had to be guaranteed by constructing the military/industrial complex of the Third Front in the remote inner lands. All of these imperatives disclose how capital flowed and accumulated and how capital was centralized, de-centralized, and concentrated through space.

The landscape paintings of socialist realism and Maoism depicted the space of socialism. A wide range of sites of socialist construction became the subject matter of socialist realist landscapes. The principles of socialist realist aesthetics and traditional techniques of Chinese ink painting naturally led to a utopian depiction of China’s wide expanses of land, mountains, rivers, forests, and prairies, and also man-made spaces such as the locations of water-conservancy campaigns, backyard furnaces, public dining halls, schools, dam-constructions, and factories – immobile forms of capital that were fixed in space. The bird’s-eye view, the visual effects of traditional ink and brush, and composition choices were used to construct the grand panorama of China’s on-going socialist construction. In these dramatic compositions, human activities were often turned into a part of the beautiful scenery of socialist space.
This chapter is composed of three parts. First, the landscapes of the Great Leap Forward (1958-61); and second, the production of rural spatiality that originated in Dazhai, and a production brigade in Shanxi province during the campaign “Learn from Dazhai in Agriculture” since the mid-1960s. The final section discusses the visual representation of labor in utopian images of socialism. Through visual and historical analyses of such landscapes, this chapter demonstrates how the photographic and painterly practices of Chinese artists encoded the complex and dynamic processes of reification, alienation, and commodification in the utopian projection of socialist development. In art history, scholars have examined the landscape pictures of socialist construction as resulting from the reform of national painting (guohua) and from the nationalization (minzuhua) of oil painting as part of artists’ efforts to modernize traditional ink and brush painting, and to make it socialist. Historical accounts explain that Chinese artists inserted recognizable symbols of socialist modernization such as tractors, railways, and red flags into panoramic views of the Chinese motherland. Artists often based their drawings on life (xiesheng) as a means for embodying the new reality of socialist China. Because painters did mix the traditional medium with new socialist ideas and spirit, this kind of account is certainly one way to narrate the transformation of old national painting and the politicization of traditional, or feudal, literati painting.

Yet such a view overlooks the underlying structure of China’s state capitalism from which the socialist spectacle emerged and created the pseudo-opposition between
Chinese socialism and capitalism. The landscapes of the socialist production process presented an inverted image of Chinese society where the prevalent exchange value, produced by the economic system, was converted into the use value of an imaginary communist utopia. To visualize exchange value and its ensuing commodification became a deeply unspeakable taboo. Chinese workers, farmers, and peasants were unable to conceive of their becoming commodities in the local or global divisions of labor for China’s industrialization and international export, or within China’s imagined national identity as a socialist country. Supported by versatile techniques and artistic devices, the total body of Maoist landscapes was actually built upon the traumatic core of Chinese society in its collective denial or misrecognition of its capitalist self. Here socialism, as Lefebvre put it, was nothing other than the transformation of everyday life on the surface level; or mere “appearance” in Guy Debord’s terminology.

Sun Xueni’s painting titled The Creation of the New World (kaitian pidi di yi hui) (1958) [Figure 31] describes the primordial event that signaled the advent of a new age called the Great Leap Forward (1958-61). Sun painted the People’s Commune (renmingongshe) after his visit at the very beginning of the Great Leap Forward. In his inscription, he compared the past, when nobody felt bitter about coldness and hunger, with the present day when everybody enjoys gourmet food for free. His painting style, format, and arrangement of traditional subjects such as pine trees and housing look very traditional, except for the red flag and public signs. This “old-fashioned,” even
“primitive” style of the master artist (Sun was about eighty years old when he painted this) displayed transitional characteristics, and anticipated the new world of communism. With the launching of political and economic radicalization in the late 1950s, building up the socialist country entailed destroying the old spatiality of feudalism and nascent capitalism and replacing these with a newly arranged socialist space. The strenuous spatial transition, first to socialism and then to communism, corresponded to the uneasy implementation of collective jobs. These involved public projects, political struggles, and spiritual transformations through the collective labor process. Picturesque scenes of infrastructure construction and collectivization (nongye hezuohua) such as Sun’s painting revealed the historical climate in which many seemed excited and filled with high hopes for the prospect of plentiful, cost-free food.

The emergence of new public spaces, including the People’s Commune (renmingongshe), testified to the group-oriented characteristics of socialist space. The communal activities for production and distribution, the social and production relations, and the division of labor led to the physical production of space under socialism. Sites for production demonstrated Mao’s approach to China’s development, which prioritized production relations over productive forces. Mao believed that the

133 The People’s Commune (renmin gongshe), steel-iron production (dalian gangtie), the militarization of the whole population (quanmin jiebing) and revolutionization (jiayu geming).
militarization of the whole population could compensate for China’s shortage of productive forces. In other words, a well-trained, well-organized revolutionary workforce can miraculously increase productive forces. Reflecting the Maoist view, a variety of visual materials from the new-year print (*nianhua*) to national painting (*guohua*) depicted the loci of socialist production where laborers worked extremely hard. On the other hand, the scenery in the spatial productions of socialism also implied, to use Neil Smith’s words, “the production of meaning, concepts, and consciousness of space which are inseparably linked to its physical production.”135 In this light, the space of socialism constructs the idea of socialism. It represents, promotes and actualizes what socialism means, what it values, what it cares about, and what it does not.

**The Surreality of Reality**

The print *All Reveal Genius Riding the Winds and Waves* [Figure 32] is symptomatic. This new *nianhua* conveys the spirit of the age, literally becoming a manifesto of the Great Leap Forward. The visual image portrays a parade of people happily proceeding through water. Engineering the whole body of China’s national economy, a Han-

134 Mao believed that the organization of collective farming (the production relation) would liberate the productive forces. A transition in the production relation – how people work together – leads to an increase of productive forces, according to Mao’s view.

Chinese proletariat in blue overalls is leading the festive march of a group of the people. The persons marching through the ocean represent individual sectors of China’s production. The order of the figures’ appearance implies the priorities in China’s economic growth. First, the male factory worker alludes to machinery and heavy industry. Second, the female tractor driver and farmer indicate the mechanization of agriculture, grain production, and light industry respectively. Third, the People’s Liberation Army implies military force and possibly the militarization of the entire workforce. A child wearing a red scarf (the Young Pioneers) and the rest of the figures following the lead of the Han proletariat symbolize the rest of the members of Chinese society whose economic activities support the foundation of the Chinese nation-state.

The scrupulously designed composition delineates the invisible hierarchy of socialist China. What is interesting in this grand view of the ocean-crossing march is the surrealistic conception of socialist economic development. In the background, a man in a Mao suit is flying on an air-launched missile. This adds a comic touch to the scene, which otherwise simply depicts a fictive parade in the water. The vertical movement of the skyrocket and the horizontal movement of the procession express a multi-directional spatial expansion and visualize the synergetic force of the people’s psychological dynamics. The variegated spectrum of rainbow colors and the jubilant tempo and rhythm of the splashing waves generate a tangible energy of hope and optimism that anticipate the new age. This surrealistic depiction of Chinese producers as a collective
body conveys the shared excitement about China’s economic progress as they embark on a historic venture into a communist wonderland.

The Anti-Rightist Campaign signaled the dawn of the Great Leap Forward, i.e., China’s Second Five Year Plan (1958-62). In November 1957, the People’s Daily (renmin ribao) criticized “the introduction of a household responsibility system (baochan daohu) in Yongjia County in Zhejiang because the fixing of farm output quotas for each household is the restoration of the capitalist small farmer economy.” 136 This editorial stance reflected Mao’s opinion favoring the targeting of all rightists who rejected state grain purchases and collectivization. “Rightists” was the name given to those “rich and middle-level peasants who preferred the individual economy and demand the expansion of free market and the rise in prices of agricultural products. The people who believe that the discrepancy between city and town cannot be eliminated shortly are also considered rightists.” 137 Diverging from the Stalinist line of socialist transition, Mao began to concentrate on Chinese-style rural development. Decentralization aimed to enable the agricultural sector in the countryside to engage its own modern industrial production for the purpose of promoting agricultural development and a greater agricultural surplus. This idea of a self-reliant countryside resulted in the People’s


137 Ibid., 111.
Communes. Maoist images, including the aforementioned surrealist depiction of China’s economic progress, frequently depicted images of a higher stage of socialization for rural production, thus marking the beginning of the Second Five Year Plan (1958-61).

**A De-Capitalist Utopia**

Whereas the quixotic new-year print deploys an imaginary vista of the Great Leap Forward, *The People’s Commune’s Dining Hall (renmingongshe shitang)* [Figure 33] in 1958 conveys the high-spirited, optimistic atmosphere of the countryside in a more realistic way. The public dining hall was the symbolic and representative place of Mao’s ambitious socio-economic and political plans for catching up with England in less than fifteen years. The institutional form of socialist governmentality aimed to reorganize the people’s lives as a way of domesticating socialism. Collectives, co-opts and villages were newly incorporated into the People’s Communes along military lines. The goal of such a social formation was intended to mobilize surplus labor and maximize political and economic efficiency. The capital investments in agriculture for food control and water irrigation were expected to speed up the development of socialism. In early 1958, the party leaders believed that the People’s Communes would serve as “the best model through which to achieve, firstly, the transition from collective ownership to public ownership in rural areas, and secondly the transition from a socialist society to a
This spatial arrangement for socialist living imposed new production-centered life styles upon peasants and farmers. Their praxis, in turn, shaped a spatiality that in those days appeared to be socialist. The organic unity of post-capitalist communities and its accompanying fairytale story seem to materialize in the edifice depicted in *The People’s Commune Dining Hall*. In line with this, the painting’s inscription, “free meals, all smile, and work harder, happiness forever” (*chifanbuyaoqian, laoshaoqikaiyan, laodonggengjiji, xingfuwanwannian*),” conveys a fully charged optimism for the communist future.

A group of traditional painters (*guohuajia*) in Jiangsu, including Qian Songyan (1899-1985), Fu Baoshi (1905-65) and their students, collaborated to paint the public dining hall in an effort to reform traditional ink painting by depicting a contemporary political theme. The spectacle of the People’s Commune also reflected the artists’ struggle to measure up to the production quota of 3,500 paintings set by the local Jiangsu Chinese Artists Association. Painting became a form of quantitative value and of money since it counted toward the national production numbers throughout the massive campaign for intensive capital accumulation. Fu Baoshi, under the political and

---

economic pressure, said that art does not do its job as wonderfully as politics (zhengzhigualeshuai, bimojiubutong 政治挂了帅，笔墨就不同).  

The collective work of the Jiangsu painters (jitichuangzuo), i.e., a traditional painting with socialist content, employed a bird’s eye perspective. The high point of view invites viewers to the deep depths of the socialist public space. It illustrates the multifaceted aspects of the people’s daily activities under socialism in great detail, although the wide open space makes everything look very small. This scene of collectivization is composed of roughly three spatial divisions: the public canteen, factory buildings, fields and farms. The way in which this painting deploys space is interconnected with a series of the spatial practices of Chinese farmers and peasants. Their praxis is spatially arranged and temporally ordered. Surrounded by the diagonal arrangement of outer walls, the main edifice of the public canteen has two architectonic compartments that lead people to perform physical activities – before eating, eating, and after eating. The bottom part of the painting portrays two worker units (danwei), entering the dining hall. These consist of local cadres, peasants, and female workers who are liberated from the sexual and physiological division of labor. The harrows and grain rakes that they are carrying over their shoulders indicate that the groups are coming back from work. Inside the canteen and in the foreground, people in small scale

\[139\] Tianzhong Shui, Ershishiji Zhongguo Meishujinian, 258. Original source is Meishu, 1958, July.
are sitting around large dining tables shared by four to six people. They are eating, chatting, and looking around as a few people in white caps and aprons deliver food. The next section over the dining hall illustrates what people do after the meal – including a wide array of leisure activities such as reading large character posters (dazibao).\textsuperscript{140}

Across from the public dining hall, there is another territorial division of socialist space where the products of the peasants and farmers are collected, stored, and processed. The numbered mills and granaries are located together to maximize the efficiency of labor, space, and capital. The endless line of water-buffalo carts full of grain and crops are heading to the factories. This insinuates that collectivization increases productivity and ensuing production. Finally, in the background, the most remote area of this landscape alludes to a bumper harvest. A golden yellow color dyes the horizontally expanded paddy field with its accents of red flags, the symbol of high production. Huts, boats, and the mountains – all means of production – are beautifully painted, adding a poetic and pastoral sensibility to the scene. Occupying the center of the landscape, crimson maple leaves, in contrast to the deep green color of pine trees,

\textsuperscript{140} During the Great Leap Forward, “the educational policies designed to correct inequalities through new programs of education particularly in the countryside. A vast variety of ‘half-work, half-study’ programs, ‘red and expert universities’ and part-time evening schools for peasants and workers were hastily established in accordance with the Great Leap goals of permitting “the masses to make themselves masters of science and technology” and eliminating the distinction between mental and manual labor. Regular six-year primary schools and three-year middle schools were expanded in the rural areas under the administration of the communes so as to better serve local needs and realize the Marxian goal of combining education with productive activities” Maurice Meisner, \textit{Mao's China and After}, (New York: Free Press, 1986, 1999), 269-270.
accentuate the beauty and richness of this peaceful moment in their bucolic life.\textsuperscript{141} The communalized hitherto domestic dining place, while institutionalizing socialism, provides a mode of socialist experience. It includes such spatial practices as participating in self-criticism, mass meetings, and ideological education through which people identify themselves as socialist subjects in everyday life that is subject to ideological intervention.

What is invisible in this intriguing landscape of the public dining hall is the emotional, physical and economic expense paid by the peasants for the socialization of rural space. The ugly side of the same coin that has preceded this total arrangement was the demolition of the traditional spatial order. The forced destruction threatened the ingrained value system of “conservative” peasants who cherished filial piety and kinship. Peasants’ responses to land reform and collectivization varied depending on their economic status after losing their private property.\textsuperscript{142} For example, in 1958

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{141} We can see the significance of color surfaces in post-1949 China in Fu Baoshi’s writing: “Today, when 470,000,000 people are signing ‘the East is Red, the Rising Sun, etc.,’ can water and ink alone be sufficient for painting” quoted in Anita Chung’s “Of History and Nation: The Art of Fu Baoshi” \textit{Chinese Art in an Age of Revolution}, (Cleveland, New Haven: Cleveland Museum of Art, Yale University Press, 2012), 19.
\end{flushleft}

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{142} The collectivization of Chinese agriculture was preceded by the land reform of 1949-52. Land and other agricultural resources were expropriated from landlords and rich peasants and distributed to poor and middle-income peasants. The major objective of the land reform was political in that it aimed at consolidating the political base of the Chinese Communist Party in rural areas. By isolating rich peasants, and eliminating landlords, and by aligning the party with middle-income peasants, the Communists attempted to transfer power to the poor peasants in the countryside. Its impact in terms of generating agricultural growth was minimal since each peasant received just over one mu of land (about 0.027 of a hectare). This was too small to provide farmers with the surplus essential for investment and agricultural growth. Nevertheless, it had a significant income-leveling effect. The collectivization was launched after the
\end{flushleft}
Chengdu, rural planning grouped 1480 households into five villages, making them the five farming sections of a co-op located approximately half a mile apart from each other.\textsuperscript{143} By the end of 1958, 753,000 advanced agricultural co-operatives had been merged into 26,576 people’s communes and the rate of peasant participation had reached 99.1 percent.\textsuperscript{144} The radical transformation of space entailed the ruthless destruction of ancestors’ graves and ancestral or family houses where people had lived for generations and had retained small private plots for growing their own vegetables and raising pigs to be sold on the rural free market. The public dining and housing systems dismantled the traditional notion of home, since most family members lived separately in order to serve the people instead of their family elders. Otherwise, they were often dislocated to remote areas for public projects such as water-well drilling. The immobilized capital of the laborers was consumed for days and nights at a time, as the workers pursued the reward of a red flag, a symbol of high productivity. The spatial and land reform with the initially gradual formation of agricultural producers’ co-operatives because it was thought that collective farms in China would not be viable without heavy machinery, such as tractors, which would only be available after industrialization had proceeded. Hence the collectivization of agriculture was planned to be completed in a time span of 10-15 years from 1949 on, the same time span that was envisaged for China’s industrialization and the nationalization of industrial and commercial enterprises. This time frame, known as the ‘general line’ or development strategy in the transition period, was even written into China’s 1954 constitution” Joseph C.H. Chai, An Economic History of Modern China, (Cheltenham, Northampton: Edward Elgar Pub., 2011), 111-112.

\textsuperscript{143} Chung Xian Chen, “Revolution in Village Housing,” China Reconstructs, Vol.7, November 1958, 27. The reliability of this information is questionable but it can be the original plan for the People’s Communes in Chengdu area.

\textsuperscript{144} Chai, 123.
territorial division of labor placed workers in the hinterland for immobilizing “productive capital in the forms of factories, machinery, transport routes, warehouses and a host of other facilities.” The distant work camps prevented the workers from commuting to the public canteen for even months at a time.

To a great extent, the de-centralization of the Chinese economy granted power to local cadres. The public canteen became a place of corruption and exclusion when the party cadres prohibited people who had not fulfilled production quotas from coming to have a meal; while land, farming tools, and cooking utensils turned into collective property or was put into backyard furnaces to make unusable steel. Under the pressure of local party cadres who could label anyone a rightist or counter-revolutionary, peasants tended to acquiesce to the coercion of the party bureaucracy. Blurring the boundary between private and public spaces, the spatialization of power relations (part of the state apparatus) was exercised until the abolition of the short-lived public dining hall system and the restoration of family village structures in 1961. The central planning controlled the allocation of labor and capital based on the given output targets of each enterprise. This socialist economic structure extremely restricted spatial mobility. The household registration scheme (hukou zhidu) was introduced in 1958. As Jameson puts it,

---

145 Smith, 88.

146 Dikötter, 2011.
it was one space among others in which “alienation happens: the space of the land and the peasants, enclosure, movement from country to city, and so forth.”  

Capturing a moment of agrarian life, *The People’s Commune Dining Hall* [Figure 33] illustrates two functionally differentiated spaces: space for production, i.e., nature, mills, and granaries; and one for distribution, i.e., the public canteen. The spatial juxtaposition raises a critical question about production and distribution in socialist China – two elements of contradiction under capitalism. The socialist mode of production is embodied in the landscape of socialist distribution and production. By visualizing the process of how peasants immediately consume their products at the canteen, the rural landscape depicts de-alienated workers with the allusion of use-value and the Maoist doctrine of distribution according to their labor, or even according to their needs. The People’s Commune is a symbolic place that embodies Mao’s urgent impulse to construct the socialist production relations regardless of the actual economic base of the Chinese society, including such factors as its current productive forces.

Considering that collectivization actually took control of agricultural surplus away from peasants and farmers and put it into the hands of party cadres, the landscape disguises the structure of exploitation and alienation internal to socialist China. The rural population had to pay various taxes, including a land tax, under the compulsory

---

agricultural procurement scheme. The mode of exchange between farmers and the state was unfavorable to the former due to the state’s monopsonistic profits. Under capitalism, “workers are alienated from their own production by producing it as separate from themselves in the first place, so that it comes before them as a properly alien object and force.” What Chinese peasants and farmers experienced during the Great Leap Forward was not totally different from alienation under capitalist production. Chinese peasants and farmers had to sell their products (i.e., commodities) to the state at a price below the market price, and they had to buy manufactured goods from the state at a higher price than the market price. The mode of exchange caused alienation among the peasants and farmers. Under socialism, immediate producers undergo alienation, similar to capitalist alienation; according to Jameson, “the fourfold alienation: from the means of production, their products, their activities as work and finally their fellow workers.” Chinese workers were alienated from the means of production mainly

148 “The agricultural tax, which was in effect a land tax, was the most important and visible tax. The invisible taxes paid by farmers included the monopolistic and monopsonistic profits of state enterprises, for in selling goods to farmers state enterprises had a monopoly of manufactured goods, the prices of which were generally much higher than their production costs. The profit make-up plus commodity tax together accounted for an average of about 32 percent of the prices of manufactured goods in the period 1952-78. Similarly, in buying goods state enterprises acted as monopsonists under the compulsory agricultural procurement schemes which required farmers to sell a certain amount of their produce to them at a price below the market price. The difference between the state purchase price and actual market price constitutes an element of tax or monopsonist profits. An estimate of this tax of eight agricultural products became the most important source of government revenues. Altogether the visible and invisible taxes financed nearly fifty percent of China’s government expenditures in this period” in Chai, 114-115.

149 Jameson, Recoding Capital, 131.
because they owned none. All means of production during the Great Leap Forward were turned into collective or public properties. Chinese peasants and farmers were obviously alienated from their products due to state taxation and procurement schemes and also due to the unequal exchange rate between agricultural products and manufactured goods. Chinese peasants and farmers also experienced alienation in their activities because their work was not for themselves; it served commodity production and exchange under state socialism, and their work was to produce exchange value. Exploitation is often the inevitable working condition of people who are forced to complete work done ahead of schedule and fulfill the production quotas. Throughout the Maoist mass mobilizations and political campaigns, people felt alienated from their fellow workers because of competition, corruption, self-criticism, and various kinds of politico-economic activities. Because of these various forms of alienation (e.g., through taxes, fixed markets, mobilizations, etc.), Chinese workers were as vulnerable as those under the production process of capitalism.

What the lyrical vista of China’s countryside illustrated was far away from the life of peasant workers alienated in a capitalist society. Rather, the landscape portrayed a

\[150\] Ibid., 42. Karl Marx characterizes alienation in *Capital One* as follows: “before [the worker] enters the process, his own labor has already been alienated from him, appropriated by the capitalist, and incorporated with capital, it now, in the course of the process, constantly objectifies itself so that it becomes a product alien to him” in Marx, 716.
de-capitalist utopia. The bird’s-eye view not so much highlighted individual workers and their inter-personal relationships, as it did render every worker anonymous, abstract, quantified, and de-alienated. The grand view of the socialist spectacle with workers depicted at a minuscule scale generated the mythic distance that kept artists from confronting the real life of millions of peasants and farmers who were exhausted after sixteen-hour work days aimed at launching a “sputnik.”\textsuperscript{151}

**Untouchable Beauty of Nature**

National paintings by Jiangsu artists such as Qian Songyan’s *Building the Dam* (1958), Zhang Wenjun’s *The Fertilizer Collection Brigade Battles Taihu Lake* (1958), and Song Wenzi’s *Quarry Work Site* (1958) [Figure 34] conveyed the local milieu of Jiangsu province where underemployed laborers were mobilized and militarized for the purpose of increasing agricultural production and boosting the agricultural surplus to fuel urban industrialization. The more the bird’s-eye perspective captured the grandiosity of nature, the more miniscule the workers became. The existence of Chinese laborers became extremely trivial under the panoramic unfolding of the eternal beauty of nature. Revolutionary romanticism rendered nature and people immersed in the decorativeness of the landscape. The spectacular view of natural beauty hid the true

\textsuperscript{151} According to Frank Dikötter, “In Chayashan, Henan, the first people’s commune (known as the ‘Sputnik Commune’), a goal of 4,200 kilos of wheat per hectare was set in February, and by the end of the year an entirely fictitious level of 37.5 tons per hectare was promised” in Dikötter, 37.
nature\textsuperscript{152} of an economic dynamism in which dislocated workers were alienated and exploited by the state. Instead, the spectacle of socialist construction evoked the sublime aura of the ideology called socialism.

In the aforementioned socialist realist landscapes, the traditional way of featuring nature with brush and ink, makes the scenery of mountains and rivers appear dramatic and spectacular. During the Great Leap Forward, the majority of people were mobilized for melting steel at backyard furnaces that continuously devoured enormous amounts of fuel and timber for days and sleepless nights. The waste of natural resource caused deforestation, leading to soil erosion and water loss in a vicious circle; while excessive irrigation severely disrupted and damaged the balance of the ecosystem. During the Maoist regime, nature became the object of labor-exploitation. The old fable “\textit{yugongyishan}” (the old fool who is believed to move the mountains), was often quoted so as to propagandize the revolutionary force of transforming nature. A class struggle happens in the natural world, which becomes the battlefield where human will is tested in its effort to overcome the material conditions of natural law. According to Judith Shapiro, the Maoist period demonstrates the inseparable relationship between political repression and environmental degradation; its dynamics suggest the “congruence between violence among human beings and violence by humans toward the non-human

\textsuperscript{152} All art may hide the true nature of an economic dynamism but I saw the visual images I analyzed in this dissertation as Guy Debord’s “spectacle” – the mere appearance.
world.”153 Her argument is not applicable to the whole non-human world of Maoist China because Chinese attitude toward machinery is considerably favorable; but she is right about nature. Nature became an object of labor to be tamed and carved by human agency (in particular, the case study of Dazhai landscapes demonstrates this antagonistic view toward nature under Mao). In this light, Neil Smith elaborates, “people change their own nature as they progressively deprive external nature of its strangeness and externality, as they mediate nature through themselves, and as they make nature itself work for their own purpose.”154

Nevertheless, nature in the images of Jiangsu landscapers remains so beautiful that the undamaged substance of nature resonates with the intrinsic charm of the cosmic order, the being in its inner dynamics, and as the source of endless inspiration. Classical Chinese landscapes, including literati paintings, were used to detach artists from their earthly lives and to subordinate human beings to nature, becoming one with it. In the 1950s, guohua painters like Ying Yeping (1910-1990) begin to portray nature as the site of socialist production. They reappropriated the generic rendering of mountains and rivers from the past; for instance, in the modern version of scholarly landscapes by Huang Binhong (1865-1955). To the extent that the use of ink and wash techniques, lines,

---


brushstrokes, inscriptions, compositional features and sometimes pale hues retains the long-established sense of beauty, sanctity and mystery in picturing nature, this specific way of constructing the world of nature mirrored the traditional notion of nature as a refuge from the mundane. For example, Ying’s *Lofty Mountain Bows Its Head, the River Yields to a Road* (1956) [Figure 35] stages a group of people, Chinese road-builders, participating in the construction of infrastructure in mountainous valleys and gorges. As capital visualizes time as geography, the grandeur of the mountains and rivers under construction evokes the timeless ethos of China’s socialist construction in its early stage. The horizontal rendering of the mountains, the layered depth of fore, middle, and backgrounds, emphasizes the grand scale of the construction project, the material base for the smooth circulation of capital. The rural scenery makes nature the field of revolutionary development, embodying China’s epic history and marching toward the *telos* of communism.

**Little Men and Commodification of Labor Power**

Men depicted in small-scale are popular protagonists in visualizations of the labor process of socialist construction, with nature serving as the material base. The picturesque depictions of local Chinese areas betray the universal commodification of labor power and nature altogether, although the landscapes represent both as inconsumable and intact. Tireless laborers appear to be substitutes for ancient recluses,
protagonists in classic landscapes, in their romantic reunion with nature in its abstractness. Song Wenzhi’s *Quarry Work Site* (1958), for instance, illustrates working men and women, depicted in small-scale, merged into the labor process of stone quarrying in the gorges of mountainous areas. As Neil Smith argues, the natural world of socialist industry shows the process of nature becoming more and more the product of social production, along with the progress of capital accumulation and the expansion of socialist economic development.¹⁵⁵

More importantly, Shao Luoyang’s *The Whole People Make Steel* (quanmin liangang) (1959) [Figure 36] reifies the intrinsic paradox of China’s socialism symptomized by the total absence of people in the scene. Although the title of the socialist realist landscape alludes to the whole population’s collective engagement in the national project of socialism, nobody is visible in the noble land of communist solidarity. The people, the collective body of China’s labor force, is considered to be the major source of productive power necessary for China’s transformation into a communist society. It is even more important given the national condition of China, which lacks capital, and therefore seeks a labor-intensive development model. The absence or invisibility of the people in this sense turns this scene of mass mobilization for steel-making into a covert landscape of the Maoist economy during the Great Leap Forward. It thus mystifies the higher truth of history governed by the words of Chairman Mao and simultaneously may imply the

¹⁵⁵ Smith, 32.
Great Famine when the people disappeared from the crowds of revolutionary history. A picture that mystifies the labor process emerges in socialist built-environments such as the People’s Communes. Factories, ships, bridges and smoky chimneys in splendid vistas fill the seemingly empty spaces where nobody is around. Such spectacles exclude concrete labor from the universality of nature. They treat the mutated capitalism of China as the universal product of nature.

Chinese artists reified the inter-state and regional division of labor in Maoist images by converting the production relations of China’s socialist economy into the material image itself. As Frank Dikötter explains it, during the Great Leap Forward, “due to China’s limited foreign currency and gold reserves, both debt and actual imports have to be paid for in kind through exports. The basic trade pattern is the exchange of credit, capital goods, and raw materials for rare minerals, manufactured goods and foodstuffs...[This] means that more foodstuffs have to be extracted from the countryside to pay the bill.” 156 The industrialization of a backward and somewhat isolated agricultural country like China heavily relied on more advanced countries like the Soviet Union partly because of America’s embargo against China and its allies. The bottom line was that in order for China to realize communism as quickly as it wished, aid from the Soviet Union (in diverse forms of capital transfer) were indispensable. To that extent, the leadership of the CCP exercised a kind of internal colonialism at the cost

---

156 Dikötter, 76.
of peasants and farmers. More than the half of all exports to the Soviet Union comprised “agricultural commodities, ranging from fibers, tobacco, grain, soybeans, fresh fruit and edible oils to tinned meat.” The greatest burden of the enormous imports fell on Chinese peasants and farmers. China’s dependency on the Soviet Union for its own industrialization and economic growth forced the Chinese populace to feed people in the Soviet Union instead of themselves. This commodification of labor inevitably took place in such inter-state trade and in the urban and rural production relation. Therefore the Great Famine was not simply a tragic domestic event that happened to the Chinese people. It was the outcome of a complex inter-state relationship between China, the Soviet Union, and many other countries (China’s allies to which China shipped imported grain and crops, as I argued in Chapter One). This inter-state division of labor, i.e., China as the supplier of foodstuffs to the Soviet Union, was involved in both natural and man-made disasters.

Although the seriousness of the famine differed depending on the locality, what was unchanged was how the uneven development between China and the Soviet Union shaped the urban and rural landscapes of China. The state monopoly on grain purchases and marketing played a key role in forcing peasants to sell their products to

\[ \text{\ldots} \]

\[ ^{157} \text{Ibid.} \]

\[ ^{158} \text{Dazhai does not suffer famine because the remote production brigade has not followed the party-line of steel making at the backyard furnaces. Instead, the local people concentrate on grain production.} \]
the state for less than their market value. The contradiction of capital surfaced due to “the combination of a decline in grain output in 1959-61 and the increase in the ration of the ratio of the state net procurement to feed the urban population and for exports, albeit dwindling grain harvest.”\(^{159}\) The use value of immediate producers (Chinese peasants and farmers) conflicted with the exchange value of their products (prices set by the state monopoly). The state exploitation of peasant villagers financed industrial construction. Through the Maoist era, China pursued a high rate of investment (i.e., the rate of capital accumulation) that was concentrated in the heavy industrial sector. “The heavy industrial sector received the lion’s share at the expense of the light industrial and agricultural sectors.”\(^{160}\) Therefore, if the state allowed the villagers to raise their level of consumption (as a means of preventing massive starvation), the speed of industrialization decreased.\(^{161}\) Under such an economic structure of socialism, both urban factory workers (including those who immigrated into city in the 1950s), and peasants and farmers in the countryside became the producers of exchange value within the cycle of China’s commodity production and exchange. In both local and international arenas, the Chinese people were turned into commodities. They

\(^{159}\) Chai, 139.

\(^{160}\) Ibid., 111. According to Joseph C.H. Chai, “on average the industrial sector received more than 60 percent of the total state investments, of which 90 percent were channeled into the heavy industrial sector,” (Chai, 111).

underwent “socialist” alienation in all possible ways through international and regional divisions of labor. This ubiquitous phenomenon of alienation occurred through the trans-nationalization of socialist production.

The portrayal of men at small-scale and the disappearance of workers in the socialist realist landscapes does not so much result from Chinese artists’ intention to hide the crisis or the maladies of socialism, as does it demonstrate their favored painting practice and their devotion to traditional art, despite the party’s political intervention on art. It was the painterly practice of classical landscapers who “turned their back on nature in deference to their “inner eyes,” and as a result had cultivated an “unnatural” vision that equated landscape with mindscape, creation with imitation” might not totally disappear. The field of fine art operated by its own rules. The professionalism of Chinese artists persisted as the result of the division of labor of the whole society. It did not completely eliminate the inner tendency of fine art that was prone to be apolitical in pursuit of art for art’s sake. The way the artwork isolated itself is intricately tied up with the egos of professional artists – this relatively privileged stratum in a new hierarchy.

162 Fu Baoshi once wrote that “it is not people smelting steel, but steel tempering people – my feeling after attending the teachers’ steel-smelting campaign yesterday evening” quoted in Anita Chung’s “Of History and Nation,” Chinese Art in an Age of Revolution, 22. Based on this diary-like note by Fu, artists like Fu must have felt alienated during the Steel-Smelting Campaign in the Great Leap Forward. But his paintings, especially the landscapes that he developed from xiesheng, do not reflect such a collective experience or social phenomenon.

that encompassed the entire Chinese society. The bird’s-eye perspective and the compositional traits of the classical landscape naturally led to the visual effect of invisible or miniscule socialist workers. Following the generic rendering of nature seemed like a passive way to reform and modernize traditional ink painting. However, it was also undoubtedly an easy way to show that the painters were contributing to the preservation of national heritage in accordance with the party policy. In this way, the group of Jiangsu artists, in Adorno’s sense, “detach their artworks from the empirical world and bring forth another world, one opposed to the empirical world as if this other world too were an autonomous entity.” 164 Although the landscape of the People’s Commune intended to depict a new reality of China in its revolutionary development, the outcome of artistic endeavors, such as drawing from sketches (xiesheng), turned out to create an elusive reality. The illusionistic veil actually constituted people’s perception of socialism as a reality, a false cognitive mapping, in Jameson’s words. 165 The separation from the true actuality of Chinese society in the world economy intensified its insularity to the point that the spectacle of socialism itself became a goal. The unrepresentable lived experience of the Chinese people, who lived through various


165 “Cognitive mapping” —Jameson’s analytical tool—provides a spatial understanding of “the discontinuous expansions and quantum leaps in the enlargement of capital, in the latter’s penetration and colonization of hitherto uncommodified areas” in Jameson’s “Cognitive Mapping,” the Jameson Reader, 278. The shifted mode of production in the stage of imperialism, which was the imperialistic dynamic of capitalism proper, confined the phenomenological experience of the individual subject that became limited to a tiny corner of the social world.
hardships and a series of economic and political upheavals, kept failing to be registered in the symbolic.

**Production of Nature and Infrastructure**

The landscape of Song Wenzhi, titled *Transformation of Mountain and River* (*shanchuan jubian*) (1960) [Figure 37], as well as Shao Luoyang’s *The Whole People Make Steel* (1959), depict sites of industrial development where physical infrastructure like factory buildings, transmission towers, and dams are built.\(^{166}\) Song’s vista of the Three Gorges dam construction on the Yangzi River embodies the spatial centralization of capital, making it seem as if it happens outside of the general rule of capital accumulation and circulation. His frequent use of ink in depicting the forest around the dam and his use of relatively strong orange and orange-red colors create a dramatic visual effect of a calm gravity. As a means of increasing productive forces, dams are an essential piece of infrastructure. As Neil Smith puts it, “the development of productive forces causes an increase in the scale of production process itself – the greater the

---

\(^{166}\) On September 3, 1953, according to Mao’s instructions, Li Fuchun gave a three-part report to the Central Government on the discussions with the Soviet Government concerning aid to China. Part 1 dealt with the tasks and guiding principles for the first five-year plan; Part 2 with the results of the discussion with the Soviet Government; and Part 3 with current tasks. For current tasks, Li Fuchun proposed that, first, in formulating the country’s first five-year plan, China must take as its core the 141 enterprises which the USSR was helping China to construct and restore, and to coordinate various aspects of the national economy in accordance with the principle of proportionate development. Second, China should strengthen work on infrastructure. Third, since the Soviet Union was expending much effort to design the 141 enterprises and to help China build them, and since the Soviet Union would be sending a large number of experts to China, China must therefore complete all of the preparatory construction. Fourth, China had to learn from the Soviet Union and to train new talent. See Kong, 159-160.
number of laborers working together, at the same time, in one place, the larger is the mass of instruments and materials employed in the production and the larger is the spatial scale of the production process.”167 While Song’s choice of the large size and scope of the landscape implicates the vast spatial scale of the dam construction, his approach to the centralized economic project remains highly metaphorical. His picture does not reveal the production of nature as a social process of the material substratum in which, in Smith’s words, “use-value and exchange value, and space and society are amalgamated together”168; rather, the bird’s-eye view captures the process of capital centralization as a natural process and even nature itself. The picture of the majestic Yangzi encodes the rule of centralization of the mobile workforce at the historic site of the Soviet-designed Three Gorges Dam construction. Reified are the so-called “mass human wave tactics” located there in order to take advantage of China’s laborer power. The forced large-scale resettlement of ethnic minorities for the hydro-electric dam never appears as the subject matter in such a genre of socialist realist national painting.

Without employing a bird’s-eye view, more “modernized” renderings of the infrastructure at construction sites shed light on the labor process of the individual workers. The campaign for water conservancy became a popular theme of Maoist visual culture during the era of the Great Leap Forward. Socialist realist landscapes depicted

167 Smith, 123.

168 Ibid., 32.
the construction of irrigation facilities. They often idealized the production relations of human beings and nature. Jin Zhiyuan’s and Song Wenzhi’s *Pull Down Mountain and Bring Water* (*pishan yinshui*) (1958) [Figure 38] portrays the mobilization of peasant workers building a canal through the mountains. Compared to the visual images analyzed above, this rural landscape brings laborers into the foreground and spotlights the bodily postures of each individual worker at the front. The loosely curved line arranging the groups of peasants follows the meandering mountain path that disappears at a vanishing point. Owing to the low perspective, it is difficult to glimpse the entire vista of the mountainous site. This compositional device, however, allows the viewers to feel as if they are there with the laborers who are quarrying and carrying stones and soil. The wired overhead carriers that deliver the soil miles away also diversify the spatial dimensions of the geography. The movable high-hanging carriers generate a dynamic spatial register, up in the air against the descending and more remote inner valley.

The male and female workers in the front sustain their individuality in a variety of self-expressions and distinctive appearances. Compared to the national paintings, whose perspective make people look like dot that are merged into the splendor of a mountain range, the idyllic and energetic picturing of canal construction gives equal attention to peasant workers and nature – the means of production necessary for achieving socialism. The visual description defines an ideal human relationship to
nature, triggering human intervention in the metamorphosis of natural space, the locus of impending communism.

Lin Maoxiong’s oil painting, *Water (shuǐ) (1958)* [Figure 39], similarly depicts the site-specific scene of a water conservancy project in Jilin. Lin places a group of people taking a short break to drink water amid the construction of irrigation facilities. This typical site of the Great Leap Forward demonstrates inter-ethnic cooperation between Hanzu and Korean-Chinese (*chaoxianzu*) laborers. Mixed with the production relations of the socialist economy, the cross-ethnic cultural transaction embodies the ideal social relation of Maoist China. The desirability of inter-ethnic relationships is expressed through the red flags of high productivity. The speedy building up of irrigation facilities represents the good social and production relations between two nationalities. Here Mao’s military organizational principle for production relations (how Han and Chaoxian nationals work together) is intertwined with friendly inter-ethnic social relations (the way in which they get along). A group of barefoot laborers gathers to drink water in the foreground. The group consists of two Han and three Korean Chinese. Lin picks the moment when a Han-ethnic woman in a blue top makes a joke, and a Chaoxian male worker in a red shirt is smiling in response to her humor. The story about this infrastructural construction site unfolds with a pleasant sense of humor and optimism, brightening the milieu. The kindred spirit of revolution and the amicable inter-ethnic relationship in the local area of Jilin buttresses the strong collective drive to
build the physical infrastructure as quickly as possible. In this historical context, the collectivity of cross-ethnic cooperation aims to fulfill the high production rates in order to secure surplus value by meeting the inflated production quotas. The inter-personal relationship between the two ethnicities is portrayed as ultimately overtaking Britain in perhaps even twelve years, so as to finally prove the superiority of China’s socialist system.

**Illusion of Self-Reliance and Dazhai Spatiality**

Capital creates a world after its own image. Marx and Engels in *Communist Manifesto*

When the People’s Daily raised the call to follow the Dazhai Road on February 10, 1964, Dazhai, a production brigade in Xiyang County in Shanxi, became a national model for China’s rural development. Under the leadership of iron man, Chen Yonggui, peasants in Dazhai initially constructed the distinctive terraced space during the second half of the 1950s, for the purpose of increasing grain production. The terraces [Figure 40] were created through the collective effort of the commune, as a means of providing flood control in the local area where heavy summer rains often destroyed entire villages and ruined people’s livelihoods. The spatiality of Dazhai – the repetitive man-made spatial patterns of terraced fields – gained a new symbolic meaning in the aftermath of the great flood in 1963. In spite of severe hardships, the people of Dazhai successfully recovered from this natural disaster. They rebuild the destroyed terraces and cave
dwellings from scratch, without relying upon external, state-relief support in the form of grain, funds, or materials – known as the “three noes.” This transformed what Dazhai meant in Chinese history during a subsequent nationwide campaign called “Learn from Dazhai in Agriculture” that began in 1964. The one-party state mobilized the entire Chinese population to build Dazhai-style terraces in other locales, regardless of their dissimilar geographical conditions. The spatiality of Dazhai not only came to symbolize the self-reliance of the Dazhai Commune, but in international venues it also represented China’s self-sufficiency after the Sino-Soviet split. Chinese artists, photographers, and print makers portrayed Dazhai-style terraces, as well as the Dazhai Commune, in diverse artistic genres and forms. The utopian images of Dazhai landscapes illustrated the core values pertaining to the ideologies of self-reliance, heroism, and collectivism in Maoist China, as well as the Maoist virtue of hard work. The visual representation of socialist rural development and China’s labor-intensive development model spatially undergirded China’s socialism and visually constructed a utopia of self-reliance in the Chinese imaginary.

Maoist visual culture often portrayed the Dazhai Commune as a self-sufficient utopia. Zhang Yuqing’s *Dazhai Aerial View* (1975) [Figure 41] employs a bird’s eye

---

perspective, depicting a panoramic view of a bucolic agrarian society surrounded by iconic terraced fields. The aerial view enables the viewers to look deeply into the design and layout of the entire village. This realistic depiction of Dazhai village shows two political slogans on large boards stating *zili gengsheng* (relying on our own effort) and *fenfa tuqiang* (working hard for prosperity and to be powerful). Zhang uses vivid yellow and green colors, alluding to a bumper harvest. The picturesque combination of nature, a built environment, and the people in perfect harmony creates a romantic atmosphere.

Along with the endless layers of terraced fields and tracts of level ground, the poster also depicts Dazhai-style buildings – immobile capital fixed in space. These uniquely structured communal buildings consist of a row of cave-style stone dwellings that make up the first floor, and are then topped by more ordinary tile-roofed houses to form the second story. Beautifully arranged community buildings, workshops, schools, and shops are incorporated within the terraced, cave-like housing blocks. This spatial arrangement of public places that invade private places aims to promote collectivism. The signs of agricultural mechanization, such as tractors and sprinkling devices, and the Unity aqueduct on Tiger Head Hill, signal the tremendous changes in Dazhai, from a barren mountainous countryside to a revolutionary locus of China’s agricultural development.

The miniscule size of the people shown in the commune emphasizes the greatness of Dazhai and the special iconic status that it has achieved as a whole. Principles of socialist realism such as revolutionary romanticism, optimism, and socialist content turn this
Dazhai landscape into a spectacle of socialism whose language, Guy Debord says, is composed of “the signs of the dominant organization of production, simultaneously the ultimate end-products of that organization.” 170

Mao’s vision of revolution often associated socialism with spatial arrangements and geographical transformations on a larger scale, because conquering nature was considered indispensable to China’s socialist construction. In 1964, the CCP began to promote the Dazhai model all over the country and encouraged the people to use heroic will and revolutionary spirit to change the faces of rivers and mountains. Of course, building terraces on mountainsides entailed the enormous transformation of nature and the geography of the area. The poster image Don’t Depend on the Heaven (1973) [Figure 42] by Xiyang Amateur Fine Art Production illustrates how Mao Zedong Thought promoted the ideology of self-reliance by suggesting a particular way of connecting people to their surroundings, including both space and nature – a sub-category of space. While the sign, “rendingshengtian,” on the building emphasizes the will power of humans in mastering nature and objective conditions of reality, the graphic image of the folkish landscape illustrates irrigation facilities, storage ponds, and winding pipes that bring water down form the mountains for irrigation. The arch-shaped walls of the terraces were invented to withstand the much greater pressure of floodwater. The subtly

changed design of the terraces and irrigation system exposes the Dazhai people’s effort to prevent natural disasters like floods as a way of conquering nature. This standpoint of self-reliance, as a driving force for mastering nature and, furthermore, for remolding space and objective reality, subsumes and invokes the people’s antagonism toward nature and was essential for realizing socialism. This may be the key message that the heavenly earth landscape intends to deliver.

Under the influence of socialist realist aesthetics and its embellishing effects, Dazhai landscapes result in extreme abstraction when representing labor. Lu Ruozeng’s *Autumn in a Mountain Village* (1973) [Figure 43] depicts typical Dazhai-style terraced mountains colored by revolutionary romanticism. The stunning, fairytale-like view of the Dazhai landscape dilutes the hardship of physical toil, partly because hard-working peasants are almost invisible in this scene. Rather than focusing on smiling, hard-working, and even heroic laborers at the worksite (like the national paintings I analyzed before and Chao Xinlin’s poster titled *Agriculture: Learn from Dazhai to Make Great Changes*), Lu’s dreamlike landscape captures the romantic moment of fall harvest, which embodies a timeless pastoral beauty. Such kind of graphic impact, with its vivid colors, results in eternalizing the joy of rural life through the creation of an imaginary space.

On the other hand, *Spring is Everywhere in the Deep Valley* (1973) [Figure 44] shows the total abstraction of the sequence of laboring processes such as crushing stones, transporting soil, etc. that are inevitably required in order to construct the Dazhai
spatiality. The space of work, in Henri Lefebvre’s words, is “the result, in the first place, of the repetitive gestures and serial actions of productive labor, but also – and increasingly – of the technical and social division of labor; the result therefore, too, of the operation of markets (local, national, and worldwide) and, lastly, of property relationships (the ownership and management of the means of production.”¹⁷¹ However, the visual image does not illustrate the actual sequence of the laboring processes, the division of labor among commune members including middle and lower peasants, and local party cadres, and the state ownership over land as well as the role of the market in sustaining self-reliance. The social relationship between the people in Dazhai and the state is encoded, although the utopian image of self-reliant Dazhai is sustained by the Commune’s grain contribution to the state in compensation for state ownership over land.

The absence of laborers idealizes not labor, but the outcome of labor, mainly because the Dazhai landscape appears like a mirage. The illusory and unattainable qualities of the traditional landscape, which are reproduced in the poster form, come from the particular ways that landscapes are pictured in traditional ink painting. In contrast to the signs of modern technology and industrialization such as dams, the bird’s-eye view and the artistic rendering of misty mountains, high cliffs, dense fog, and clouds conveys a certain sense of isolation. On the terraced mountainsides, clear water

¹⁷¹ Lefebvre, 191.
falling from dams on the mountaintop might allude to the political ideal of Mao, who believed that a clear-running Yellow River was the supernatural political ideal. This Maoist utopia exists in the blurred borderland that connects reality and imagination, insofar as the communist kingdom, environed within the unfathomable abyss of space, remains dissociated from the laboring process that entails hours of quarrying stones, making bricks, filling carts with stones and dirt, tamping the arch-shaped stone walls with soil, leveling the ground and so on. In this spectacle, however, “labor itself withdraws into the innermost and inaccessible recesses of representation as such,” as Fredric Jameson puts it.\textsuperscript{172} The elusive nature of this Dazhai landscape transcends the constraints of the specific here-and-now by encoding the productive process of socialist space in which the exploitation of laborers is inevitable.

In the same vein, Li Keran’s \textit{Terraces on the Mountain Top} (1974) \[Figure 45\] features Dazhai spatiality as a metaphoric space. What Li painted is a spatial pattern. Under the influence of the dominant mode of representation of socialist realism, the repetitive pattern of local and national geography erases something indescribable and unrepresentable. Rather, the spatiality exemplifies the fetishism of space-commodity. The remaining exploitation, alienation, the terrace builders’ separation from the conditions for the realization of their own labor in producing exchange value, and the cycle of surplus value and capital allude to the still existing capitalist relations of

\textsuperscript{172} Jameson, \textit{Representing Capital}, 113.
production under state capitalism. Space here mystifies the nominal socialist production and fetishizes it through space and in space. Dazhai spatiality does not suggest the space of socialism, but a space for socialism – the raw materials given to the human for capital-accumulation. This manmade artificial space also embodies the wasted human capital owning to the central planning that applied the Dazhai model to the whole country, regardless of dissimilar geographic conditions. The spatiality that symbolizes self-reliance at the same time reincarnates the imagined surplus value that China needs for sustaining the public perception of socialism as a reality, even though the socialist mode of production does not materialize with space. The socialist mode of production is completed when productive forces increase and transcend those of capitalism and when the relations of production become considerably more socialized. But Mao’s socialist economy does not meet these two conditions for overcoming the capitalist mode of production. The imbalance results from Mao’s idea of China’s socialism as prioritizing production relations over productive forces. In this light, Dazhai spatiality in Li’s landscape describes things in space, i.e., the fetishized commodity of space. As Jean Baudrillard argues:

173 “A given mode of production does not disappear, according to Marx, until it has liberated the forces of production and realized its full potential. This assertion may be viewed either as a statement of the obvious or as a striking paradox. When the forces of production make a leap forward, but the capitalist relations of production remain intact, the production of space itself replaces – or, rather, is superimposed upon – the production of things in space” in Lefebvre, 62.
The fetishization of the commodity is the fetishization of a product emptied of its concrete substance of labor and subjected to another type of labor, a labor of signification, that is, of coded abstraction (production of differences and sign values). It is an active, collective process of production and reproduction of a code, a system, invested with all the diverted, unbounded desire separated out from the process of real labor and transferred onto precisely that which denies the process of real labor.174

The image of Dazhai spatiality, a non-verbal signifying set in Lefebvre’s words, empties out the concrete substance of labor and replaces it with the painterly practice of imagemaking, i.e., visual and non-verbal signification. The fetishization of the spatiality abstracts and denies the process of real labor, producing the image – maybe “the final form of commodity reification,” to use Jameson’s words.175 The referential and effective aspect of socialist realist mimesis rejects visualizing tabooed capitalism through the fetishization of art-making. The thin paper of Li’s painting, the material itself like a commodity, embodies the congealed labor of the artist himself and the abstracted labor of the terrace builders.


175 Jameson, Representing Capital, 28.
Cartoonist and also military artist Ye Qianyu (1907-95)’s *Full Show by Xingtai Militia* (1966) [Figure 46] depicts “Learn from Dazhai in Agriculture” as an on-going and unfinished military project. The militarization of the whole population is shown against Dazhai-style terraces. Ye’s ink and color painting consists of a more complex narrative structure – four layers of story-telling. The painting demonstrates the ways in which the militarization of the workforce shapes the geography of China. The multi-layered pictorial narrative illustrates Mao’s educational policy of combining the reading of Mao’s works (the Mao cult) with performing labor and taking part in militia training after 1964. The militant activism and the guerrilla style of spatial practice constitute the production relations of the Chinese socialist economy. The visual narrative of the Maoist vision of socialist development depicts the process how Mao’s military doctrine was incorporated into the organizational principle of mobilizing labor power. The social-labor process becomes a militarization and vice versa. Through a series of spatial practices involving reading Mao’s red books, participating in military guerrilla training, and joining a political gathering, as well as doing collective labor in the fields, the mode of organization called the “three-in-one combination” shapes socialist

---

176 By 1964 military intervention in civilian affairs increased after the People’s Liberation Army’s General Political Department dispatched army personnel to schools, government offices, and economic organizations. The PLA controlled the local militia and the organizations of army veterans and young peasants in the countryside during the post-Great Leap Forward years, although its power was limited and subject to the Maoist faction of the Party.

177 Quotations from Chairman Mao first published in May 1964.
subjectivity. This organizational model was to combine military leadership, artists, and the masses during the Socialist Education Movement (1962-66). People were militarized and their labor process was organized in a military way. This mode of social organization constructed pseudo-socialist social and production relations. This does differ from the social and production relations of the capitalist production process. Yet these formal changes do not transform the intrinsic nature of the capitalist production relation between the bourgeois and the working class. While alienation and exploitation remained intact under China’s state capitalism, the military mode of production relation constructed a quasi-socialist mode of production and production relation as a means of increasing grain production in the national economy. Dazhai-style terraces become the background of this landscape where the Maoist social order was constructed in the imaginative world of socialism.

**Revolutionizing Economy in the Countryside**

Capital accumulation, circulation, and allocation left certain spatial traces and patterns all over mainland China after Mao dogmatically applied the site-specific strategy of Dazhai to a vast continent of dissimilar localities in order to increase the national production of grain. The nation-wide project entailed labor transfers from city to country, so centralization happened in the countryside. The accumulation of capital,

---

Neil Smith notes, is “not just accumulation of the proletariat, (in our case, Chinese workers), but accumulation of the workforce in certain places of production.”\textsuperscript{179} Mao, unlike Marx did not see the urbanization of the countryside as an inevitable consequence of historical progress. Mao’s “ruralism,” Maurice Meisner says, “reflects itself in an emphasis on socioeconomic development of the rural areas, a perception that the true sources for socialist reconstruction reside in the countryside, and the notion that urban dwellers can acquire ‘proletarian’ revolutionary virtues by going to the villages and living and working with peasants.”\textsuperscript{180} In Marx’s view, the social and regional division of labor between developed city and backward country was considered to be inevitable in the process of modernization and historical evolution. The contradiction was to be solved not in the capitalist present, but in the socialist and communist future. In contrast to the classical Marxist standpoint, Mao’s campaign, “Learn from Dazhai in Agriculture,” reveals his effort to eliminate the discrepancy between city and country and the ensuing social division of labor between two under the state capitalism of China. By seeking the self-reliance of the countryside via imitation of the Dazhai model, Mao intended to neutralize the uneven development between city and countryside. For Marx, capital transfer between city and country, i.e., the commodity exchange between two territorial divisions, and the antithetical division of labor are the foundation of the whole

\textsuperscript{179} Smith, 124.

\textsuperscript{180} Maurice Meisner, \textit{Marxism, Maoism and Utopianism}, (Madison, London: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1982), 28.
economic history of society.¹⁸¹ Both Marx and Mao regarded the abolition of the city-country division as the precondition for achieving socialism; but Marx would never have imagined that Mao would attempt to build socialism out of China’s premature condition of pre-industrial capitalism – the historical state lingering somewhere between agriculture-based and capitalist modes of production.

The dispersal of a certain geographical pattern into the different parts of mainland China drew a dynamic spatial map of territorial differentiation. This vision was embodied in the several national projects that centralized strategic loci for protecting China’s political and economic sovereignty¹⁸²; for instance, “Learn from Daqing in Industry” and “the Third Front.” Among these, “Learn from Dazhai in Agriculture” – until it was denounced by Deng Xiaoping in the early nineteen eighties – represented the utopian dimension of the Maoist historical paradigm that sought to abolish the antagonistic relation between city and country. This process was accomplished through two methods: first, the transfer of the labor force, labor

¹⁸¹ According to Meisner, “the salient feature of the Marxist analysis is that historical progress is identified with the supremacy of the city, whereas the dominance of rural areas is associated with periods of historical stagnation or regression. The rural-based feudal system is described as a retrogressive development, resulting from a decline in productive forces and population” in Meisner, Marxism, Maoism and Utopianism, 31-32. “For Marx, the rise of capitalism was not only inseparable from the dominance of city over countryside, it also foreshadowed the dominance of urbanized industrial nations over rural peasant countries – for the permanence of the productive forces of capitalism could not assured only if capitalism achieved word-wide dominion. Marx had little doubt that this universal triumph of the capitalist mode of production was imminent in the modern historic process” in Meisner, Ibid.

¹⁸² Self-reliance indicates both political and economic sovereignty of China.
outsourcing from the city,\textsuperscript{183} which meant population movement to the agriculture sector of China’s national economy. Second, Dazhai-style terrace-building appeared to be the key solution to the defects of China’s socialist economy, especially the shortage of grain and underemployment in urban areas. By 1962, industrial production had shrunk by about 40 percent from its 1958-59 levels. In cities, the millions of migrant peasants from rural areas took jobs from urban workers, who were underemployed because of the internal peasant migrants. The central leadership, with the launching of the national campaigns for “return to village (\textit{shangshan xiaxiang})” in 1962, decided to send economically redundant urbanites to the countryside in the aftermath of the Great Famine. This internal immigration from city to country was meant to relieve food shortages, the industrial decrements caused by a shortage of raw materials, and the scarcity of state investment capital and foreign capital. In parallel with the Socialist Education Movement (1962-66), “Learn from Dazhai in Agriculture” after 1964 and then “the Great Cultural Revolution (1966-76), the policy of “Take Grain as the Key Link (\textit{yi liang wei gang})”\textsuperscript{184} invested capital in the terrace-building in rural regions. This meant a significant shift of investment from urban industrial development to agriculture.\textsuperscript{185} As a

\textsuperscript{183} This labor transfer partly aims to solve the under-employment of urbanites.

\textsuperscript{184} Taking Agriculture as the Foundation of Chinese Economy.

\textsuperscript{185} Modern industry is restructured for increasing production of chemical fertilizers and improving farming tools – the means of production. Scientific institutions are established in order to investigate how to improve seeds, while undertaking a program for rural electrification in Meisner, \textit{Mao’s China and After}, 1986, 1999.
result, the repetitive geographical patterns of Dazhai-style terraces reflected the shifting policies of the party-state in allocating capital leading to the decentralization of the entire national economy, which had previously been concentrated on heavy urban industries. This simultaneously meant the centralization of finance and human capital in the countryside. This is the moment when the uneven geographical development between city and country appeared to be the solution to the national crisis during the post-Great Leap Forward years.

**Labor and Terrace-Builders**

Under the influence of the wholesale change in China’s economic structure under socialism, socialist realist paintings pictured a variety of Chinese terrace builders who worked in different areas of mainland China. Along with peasants, the sent-down urban youth groups, ethnic minorities, party cadres, and the People’s Liberation Army (the PLA) appeared in the landscapes of Dazhai spatiality. Unlike the miniscule men in the new national paintings that had been produced during the Great Leap Forward, close-up shots in socialist realist paintings become a popular artistic device for representing labor. Labor was a method for creating value (both use and exchange value), a criterion for the distribution of products (distribution according to labor), and a fundamental source for increasing production. During the Maoist era, labor was also considered to have a magic power to eradicate poisonous social stratification based on
hierarchies between manual and mental work, agriculture and industry, and, finally, city and country; namely, Mao’s three great disparities (san da chabie).

Mao’s idea contained multiple meanings apropos of the division of labor, the spatial mobility of workers, and socialist labor, if there is such a thing as socialist labor. Mao’s policy of sending the urban population out to the countryside resulted in the dismantling of the division of labor in the previous society. For instance, middle and high school students stopped attending school and instead spent their time in the fields with peasants, engaging in the collective laboring process. This labor transfer destroyed the traditional division of labor. The spatial mobility of sent-down urban youth and the manual labor they engaged in were all important to developing the socialist economy under Mao. Therefore, so-called socialist labor did not so much restrict and exploit human nature (as Marx describes in explaining the side-effect of the division of labor under capitalism in Capital 1), as did it emancipate human potential and creativity. Instead, labor was considered to provide a mode of socialist experience through which Chinese people could come to believe that they were living under socialism through socialist methods for engaging in individual and collective labor. Mao regarded labor as a good tool for socialist education because labor could transform the corrupted and petrified minds and bodies of the urban youth who were spoiled by book-learning.

186 Partly because of the social and technical division of labor under capitalism, workers are deprived of opportunities to develop moral and intellectual aptitude since wage laborers repeat simple and automatic tasks.
Mao’s populist and anti-bureaucratic tendencies shaped the dominant notions of labor and highlighted the usefulness of manual labor. Labor became the more important bodily vehicle for possessing revolutionary power, enabling the transformation of people and the whole society as such. After Mao implemented the union of education and productive labor in 1964, the significance of labor was publicized in the political discourses of the communist party. Influenced by socialist realist aesthetics, optimism, revolutionary romanticism, and socialist content, Maoist images beautified and glorified labor and, by using diverse artistic devices and aesthetic protocols, often characterized it as an aesthetic activity.

Filled with the vibrant energy of moving bodies, the musicality of labor played a crucial role in muting the hardship of physical toil and the exploitative structure of socialist labor mobilized in a collective manner. Self-reliance could be achieved by labor itself because of the absence or lack of machinery. According to this scenario, the indefatigable will of so-called iron men, armed with Mao Zedong Thought and revolutionary zeal, substituted for machines. The workforce of China’s huge population was the essential vehicle for fulfilling communism via space. In such circumstances, exploitation and alienation followed upon the hours of manual labor, even when it was voluntarily done. However, Wang Wenbin’s oil painting, titled *Tamping Song* (1962)...

---

187 Mao’s childhood experience, as a son of a middle-class peasant in a small town in Hunan, affects Mao’s idea about labor in the later period.
Figure 47], exemplifies the role of revolutionary folk songs as a means of increasing labor efficiency and motivating laborers. Rooted in indigenous rural culture and forms, folk songs were meant to invoke and inspire the determination and boundless optimism necessary for vaulting China into the ranks of the powerful industrialized nations. To listen to revolutionary songs and to sing the songs collectively became a daily routine for uplifting revolutionary spirit. In Dazhai landscapes, the themes of new folk songs were translated into visual language. Wang’s Tamping Song, which depicts a Dazhai-terrace construction site, is one example of this. It portrays a group of vivacious barefoot teenage girls collaborating to flatten and compact the soil with a heavy, possibly stone-made, tamper tool. The dynamic gravity creates a fascinating tension in the image. Unlike the bird’s eye view, the eye of painter looks up at the work unit, and then up into the wide blue sky. While one girl in the center raises the heavy tamper tool, the other four surround the girl in the center. The movements of the healthy bodies of the teenage girls, their firmly planted legs and outstretched arms tightly holding the ropes of the tamper, generate a tangible corporeal energy. The female laborer who lifts up the temper handles becomes the axis of this dynamic bodily movement of the collaborators. The dynamic force of the balanced, moving bodies sublimes the toil of tamping down the earth into an aesthetic activity or an entertaining sport. In addition, the rising sun dazzling between the two girls on the left creates an earthly halo that flows along the contour of these bodies in the glory of their youth. The upward-looking perspective
turns the toil of physical labor into a theatrical performance, and the construction site into a stage.\textsuperscript{188}

Li Fuyi’s *Morning in the Construction Site* (1974) [Figure 49] is another landscape of Dazhai spatiality that substantiates the distancing effect of socialist realism in illustrating labor. Li brilliantly employs a painterly and compositional device, called *huawai youhua* (the painting outside the painting), which expresses the subject of the painting by its absence.\textsuperscript{189} Rather than representing labor directly, in other words, in a painting about working people who have left for their construction site at the crack of dawn, Li chooses to paint three breakfast-delivery ladies called *mingong* (voluntary workers without pay). One female *mingong* in a yellow shirt is shouting out to someone who is invisible to us, the viewers. The painting alludes to the presence of workers who have already departed and who have not eaten breakfast. What the viewer is able to see is not the laborers, but the selected group of women who fill in for the absence of the former. In order to express labor as joy or leisure, rather than rigor, the artist has picked the self-less and happy volunteer workers as the subject and content of this painting.

\textsuperscript{188} In comparison to Wang’s oil painting, Tian Tian’s 1958 black-and-white photograph [Figure 48] captures the female work unit tamping down the soil in a more realistic and documentary manner. This pictorial reportage does not resonate with a melodious tempo in artistic imagination. Rather the photograph portrays the alienated female workers whose “work becomes external to, and independent of, the worker and an activity in which the worker finds no fulfillment (because he does not produce use-value for himself, but exchange value for somebody else) and the results of his own activity accrue to him only in his leisure,” Paul Craig Roberts, *Alienation and the Soviet Economy*, (New York: Holms and Meier, 1990, 1999), 3.

\textsuperscript{189} The artist told me about this during my interview with him in July, 2012.
Li’s depiction of socialist labor via *huawai youhua* is symptomatic in the historical context of Maoist China where the visualization of its own capitalism is forbidden and the mutated capitalism becomes “a missing or originally repressed representation,” in Slavoj Žižek’s terms. Žižek analyzes a painting titled *Lenin in Warsaw* displaying Nadezhda Kruskaya, Lenin’s wife in bed with a young member of the Komsomol. “The title names the object which is lacking in the field of what is depicted.” If the viewer asks “Where is Lenin?”, in other words, “Where is the object indicated by its title depicted?”, then the viewer, according to Žižek, “mistakenly establishes the same distance between the picture and the title as between the sign and the denoted object, as if the title is speaking about the picture from a kind of ‘objective distance,’ and then to look for its positive correspondence in the picture.” He continues:

But the whole point here is, of course, that in this case the relation between the picture and its title is not the usual one whereby the title corresponds simply to what is depicted. Here the title is on the same surface. It is part of the same continuity as the picture itself….Therefore what must fall out from the picture is not the title, but the object which is replaced by the title which functions as the Freudian *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz*: the representative, the substitute of some

---


191 Ibid., 159.
representation, the signifying element filling out the vacant place of the missing representation (of depiction, that is, of Lenin himself). The field of representation [Vorstellung] is the field of what is positively depicted, but the problem is that everything cannot be depicted. Something must necessarily fall out, ‘Lenin must be in Warsaw,’ and the title takes the place of this void, of this missing, ‘originally repressed’ representation: its exclusion functions as a positive condition for the emergence of what is being depicted (because, if Lenin were not in Warsaw, Nadezhda Krupskaya could not...). If we take the word ‘subject’ in this sense of ‘content,’ we can say that what we have here is precisely the different subject/object. ‘Nadazhda Kruskaya in bed with a young Komsomol member’ is the subject of the picture, ‘Lenin in Warsaw’ is its object.192

Applying an interesting analogy to the argument of this dissertation, the title of the whole Maoist culture is like “capitalism is outside China,” since the de-capitalist utopia of China should be the general title of socialist realist and Maoist visual images. What is depicted in the field of representation is the visual culture of socialist realism and Maoism; in specific, a socialist utopia composed of happy laborers. The missing, and originally repressed, representation is the lived experience of the people, which is incompatible with the title of non-capitalism, and the capitalist self of socialist China,

192 Ibid., 159-160.
which is incapable of being positively registered in the system of socialist realist representation. This representation is something that falls out from what is depicted and cannot be explained without the mutation of capitalism in the domain of China. Capitalism is the object, while the subject of Maoist visual culture is socialist reality.

On the other hand, the importance of the Dazhai landscape by Li, a Korean-Chinese painter, lies in the fact that the oil painting touches on the inter-ethnic relationship between Han national and ethnic minorities such as the Chaoxianzu during the mass movement called “Learn from Dazhai in Agriculture.” His rendering of the three female mingong emphasizes inter-ethnic harmony by including typical characteristics representative of each ethnicity and also by using obvious symbols of each ethnic culture. There are three female workers in this scene – two Chaoxianzu and one Han. The two Chaoxianzu are wearing traditional outfits called hanbok, while the Han worker is in a yellow shirt. One Chaoxian woman is holding a ttwari (鸵리), a chunk of straw or fabric braided in a circle. In the past, it was a Korean custom for people to place a ttwari on the top of the head when carrying a heavy load on the head. In contrast, the Han female worker is holding a shoulder pole (biandan), a sign of Han ethnicity. Li carefully and proportionally presents the ethnic characteristics of the three female voluntary workers, who are from different ethnicities, in order to show how important inter-ethnic cooperation and harmony are in fulfilling the goal to “Learn from Dazhai in Agriculture.” His underlying intention is to demonstrate that the passionate
participation of Chaoxianminzu in the mass movement led by the Han majority was accomplished without the loss of ethnic identity, and even with pride, by Chaoxian mingong and by the artist himself.

It is necessary to pair Lin Maoxiong’s *Water* (1958) and Li Fuyi’s *Morning in the Construction Site* (1974), because these two paintings display common traits of socialist realist paintings by ethnic minority artists. The painterly practice accompanies the process of self-identification, revealing the typicality of their ethnic group. Not all paintings created by non-Han artists are socialist realist or belong to party-art. Artists are allowed to experiment with diverse materials and western and modern styles. But in order to have their paintings called socialist realist, they must portray the stereotypic, often traditional, and timeless features of their own ethnicities. Given this, paintings by ethnic minority artists are self-confessional in the same way that Rey Chow characterizes the literature of ethnic minority writers. They usually espouse the symbols or signs of their ethnic culture in order to meet the external expectations imposed by the party-state. These artists tend to feel the social pressure and respond to the state’s interpellation that asks ethnic minorities to perform in a certain way in order to be acceptable as citizens of the Chinese nation-state. The authenticity of ethnicity should be revealed and articulated in their visual images through typical depictions of ethnic qualities such as facial, physical, skeletal, and cultural characteristics. Because of their self-identifying and self-confessional character, the case of the two Korean-Chinese artists is different from the
case of Han nationals who create paintings portraying ethnic minorities, but who are observers and not themselves ethnic minorities.

**Representing Labor in a Socialist Utopia**

What is the correlation between labor and China’s socialism? How is “socialist” labor distinguished from labor under capitalism? In other words, how do the different social formations of socialism and capitalism – i.e., the socialist model of modernization and economic development and its counterpart under democratic-capitalism – define, produce, intervene in, and imagine labor? How do they culturally manage the instrumentality or function of labor? Karl Marx in *Capital I* explains the importance of surplus labor-time. Surplus labor time is the excess that occurs after the end of the working day, which is filled with the labor-time needed for the worker to create value for himself i.e., his subsistence. The continued existence of the worker is the basis of the capitalist world since surplus labor-time leads to surplus labor. This surplus labor is the condition for creating surplus value for capitalists and for the reproduction of capital. Therefore, “surplus value is merely a congealed quantity of surplus labor-time, nothing but objectified surplus labor; more generally, surplus value is a congealed quantity of so many hours of labor, nothing but objectified labor.”

The surplus value is determined by the surplus part of the working day – surplus labor-time. In this light, “the rate of

---

193 Marx, 325.
surplus value is an exact expression of the degree of exploitation of labor-power by capital or of the worker by the capitalist.” What is noteworthy relevant to China’s socialist economy is the following statement by Marx:

What distinguishes the various economic formations of society – the distinction between for example a society based on slave-labor and a society based on wage-labor – is the form in which this surplus labor is in each case extorted from the immediate producer, the worker.195

Under China’s state socialism or state capitalism, the law of surplus value was exactly the same. But China’s socialist society had a distinctive form for extorting surplus labor from the immediate producer, to use Marx’s words. Imagined surplus value, i.e., high production quotas, fosters competition between provinces, counties, villages, and work units. The reward system of offering red flags, honor, or official recognition (being a model worker), high wages, and privileges induced labor. Being sent to the labor camps was one of the sources for extracting labor from prisoners – from counter-revolutionaries, rightists, capitalist-roaders, spies, and traitors. The militarization of the people was one way to increase the productivity of labor. The

194 Ibid., 326.
195 Ibid., 325.
196 State socialism sees China’s socialism as a social formation led by the socialist state. State capitalism designates China’s socialism as a form of capitalism in which the state becomes the key agent for managing a capitalist economic system in the guise of the state ideology of socialism.

195
centralization of labor power in certain areas and the forced internal migration of labor force also aimed to take advantage of surplus labor, making it more useful. The surplus labor time of the working day became the basic condition for China’s economic development, insofar as it had huge a population and lacked capital. China’s labor-intensive model of development definitely required extended labor time.

Labor under China’s state capitalism was far from labor under socialism. “The state where labor is no longer the condition for the development of the social wealth, where social life is under the direct control of the intellect, and where the production process is stripped of the form of penury and antithesis – all this is none other than Marx’s vision of socialism, and furthermore one of his most explicit statements of that vision, according to Neil Smith. What Marx in fact demonstrated was “the way in which the development of one form of capital implants the seed of socialism within the womb of capitalism. The equalization process reaches a new high.”

Then how did Maoist China, which had bypassed the capitalist “stage” in theory, redefine the nature of labor to ultimately achieve communism? If there is such a thing as socialist labor, the unique quality of the socialist labor comprises the negativity of socialism toward capitalism; for instance, labor must de-alienate Chinese workers whose bodies and body parts should not be quantified, measured, and dissected in order to fit

---

197 Smith, 118.

198 Ibid.
into the evolutionary process of labor for providing exchange value, surplus value, profits and the wealth of a few capitalists. Socialist labor does not socially function in accordance with the capitalist division of labor. Socialist labor must not be consumed and exploited for accumulating capital under private property ownership. Labor must serve for the common good of socialism. The bottom line is that labor is to undo capitalism and establish a negativity of labor.

The glory of labor was ubiquitous in Maoist images. The Maoist culture for beautifying labor began around 1942 when the CCP leaders adopted the Soviet Stakhanovites movement for encouraging people to emulate the young Soviet coal miner Aleksei Stakhanov (1906-77), for the purpose of increasing productivity. Zhao Zhankui, who had worked in an agricultural tool factory, became the first Chinese Stakhanovite during the Great Production Campaign. The cult of moralizing, glorifying, and aestheticizing labor was actually a common characteristic of Sino-Soviet socialist culture. The socialist revolution was inseparable from the party’s strategy of arranging and mixing myriad kinds of laboring processes. The wide spectrum of labor materialized in the dynamic coordination of constructive and destructive, violent and playful, physical and mental, individual and collective, leisure-like and disciplinary activities of bodies. The spatial movement of bodies was arranged and regulated in a

---

199 The Chinese translation of the term Stakhanovites (Sitahannov yundongzhé) first appeared in October 1936 when the CCP headquarters was located in Baoan, Yu Miin-ling, “Labor is Glorious: Model Laborers in the PRC,” China Learns from the Soviet Union, 1949-Present, 234.
time-based sequence of bodily movement. The visual analyses in this section do not so much argue for how Chinese artists conformed to the Maoist definition of labor as a way to show their loyalty to Chairman Mao in their paintings, as it illustrates the ways in which the mediation of art-making practice, under the influence of socialist realist aesthetics, allowed Chinese artists to avoid the direct re-presentation of labor in their arts.

The corpus of Maoist images, ranging from oil paintings to propaganda posters, constituted the idea of socialist labor through varied visual representations of laborers. This encompassed female tractor drivers, ethnic beauties, and male heroic model workers (laodong mofan). Here, physical bodies as the site of the Maoist ideal, virtue, morality, work ethics, and gender-formation played a key role in imprinting a certain idealized conception of labor. The female bodies of ethnic minorities, and of the educated urban youth, (especially the young girls who were sent down to the countryside), sustained the classical western and academic notions of beauty, which were allegedly incarnated in female bodies. Such bourgeois conception, embedded in the painting/drawing practice of observing (nude) female models, was introduced to China in the early twentieth century. While the conventional approach to women as the object of art remained intact, the Maoist socioeconomic and political projects imbued the content of female images with a socialist sprit. This new type of socialist women, the so-
called iron girls, emerged at the interesting juncture where art for art’s sake (or art for beauty) and art for the party-state intersected.

Since labor was visualized against the backdrop of a de-capitalist utopia, the socialist laborers were depicted as being free from capitalist maladies and pathologies. The wide spectrum of the phenomenology of capitalism (and China’s state capitalism) included not only the direct impacts of the market economy – with private property, competition, exploitation, alienation, unemployment, layoffs, inequality and polarization, – but also the byproducts of mental and emotional symptoms such as depression, chronic fatigue, uncertainty for the future, and nervous breakdowns. The counter-discourse of anti-capitalist Maoist utopianism replaced the whole range of capitalist maladies with the prettiness of socialist reality. Uncertainty was replaced by optimism and happiness. Ill and exhausted bodies turned into the young and healthy bodies. Unemployment did not exist in socialist China where everybody had a job. Competition, the way the inner nature of capital manifests itself, was converted into friendly and humanist cooperation. In this way, the aesthetics of socialist realism in Maoist images buttressed the utopian vision of socialist China.

As Leonid Heller summarizes in the basic conceptual schema of socialist realism [Figure 50], a tripartite set and categories – i.e., ideological commitment, party-

---

200 Fredric Jameson’s essay “Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture” inspired me in developing this idea. His article is published in Social Text, No. 1, (winter 1979): 130-148.
mindedness, and national-popular spirit – shaped the main principles of socialist realism. Truthfulness, optimism, activeness, and humanism supported the major principles under the unity of realism and romanticism, and content and form. These interactive and mutually complementary elements of socialist realist aesthetics created new types of production and social relations in Maoist images. The principles of socialist realism reinforced the visual effects of Maoist images in conveying the idea of socialist labor. The cross-cultural translation of Soviet socialist realism into the native discourse of Maoist aesthetics did not create something totally new from scratch. Likewise, the pre-1949 cultural discourse of “biomedicine, social Darwinism, and global athletics to celebrate the strength, masculinity, virility and healthiness of the active body” was mixed with the nation’s power.201 This bodily notion of labor was encoded in the iconography of socialist laborers. The diachronic and synchronic approaches to body images depicted a historical continuity in the public use of human bodies. The state-led body politics had continued along with China’s modernization process, which goes through the entire twentieth century.

**Moralizing Labor: Model Workers**

---

A set of Maoist vices and virtues, for instance, the sin of selfishness and the virtue of self-denial, provided the canons of everyday morality and the governing principles for social action. Maoist images applied such a morality to the visualization of socialist labor as well. The moral schema provided criteria for translating moral values into visual languages, including body language, behavior and dress codes, facial expressions, and social and production relations. After 1958, Mao’s combinatory principle of “revolutionary realism and revolutionary romanticism” rendered labor as an aesthetic activity, or even as play. Otherwise, propaganda posters depicted labor as a social and national duty and as a historical mission by showing heroic protagonists who completed their duties under unfavorable conditions such as storms, sickness, and family emergencies. Distinguished from revolutionary realism (which was similar to the anti-Japanese realism that Mao conceptualized in the 1940s), revolutionary romanticism was used for materializing the present moment of social reality in which socialist workers – the corporeal embodiment of Maoist virtue and work ethics – devoted themselves to on-going socialist construction. Typical images of socialist laborers included the masses following in the footsteps of model workers. These heroic model workers were widely known through the propaganda machine of the party.

For example, in a poster titled *Learn from Camrade Liu Yingjun: Carrying forward the Highest Instruction* (1964) [Figure 51], Yin Rongsheng portrayed the hero, martyr, and model worker Liu Yingjun, who represented the Maoist morality of sacrifice, boundless
energy, and tireless work. In the image, this living incarnation of socialist ethics is carrying a board on which the words of Mao are written. Invoking both the spirit of the old fool who moved the mountains and Chinese Stakhanovism, the catchphrase says, “xiading juexin, bupa xisheng, paichu wannan, quzhengqu shengli” (Make a firm resolution, do not be afraid of sacrifice, remove obstacles, and fight for victory). This is literally Mao’s maxim. The Dazhai-style landscape in the background implies that the masses, the terrace-builders, are following this heroic man in order to electrify China’s agricultural development. The intended message of the poster is to induce massive participation in building up the terraced fields for the people’s welfare; just like the model worker, Liu. While the text on the board hanging around Liu’s neck explicitly delivers a didactic public campaign message, the altruistic model worker’s exaggeratedly gigantic body and face show his virility.

Compared to Yin’s poster, Chao Xinlin’s Agriculture: Learn from Dazhai to Make Great Changes (1975) [Figure 52] depicts an anonymous young female laborer who is carrying grain in a cart. The teenage girl with her sleeves rolled up looks immersed in her labor. The smiling young girl is attentively looking in the direction the cart goes. She and the other women laborers in the background are wearing working clothes that do not express her femininity. The de-feminized girl-worker seems to anticipate the bright future of communism as she accelerates its arrival through her daily labor. Both Liu Yingjun and the anonymous young girl are depicted as hard workers. They represent
the Maoist virtues and moral values of hard work, frugality, self-discipline, diligence, and honesty that the Chinese workers in Africa promoted in the local work camps. Encoded in the visual languages of these Maoist images, the ascetic values of Maoism contain “a wide ideological structure of [socialism] and elements of a comprehensive world view of [Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought] within which the prescribed values became meaningful.”²⁰² In this way, socialism provided people with a moralistic superiority, even though the material conditions of their lives did not satisfy their needs. In terms of morality, they were considered better than people in the other league of capitalism. Maoist asceticism therefore operated like the Freudian reality principle that enabled people to endure their current hardships, pains, and displeasures for the sake of future moments of happiness, joy, and comfort. This collective psychological mechanism kept asking of the Chinese people that they sacrifice themselves for the noble common good. It was a method for pushing the people to work harder but it gave no clue of their being exploited or alienated, even though the delayed moment of pleasure would never come.

**Tractors, the Socialist Machinery**

The relationship between workers and the means of production is very important in deciding whether socialism is really existing in China or not. As I argued in

²⁰² Meisner, *Marxism, Maoism and Utopianism*, 121.
the introduction, losing the ability to control the conditions for the realization of the people’s labor is the defining characteristic of capitalism. During the socialist construction of the Maoist era, China’s socialism did not escape this historically determined path of depriving workers of the right to freely use and manage the means of production. Yet socialist realist images frequently illustrated a harmonious unity between workers and the means of production – especially people’s ideal relationship to machinery such as tractors.

The appearance of machinery both improves and troubles human life in the modern era. Marx emphasizes the monstrosity of machines through the mechanization of the capitalist production process. The invention of modern technology devours and replaces human labor, expels workers from factories, increases surplus population (“reserve army of labor”) and increasingly facilitates their exploitation by capitalists. Machinery, constant capital, is also one of the sources of surplus value in maximizing productivity.\textsuperscript{203} Marx basically characterizes machines as trouble-makers, partly because the most advanced instrument of labor causes the division of labor, forcing workers to do simple and repetitive jobs like automatons. Machinery is therefore seen as destroying human nature. Chinese artists’ approach to machinery was quite different from Marx’s

\textsuperscript{203} Machinery has “constant capital” in Marx’s terms -- the total value of the means of production in use at a specific point in time.
view, in that socialist realism redefined this human and non-human relationship from the perspective of romanticism.

The appearance of tractors (tuolaji) was a groundbreaking moment in China’s agricultural history. The mechanization of agriculture had been proceeding since 1949. Li Qi’s new-year print (nianhua), Peasant and Tractor (nongmin he tulaji) [Figure 53] visually describes the historic and sensational moment when peasants encountered modern machinery. The local landscape depicts a master worker (gongren shifu) in a pair of blue overalls introducing a red tractor to the villagers. The diverse reactions and responses to this most advanced tool of agricultural labor are lively expressed. The wonder of such modern technology alludes to the new phase of China’s agricultural development, where tractors will play a pivotal role in spurring productive forces. The appearance of tractors simultaneously invokes anxiety in the backward peasants who are used to traditional means of production such as cattle. In this scene, in the left corner a peasant is standing next to his ox and wiping away sweat with a white handkerchief. He is holding a traditional tool of agricultural labor – a plow. The peasant looks embarrassed in the presence of the strange modern machine. His reaction to the tractor implies the perplexity and anxiety of the people confronting a new form of the means of production. Overall the people’s curiosity about the unknown signifies both fear and expectation, and anticipates the transformation in their laboring process and agrarian lives and their hopes for the benefits that a radical break from the past might possibly
bring to them. Marx explains that revolution in the means of production leads to revolution in the social mode of production. The portrayal of peasants reveals a new change in the means of production. It embodies the transitional moment when the application of animal power, such as oxen, becomes old-fashioned and tractors are instead expected to save humanity by promising a miraculous future of bountiful surpluses for China’s agricultural production.

The juxtaposition of tractors and female peasants is a popular theme in Maoist images. In the early 1950s, Russian-origin images of tractor drivers were prevalent along with the construction of Soviet-style state-farms (guoying nongchang). Tractor drivers and the spectacular geometry of long furrows symbolized the mechanization and modernization of socialist countries in agriculture. The juxtaposition of the human and non-human -- e.g., a female tractor driver and a Han-proletariat working with a tractor -- became the indicator of modernized agricultural production. Female tractor drivers, in particular, became a popular cultural icon for promoting women’s liberation and their new roles under socialism. Wu Fan (b. 1924)’s woodcut print, *The Cuckoo’s Cry* (buguniao jiaole) (1956) [Figure 54] depicts an iconic girl tractor-driver. The lyrical scenery portrays a young girl looking at a cuckoo flying away. The tractor beside her suggests a situation in which the girl is distracted by the beautiful singing of a bird while driving.

---

204 Marx, *Capital Vol. 1*, 602.

205 The print is displayed at the Second National Woodblock Print Exhibition opened in Beijing 1956.
the tractor to plow the soil. Rather than associating the female laborer with direct productiveness, the assemblage of the girl and tractor negates the hardship of labor, thanks not only to the advantage of new engineering, but also to the romantic presence of the girl in harmony with nature in the connection between the animal and the human being.

Socialist realist and Maoist images embodied a unique way of revolutionizing laboring process and workforce partly by suggesting a new type of human and non-human relationship between laborers and the means of production – such as nature, land, cattle and seeds, raw materials, and machinery – in the visual illustrations of mechanization, collectivization, and rural and urban industrialization. By often calling tractors “red oxen,” the metaphoric expression of half-animal and half-machine liquidated what Marx calls the “demonic power” of the “mechanical monster.” In line with this, the propaganda images associated women, i.e., “steel girls,” with machinery in factory settings. The visual representation of humanist mechanization was intended to mobilize the potential workforce of women for the purpose of accelerating industrialization. To pair women with machines in a harmonious union encoded the structural dependency of agricultural development on industrialization and vice versa. In order to set up collectivization in the countryside, the mechanization of agriculture was indispensable, in that the latter allowed for the organization on an unprecedentedly

206 Marx, 503.
large scale of a huge agricultural population. To produce tractors (necessary for the mechanization) required a high level of technology and modern engineering techniques that were centralized in city. Therefore, urban industrialization had to be accomplished and had to be advanced enough to provide the tractors needed for implementing collectivization in the countryside. On the other hand, industrialization was impossible without the surplus value that was being extracted from the countryside. Therefore, the emergence of tractors, especially those made in China, symbolically indicated a certain level of industrial development achieved by China.207

Going back to Wu Fan’s print, the Chinese artist envisions a woman in nature by using green colors without any recognizable signs of a political and economic agenda. His print captures a moment of pause in a romantic mood within the flow of the working day. The poetic idleness betrays that Wu approaches the object of his art, the girl, without deeply engaging in the politicization of art; even though this apolitical print is deeply political in terms of its historical meaning, as I analyzed above. Wu’s image does not show a strong “tendentiousness,” – an overt expression of the artist’s social, political, ideological, and moral relations to and preconceptions about reality from the perspective of Marx and Engel’s realism. Rather, Wu’s print reveals that his

207 Tractors later become the signifier of China’s economic self-sufficiency and success when the country sent native tractors to its allies in Africa in the 1960s and 1970s.
portrayal of the anonymous girl tractor-driver results from his own idealization of the female model.

Zheng Shengtian (b.1938)’s oil painting, *Irrigation by Feet* (1958) [Figure 55] similarly shows a romantic approach to the primitive form of China’s productive force – so-called industrious modernization. The working condition in which men themselves must become the tool of motive power is highly romanticized. To accelerate socialist development, China considered speed extremely crucial. While the country had neither infrastructure – such as roads, railways, bridges, sewers, dams, electrical grids, and water supply – nor advanced technology and science, the labor power of China’s huge population became the primary source for spurring production and creating capital. In order to achieve socialism and, beyond that, communism as Mao had planned, Chinese laborers had to work longer and harder. However, Zheng, like Wu, attempts an apolitical interpretation of labor, overlooking the hidden political economy that makes such a working condition possible. Smiling adolescents are idly spending time half-working and half-playing. The men are described as a mere motive power, applying the natural motive power of water. The boys are not portrayed as workers or operator, subordinated to the economic system of socialist China. Zhen instead expresses the rustic charm of manual labor – using their feet to irrigate under the influence of naturalism. The relaxed and individualized bodies of the teenage boys differ from the

208 Maybe Zheng uses the naturalism skills that he had learned in Hangzhou Academy prior to 1949.
masculine bodies of the working class, in that the latter emphasizes the intensity of manual labor and labor time as a representative of the collective body of China’s productive force. The back views of working girls on the right barely stresses the toil of bringing water to dry rice paddies through the continuous and disciplinary movement of body parts. The beautiful worksite of socialist construction turns the laboring process into a happy moment of picnicking, as the snacks in the basket in the foreground imply.

The aestheticization of primitive productive forces betrays Maoist China’s strong desire for the great leap from a backward agricultural country to an advanced industrialized country. Just like the cultural icon of the tractor drivers, the theme of “irrigation by feet” conveys the romantic view of China’s backward productive force. While Zhen’s oil painting appears to be apolitical, the poster image, Benefits of Collectivization (1956) [Figure 56], utilizes its popular theme for the political purpose of advertising the good points of collectivization. Naturalism acquires a strong political connotation when it is applied to the public poster. Benefits of Collectivization (1956) uses the snapshot of peasants in straw hats pedaling the manual irrigation equipment. The advanced technology and science that can automatize the irrigation system has not yet reached the countryside in China where labor power is the main method of irrigation for preventing natural disasters. While introducing the benefits of collectivization, the poster introduces a wide range of labor tools and innovative techniques, such as “the double-wheel, blade plough, double-cropping, and close planting” introduced by the
government in 1956. In contrast to the industrialization of agriculture under capitalism, the landscape of socialist agricultural production proposes a distinctive way of engaging human labor power with the means of production. The differentiation in farming tools and agricultural skills does not alienate workers from the means of production as does the capitalist production process. Under this backward mode of production, the motive power of the tools is yet within the control of men. This case is unlike that of machines whose motive power is often independent of men (like animal, water, wind and so on). The barefoot laborers irrigating water with their feet generate a romantic ambience that supports the quasi-socialist aura of the scientific and systemic modernization in China’s agriculture.

**Music, Dance, Labor and Ethnic Beauties**

Male Han-Chinese artists’ views of ethnic minorities tended to associate ethnic beauties with music, dance, and exotic sexuality. This prevalent unconscious of the male spectator penetrated into the visual representation of female laborers who were ethnic minorities. Painters applied the image of music, the reformed revolutionary folk song, to the visualization of socialist labor. This artistic application also reflected China’s dominant revolutionary culture, in which folk songs, rooted in indigenous and rural

---


210 Marx, 493.
cultural forms, were intended to “invoke and inspire the determination and boundless optimism necessary for vaulting China into the ranks of powerful industrialized nations.” Party cadres Zhou Yang and Guo Moruo collected new folk songs (xin minge) in unprecedented quantities during the Great Leap Forward and several million pieces were collected in Shanghai alone in early 1958. Two thousand of them are published. To listen to revolutionary songs – for instance, “Fifty Thousand Spindles,” “Racing with John Bull,” “Making Shanghai a Safe and Orderly City,” “Pigs as Big as Elephants,” “Learning to Read,” “Socialism is Good,” and “The East Wind Prevails,” as well as “The East is Red” – and to sing them collectively became a daily routine for uplifting revolutionary zeal and productivity. This musical instrument of labor was meant to induce a certain praxis from a wide scope of the social strata under socialism, including factory, handcraft, and office workers, students, housewives, and cooperative farmers. The titles of Maoist visual images illustrate how Chinese painters conveyed the revolutionary romanticism of socialist realism in musical and poetic languages. The rhythmic fluidity of musicality was also absorbed into the visual expressions of socialist labor through the melodic, sporty, and energetic movements of working bodies. Combined with optimism, the musicality emitted a convivial and hilarious atmosphere, thus beautifying the working conditions of Chinese socialism.

211 King, 53.

212 Ibid., 52.
Sun Jingbo’s oil painting *The New Song of Ah Xi* (1972) [Figure 57] depicts a group of Ah Xi women from Yi minzu (Yi national) laboring in rice paddies in Yunnan. What is noteworthy is the way the de-alienation of socialist laborers is simultaneously intertwined with the ethnographic and art practices of Chinese painters. They incorporate the ethnic features of costumes, music, and dance into the pictorial record of reality in a revolutionary development. Sun worked for the Yunnan branch of the Chinese Artists Association from 1964 to 1976. While he was living in this exotic place, Sun observed ethnic beauties doing rice-planting as a group. As he painted it, the backbreaking toil of rice-planting, which repeats the physical act of stooping down and standing under the scorching sun, merges into a melodious unfolding of labor time. The visualized music plays an important role in revealing the ethnicity of the female workers in their outfits. Labor and music intermingle in the scene. The sun beautifies the nature of socialist labor through the medium of the ethnic beauties with their attractive looks and music. He also emphasizes the site-specificity of Yunnan where the Ah Xi nationality lives, thus insinuating the artist’s location in an “undiscovered” and “foreign” land inside China. The outsider and insider perspectives interact with one another. The ethnographic eye, which is also the male gaze, leads to the complex process of the self-identification of professional artists, seeing the female model of ethnic beauty as the object of their art. In sharp contrast to the androgynous and masculine images of the Chinese socialist workers who appear in posters, the pursuit of feminine beauty is
allowed in depicting ethnic minority female workers. The traditional notions of feminine beauty – prettiness and girlishness – are incorporated into the picture of the de-alienated socialist laborers in glory of youth. Here the female body, the ambivalent semiotic mixture of the primitive, ethnic, colonized, liberated, militarized, and sexualized, turns into the vehicle of labor power and agricultural production.

The aesthetics of socialist realism are used to redefine the social relation of socialist China, replacing the capitalist division of labor. Maoist images superimpose a military image upon female militia workers. Images such as Pan Shixun’s We are Walking the High Road (women zouzai dalushang) (1964) [Figure 58] portray women workers marching with their “arms” – holding picks, shovels, carrying poles, and barrows, whenever earth and sand have to be moved for infrastructure construction. The title of Pan’s painting is the same as that of the popular marching song, whose refrain is “Forward, Forward… Toward Victory.” The oil painting insinuates the dramatic moving image of socialist revolutionary workers in progress. Here the liberated Tibetan women, also newly discovered labor power, become the heroic protagonists of socialist construction. They join the road construction for building up the infrastructure of the Chinese nation-state. In Pan’s painting, the popular socialist realist theme of marching people overlaps with the Tibetan girls walking hand in hand on their way to work. Pan skillfully selects Maoist iconography of the time, such as “the liberation of Tibet,” and
mixes it with the military images of revolutionary songs and road construction. The set of socialist realist themes epitomizes the spirit of the Maoist era.

The detailed descriptions of embroidered ethnic costumes and the strikingly tanned dark skin of Tibetan girls depict the typical features of Zangzu (Tibetans). The hearty glow, smiling faces, and lively gait of Tibetan girls walking side by side and singing the revolutionary song together accentuate the vibrant, enthusiastic, and optimistic stance of the female workers on the Tibetan Plateau. The idealized beauty of Tibetan women veils the traumatic core of China’s fundamental antagonism between different ethnicities. The pictorial representation of Tibetans silences the violent state power exercised during collectivization. To the semi-nomadic people who have lived in the dry plateau for generations and used it for grazing land without farming, collectivization and modernization can be a thorny process. Pan however projects happiness and optimism upon Tibetans, thanks to the socialist realist mode of representation.

A distant isolated region such as the Tibetan Plateau becomes the ideal place for professional artists in that they can experiment with a variety of “forbidden” art styles – the characteristics of capitalist and bourgeois art that feature an eroticized view of women as the objects of sexuality. The women of ethnic minorities become the loci where the bourgeois sense of femininity remains intact. Gentle, shy, and lovely women appear in the depictions of ethnic minority workers. Zhu Naizheng, who spent twenty
one years in the Plateau, paints two Tibetan *jianmei* (beautiful women) in *Golden Season* (*jinse de jijie*) [Figure 59] during 1962-63. In his painting, the Tibetan women winnow the highland barley produced in the Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau. The stand-still image shows the women lifting the winnowing baskets high. Zhu positions the ethnic beauties against the light so that the shadowy and dark female bodies contrast with the relatively bright background. The compositional features place the huge figures of rustic charm against the wide-open sky, highlighting the romantic mood that dominates the local scenery of agricultural production. Their skirts and long hair are fluttering in the breeze. Their bodily postures with upward outstretched arms make this laboring process a moment of romantic idleness. It presents Tibetan workers as if they are mysterious women in the middle of dancing, while their hidden faces remain them anonymous. The overall atmosphere is so romanticized that the viewer hardly feels the sense of alienation. Such a portrayal of Tibetan female laborers exemplifies the persisting notion of feminine beauty in ethnic minority bodies, compared to the highly militarized images of Han women.\(^{213}\) The strong effect of romanticism results in de-alienating laborers in the visual and the imaginary. The socialist laborers depicted here are far away from workers being

\(^{213}\) The broad militarization of civilian life began after 1964. “The state-sponsored military training flourished so the masculine image of women combatants holding a rifle at her side became a dominant mode of visualizing urban and peasant women. The military training comprised “practicing for combat, marching through fields carrying crude rifles or sometimes hoes, as a substitute on their shoulders. Even in nursery schools, young children were trained for armed battle in defense of their motherland; instead of simply being taught body movement during physical education, they were issued wood sticks to use as rifles and taught games such as “Little people’s militia,” “small air force pilots,” and “learning to be the People’s Liberation Army,”” Emily Honig, “Maoist Mappings of Gender: Reassessing the Red Guards,” *Chinese Femininities, Chinese Masculinities: a Reader,* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 262.
alienated from themselves, their own bodies, external nature, their mental life, and their human life. The dancing workers seem to have nothing to do with the people whose life activity, labor, appears only as a means to satisfy their needs; that is, to make a living. Life does not appear only as a means of life in the landscape of socialist realism.

To conclude this chapter, my argument has demonstrated the ways in which socialist realism serves the spatial construction of socialism, shaping the public perception of socialism as a reality. The traditional paintings of socialist realist landscapes embody the ideals of the Great Leap Forward in representing the flow of capital, its circulation, and centralization fixed in space. Veiling the economic structure of internal colonialism, the aesthetics of socialist realism convert the exchange value of Chinese commodities into the use value of an imagined socialist utopia via the medium of space. On the other hand, the social production of nature and Dazhai spatiality encodes the laboring process of socialist workers. Socialist workers are portrayed as abstract or de-alienated, owing to diverse artistic devices and socialist realist aesthetic protocols. This redefines the notion of socialist labor and a new type of social/production relations. Ethnic minorities meanwhile become a method for Chinese professional artist to express bourgeois notions of feminine beauty against a public discourse that militarizes women’s labor power. This visual representation of female laborers results in reinforcing the utopian images of China’s working conditions. All of these Maoist art-cultural productions end up dislocating China outside of the orbit of global capitalism,
despite China’s mutated capitalism and the country’s inner connection with the new world order of Empire and transnational capitalism. Chapter Three examines how the aesthetic principle of typicality shapes socialist subjectivity in China’s plastic arts during the Maoist regime. Chapter One has discussed space on the inter-state level against the backdrop of socialist globalization/transnational capitalism. Chapter Two has focused on the space of the Chinese nation-state and the domestic economic structure of internal colonialism under socialist commodity production and exchange. Finally, Chapter Three sheds light on socialist subjectivity, the atomic unit of social space.
CHAPTER THREE

Typicality and the Fantasy of Socialism

Two anonymous soldiers sit together. The older soldier is playing the flute. The younger soldier is leaning against his comrade and listening to the melodies that the old veteran is making. In this way, Pan He’s sculpture *Arduous Times* (1956-57) [Figure 63] commemorates the historical event called “the Hainan Liberation,” which occurred in 1950 on Hainan Island. The sculpture was intended to memorialize the Civil War through the poetic embodiment of the interpersonal relationship between two People’s Liberation Army soldiers. As the title implies, the times that they supposedly went through together were clearly arduous; however, the sculpture’s visual representation of wartime is peaceful and even playful. What underlying principle is applied to Pan He’s sculpture in portraying memories of the past? Why did the sculptor pick two anonymous soldiers to commemorate the Liberation? In what ways did typicality, in coordination with socialist realism, present history as the history of class struggle? How was the aesthetic canon of Marx’s and Engels’s realism, the typical, transvalued to serve Maoist ideals through the personified abstractions of Chinese plastic arts? What did such Maoist plastic arts intend to convey in terms of the formation of socialist subjectivity? This chapter is designed to answer these questions.
Debate on the Typical

Compared to socialist realism, the typical (dianxing, 典型) has a relatively long history. It appears to be the essential component of Marx’s and Engels’s criticism of realism in the nineteenth century. Friedrich Engels (1820-1895), for example, discussed the typical in his letter to Margaret Harkness in 1888. For Engels, the typical was not only a criterion for appraising the English writer’s novel, but also a general principle for writing realist literary pieces. In his letter Engels states that:

Your Mr. Arthur Grant is a masterpiece. If I have anything to criticize, it would be that perhaps after all, the tale is not quite realistic enough. Realism, to my mind, implies, besides truth of detail, the truthful reproduction of typical characters under typical circumstances. Now your characters are typical enough, as far as they go; but the circumstances which surround them and make them act, are not perhaps equally so. In the “City Girl” the working class figures are a passive mass unable to help itself and not even making any attempt at striving to help itself.¹

As addressed above, the typical aimed to seek a truth (zhenshi). It was intended to guide writers to reproduce truthful, therefore typical, characters in realist novels. More

broadly, typicality was the operational rule for selecting and plotting characters, circumstances, and the reaction of characters to their circumstances. Rather than describing passive and helpless wage-laborers, which might reflect the more factual reality of nineteenth-century Victorian England, the typical enabled writers like Harkness to create a desirable, and obviously value-laden, image of a working class with class consciousness. The truthfulness of typical characters under typical circumstances could differ depending on who decided what truth was. From the perspective of Marxism, truthfulness was not what the bourgeois capitalists claimed as truth. Rather, it was the truth of the working class as a socio-economic and political group. It was not a truth about individuals disconnected from the capitalist mode of production. Truthfulness excluded especially those who remained largely passive, helpless, and depressed because of unemployment or the possibility of unemployment. The truthful reproduction of typical characters under typical circumstances largely meant depicting the progressive and victorious human figures leading the class struggle. The original meaning of typicality thus was linked with a proactive image of the working class – and more generally, with the self-empowering subject. Moreover, such a range of typical characters of the working class could exclude undesirable characters, such as skeptical, complex, traumatized and schizophrenic factory workers. In this way, the Marxist outlook in nineteenth-century realism foreshadowed the disappearance of the “middle-characters” in Maoist revolutionary plays, ballets, and films, and of visual images in
which people were depicted as either purely heroes or villains. When combined first with socialist realism and then with Mao’s revolutionary mass culture, typicality was transvalued to reproduce a certain type of socialist subjectivity.

Going back to nineteenth-century England, the reality that the working class confronted was considerably inhuman, due to the influence of expanding capitalism and the ever-increasing scale of industrialization. In the context of the manuscripts and books of Marx and Engels, including Capital 1, the typical that Engels had in mind was meant to expose the miserable working and living conditions of factory workers and peasants in the most industrialized country in the world. The goal of typicality was to educate the working class, especially the proletariat, by providing them with knowledge about how the capitalist economic system operated against them. It ultimately aimed to drive the working class to transform the exploitative conditions of the capitalist production process and to sever the never-ending circle of capital’s reproduction. It was believed that this single precept of realism could prevent the working class from realizing that they themselves “produced capital and all its accumulations,” to use Jameson’s words.²

Thus capitalists’ exploitation and the resistance of the exploited against oppression became the basic plot for telling a revolutionary history in which the typical

² Jameson, Representing Capital, 142.
partook. Typicality was oriented to focus on antagonistic production relations under capitalism, and to attack the capitalist mode of production. The constitutive elements of realism were largely class, class antagonism, class struggle, contradiction, and the history of class struggle. Typicality was involved in verbal and visual representations of those key components through its illustration of a potential revolutionary power. As a result, the proto-socialist realist principle provided a visual and narrative device that designated individuals as the representatives of the class to which they belonged. This led to a sort of editing process that produced simplified, generalized, exaggerated, and reductive caricatures for the purpose of representing the substance of being working class. Other factors of identification such as nationality, gender, race, age, religion, ethnicity, and citizenship became less important. These elements were merged into the idea of classes. Class appeared to be the most defining component of identification and the most conclusive condition of human existence. Combined with socialist realism, the typical embodied idealized human types and typology – fully enlightened, determined, devoted, and heroic revolutionary classes. The ideological impact of this single precept, the typical, influenced the people and their lives in Maoist China to the extent that they were exposed to a tremendous amount of didactic images. Such images were intended to teach their audience how to be typical peasants, workers, soldiers, party cadres, ethnic minorities, and citizens; and more generally, how to be heroic socialist subjects who acted in typical ways under typical circumstances.
In the Soviet Union, the meaning of the typical was discussed again after the Nineteenth Party Congress in 1952. G.M. Malenkov, (1902-1988) who succeeded Andrei Zhdanov (1896-1948) as the cultural czar of the Stalinist regime, proposed a new understanding of typicality for Soviet art and literature. The typical, as Igor Golomstock put it, originally was to show “the shoots of the new life bursting through the unattractive features of the old world.” Drawing on that, Malenkov in 1952 confirmed this characteristic of typicality, which according to him was not a “statistical average” (i.e., not the most widespread). It was “not what there [was] more or less of in life, but what [corresponded] to the essence of the given social force, regardless of its arithmetical frequency”; the typical was about “the most exceptional.” In line with revolutionary romanticism, the typical was to be used to construct the mythic dimension of reality in revolutionary development, as conceptualized by Maxim Gorky (1868-1936), the father of socialist realism. It also aimed at invoking a wish-fulfilling power that could realize what the communist leader said. Thus the typical provided an ideological apparatus to make the words of the leader a reality, actualizing “a new stage” and “a turning point in history.”

---


4 Ibid., 189-190.

5 Ibid., 189.
revolution, and human character were all created by the core principle of typicality in this historical context.

The contemporaneity of typicality was crucial because of the strong connection between the typical and party-mindedness (*partiinost*) in envisioning social reality in accordance with the recent party line. As Boris Groys writes, “the portrayal of the typical [referred] to the visual realization of still-emerging party objectives, the ability to intuit new currents among the party leadership, to sense which way the wind [was] blowing. More precisely, it [was] the ability to anticipate the will of Stalin, who [was] the real creator of reality.”

In other words, the creation of typical arts accompanied a process in which artists identified and fused their inner realities with the will of the party and Stalin in order to simulate a model reality. The question of the typical, therefore, was a political question, as Groys argues, in that “artists’ inability or unwillingness to select the ‘correct’ typical could indicate their political disagreement with the party and Stalin at some subconscious level.” The typical was totally incorporated into party-mindedness or Stalin’s will itself. In this light, Groys argues:

> The mimesis of socialist realism is the mimesis of Stalin’s will, the artist’s emulation of Stalin, the surrender of their artistic egos in exchange for the collective efficacy of the project in which they participate. “The typical” of

---


7 Ibid., 52.
socialist realism is Stalin’s dream made visible, a reflection of his imagination – an imagination that was perhaps not as rich as that of Salvador Dali, but was far more efficacious.”  

Similarly, the typical was a political matter in China. Chinese artists’ efforts to merge their egos with Mao Zedong Thought revealed the coordination of typicality and Maoism. Professional artists attempted to create a desirable reality, worldview, and history in accordance with the CCP’s shifting policies and Mao’s short-term and long-term agendas. However, the typical did not confine itself to the sphere of politics. It was also deeply involved in the socialist economy through the visualization of an imagined surplus value and dramatic increases in productive forces and labor power. Achieving high productivity was a way of proving political righteousness and loyalty to the party or Mao. But what Groys overlooked is how the typical served the purpose of establishing the pseudo-opposition between socialism and capitalism and how the typical, in conjunction with revolutionary romanticism and party-mindedness, converted the rules of capital into the wish-fulfilling and imaginary world of socialism. Drawing on Groys’s argument, it is necessary to examine how the representation of typical figures under typical circumstances facilitated the anti-capitalist cognitive mapping in which people perceived themselves as living under socialism through identity and memory politics.

8 Ibid., 53.
In 1956, George Lukács (1885-1971), a Marxist scholar and philosopher, linked economy with the problems of Soviet socialist realism, which encompassed the issues of the typical and revolutionary romanticism. In his critique of Soviet literature, he argued that the “economic subjectivism” of Stalin caused a predicament because Soviet socialist realism ignored “objective facts” and research on the Soviet economy. What Lukács called economic subjectivism is prevalent in Soviet literature. According to Lukács, economic subjectivism did not reflect solid research on the Soviet Union’s national economy, which was too backward to be communist. By nullifying the official claim that communism was imminent in the Stalinist Soviet Union, Lukács contended that the dogmatism of Soviet literature led to the mechanical application of political concepts to art. Therefore, Soviet literature in general was not a form of socialist realism, but of socialist naturalism. This naturalism, a code word for Soviet socialist realism, was criticized for failing to portray the totality of society with its “dynamic contradictions of social life.”9 A mechanical, propagandist, abstract, sectarian, and economically subjective view of social reality was considered to be improper to what Lukács defined as socialist realism. This was so because such an outlook was not rooted in “objective” facts, vigilant research, and concrete truths; and as a result, it distorted the meaning of the typical through revolutionary romanticism and, in Lukács’s words, “tedious schematic optimism.” Therefore, economic subjectivism, Lukács argued, “limited on the one hand

9 Lukács, 109
the portrayal of reality to a crude naturalism; and introduced, on the other, a false substitute in the shape of revolutionary romanticism.” 10 Naturalism turned the exceptional into the typical (his claim is exactly opposite of Malenkov’s argument). He clarified the typical in relation to economic subjectivism as follows:

The typical is not to be confused with the average (though there are cases where this holds true), nor with the eccentric (though the typical does as a rule go beyond the normal). A character is typical, in this technical sense, when his innermost being is determined by objective forces at work in society [emphasis is mine].11

What Lukács called “objective” forces did not mean a neutral objective social reality free from subjective political engagement because, for Lukács, as Zizek puts it, “there was no objective social reality that was not already mediated by political subjectivity.” 12 However, when it comes to a typical character, a person can be typical only when the innermost being of his character is shaped by the objective forces of society at work. The primacy of political messaging and political agitation under Stalin’s dictatorship made Soviet writers numb to objective forces. Soviet literature under Stalin was no longer socialist realism, according to Lukács. This standpoint, however, conflicts with the

10 Ibid., 128.
11 Ibid., 122.
historical context from which Soviet and Chinese socialist realism emerged. It seems that neither Stalin nor Mao seriously took into account the “objective” law of economic development when they implemented economic and political plans. To Mao, the Great Leap Forward (1958-61) was meant to achieve communism based on imagined surplus value in every sector of China’s national economy.

For instance, Mao once associated surplus food and grain with “spirit,” i.e. the mental condition of human beings. When the Chairman visited Xuhui in 1958, he was pleased with the report about the surplus food produced in the local area. He used a metaphor that associated commodities with spirit, by saying “we can produce spirit from taro,” “every county will produce spirit! How many tons of spirit do we need?” Mao’s emphasis on the spirit of surplus value, as if surplus food was a “red” commodity-fetish, insinuated the revolutionary fervor of the masses, equivalent to their labor time in practice. The spirit of surplus value, i.e. the imagined surplus food, buttressed the ideology of socialist development as being irrelevant to the objective facts or forces anchored in the reality of the Great Leap Forward. In the historical context of Soviet and Chinese socialist realism, typicality did not interact with the objective forces of society.

\[\text{\textsuperscript{13} Dikötter, 41.}\]
On the other hand, Lukács clarified the definition of the typical. He differentiated “typical” from “illustrative” or “topical.” When somebody is typical in his or her behavior, “the determining factors of a particular historical phase [must be] found in them in concentrated form.”14 The typical figure is not illustrative because the individual is not linked to “all accompanying accidentals” (non-typical elements) and the typical figure is not topical since the person’s features are “not prescribed by a specific political intention.”15 Typicality should not simply follow the top-down instructions of the party leadership. According to Lukács, typicality is like a quilting point that connects the individual to contemporary society and the age of history, because the typical character reacts with his entire personality to the life of his age. However, what Lukács found in Soviet novels was nothing but the anemia of socialist naturalism and an ensuing “arbitrary topology.”16 Because of the dogmatism of the Stalinist period and the mechanical application of political concepts in art, Soviet socialist realism did not display genuine typicality.

Then how did Chinese critics and artists reinterpret the nineteenth-century notion of typicality during the Maoist era (1949-76)? What kinds of modification and retranslation happened after crossing national borders and temporal gaps? Lukács’s

14 Lukács, 122.

15 Ibid., 122-24.

16 Ibid., 124.
criticism of Soviet socialist realism contradicts Mao’s combinatory principle of revolutionary realism and revolutionary romanticism insofar as “economic subjectivism” was an integral part of socialist realism in socialist China. To Mao, politics and economy were tied together. He never undermined the importance of the superstructure in shaping the patterns of his utopian thought. In Mao’s view, the relationship between base and superstructure was not rigidly fixed. Superstructure was not always predetermined by the base, i.e., by the mode of production in classical Marxism. In Mao’s paradigm, these two building blocks of society remained more dynamically interactive and shaped each other. The fact that socialist realism (i.e., superstructure) did not reflect or engage in the objective forces of economy (i.e., substructure) did not matter in Maoist China. Socialist realism, as the original definition implied, was the tool for speedy socialist construction. The revolutionary force for socialist development was ignited by utopian imaginaries, i.e., imagined surplus value such as a bumper harvest that did not actually exist in reality. Socialist realism was an instrument for achieving economic goals.

The Chinese discourse of typicality focused on the antithesis, or the tensional relationship, between typicality (dianxing) and individuality (gexing). Art critics such as He Rong considered the typical to be incomplete and to lack what could be supplemented by individuality. In his essay titled “On the Creation of Typical Figures”: [the ancient epic] Peacocks Flying to the Southeast (guanyu chuangzao dianxing renwu
wenti: kongque dongnan fei) in Meishu.\(^{17}\) He stresses the synergy that typicality and individuality can generate together. He claims that by combining these two elements, artists can embody both the universal (or common) character of human beings and their individualities. The dialectical synthesis of typicality and individuality, he argues, prevents art from being simplistic or formulaic. The mutually complementary principles help the portrayal of human characters become vividly alive and interestingly dynamic. He Rong’s notion of the typical is similar to that of Lukács. Both seek “the organic unity of profound individuality and profound typicality”; in other words, “authentic types” in Lukács’s terms. In addition, both criticize the mechanical or stale depiction of human figures to fit a political conception of type. Politics should not impose a monolithic idea of human figures and stereotypical models on literature and art.

Drawing on historical knowledge about portraits in the West and China, Wu Zuoren applied the concept of the typical to the versatile examples of portraits, as well as to theories of portraits such as Xie He’s theory from the Southern Qi Dynasty (495-502). In his essay “Short Talk on the Portrait,” published in Meishu December 1959, Wu applied Engels’s notion of typicality to his art historical inquiry of Chinese and Western portraits. By domesticating the foreign concept, Wu could associate the typical with diverse portraits produced in dissimilar historical contexts. He suggests different

\(^{17}\) He Rong, “guanyu chuangzao dianxing renwu wenti,” (on creation of typical figures), Meishu, March, 1956.
approaches to figures, depending on whether people in the portraits are alive, already
dead, well known, or nameless. Wu asserts that in order to truthfully portray a person,
the artist should get to know the person better. The artist should observe the object of
his/her art in everyday life as the painter attempts to penetrate the inner nature of the
person. This is not always possible, however, when the artist is portraying a figure who
is already dead. In his talk, Wu used the example of Rodin and the bust of Balzac. In
such a case, the artist should study historical evidence, including photographs and
writings, and conduct historical investigation of the society and circumstances in which
the protagonist lived. Wu said that Rodin, after reading Balzac’s novels, could
appreciate the characteristics of the aristocratic society in Balzac’s age and then create
the bust of the realist writer. Rodin’s efforts to understand this historical figure from
multiple perspectives enabled the sculptor to create the bust and recreate Balzac as a
typical figure of his time, according to Wu. In Chinese history, Cao Cao (155-220) – a
famous statesman and general during the Han Dynasty and also a character in the novel
and play, The Romance of Three Kingdoms – became a synecdoche for the universal or
archetypal human quality of liveliness (gaikuo shengdong). In Wu’s opinion, typicality
allows artists to use their imagination in portraying people from the past. Imagination is
an important element for enriching the depiction of typical figures in history and
constituting historical truth. Wu also claims that artists can find typicality in the
portraits of nameless people whose life-stories are not known. The portraits of unknown
figures such as the model workers of socialist China and the Roman bust of a boy can move the viewer insofar as artists have deeply delved into archetypal figures and created emotional and spiritual inspiration. Partly because Wu himself was an artist and also a teacher, his interpretation of typicality seems more practical. He suggested useful manuals for other artists, and perhaps for his students as well, concerning how to create good portraits that embodied the typical of the new age of socialism.

In 1930s China, the typical stimulated a prolific number of aesthetic questions among nationalist elites about China’s literary discourse of realism. The typical was not completely subsumed under party-mindedness. Hu Feng (1902-1985), a writer and literary theorist,\(^{18}\) pointed out the significance of universality in his argument about the typical (dianxing). He contends that the typical (type/dianxing) is dissimilar to stereotype (leixing), in that the former requires “individuals embodying the universal qualities of specific groups,”\(^ {19}\) whereas the latter “merely seizes on one or two common superficial traits.”\(^ {20}\) To Hu Feng in 1936, universality was the essential asset of art. It enabled art to exert great power, allowing us to “expand and deepen our understanding of reality.”\(^ {21}\) He asserted that without universality, literature and art cannot serve life. “A person,”

\(^{18}\) He was purged during the Anti-Hu Feng Campaign of 1955.


\(^{20}\) Ibid., 347.

\(^{21}\) Ibid., 351.
Hu said, “is the summation of social relationships.” A typical character in literature “necessarily reflects the interrelationships of the society from which that character comes” and (s)he is “always part of a group.” These conditions cause type (dianxing) to embody universal qualities, instead of being “distinctive” and “unique.” While highlighting the individualized aspects of types (the synthesis of individuality and typicality as discussed above), Hu Feng regarded universality as the essential quality of the typical. According to him, “the central task of literary and artist creation is to portray people and create types (dianxing); only successful types can generate great ideological power, although this idea has not yet been universally understood or recognized.” In this way, he alluded to the special position of writers in society because their ideas of the typical could lead readers to understand and recognize the universality that connects individuals to the totality of society.

Influenced by Maxim Gorky, Zhou Yang also discussed the typical in the mid-1930s. Zhou’s 1936 essay, Thought on Realism, introduced multifaceted issues of realism that were incorporated into the discourse of socialist realism decades later. His essay touched on objective/subjective truth, the union of subjectivity and objectivity, as well as

---

22 Ibid.
23 Ibid.
24 Ibid.
25 Ibid., 354.
the contradiction between writers’ subjective consciousness and a truthful reflection of reality. Along with the typical, the tension between the writers’ worldviews as characterized by his/her class and the objective tendencies of reality drew Zhou’s attention as well. In this early essay, Zhou Yang in 1936 quoted Engels’s claim that realism “implied, besides the truth of detail, the truthful reproduction of typical characters under typical circumstances.”

For Zhou Yang, “a work of art [was] not a random display of facts but a selection from among the miscellaneous facts of human life of what [was] shared, characteristic and typical; through these elements people [could] clearly discern the whole of life. This ability to generalize the typical [was] preciously the power of art.”

Zhou Yang explained how typical characters came into being as follows:

Creating types entails extracting from a certain social group the most characteristic traits, habits, tastes, aspirations, actions, speech and so forth and embodying these in a character, ensuring that the character does not lose its distinctive personality. Thus a type possesses particular traits common to a specific time and a specific social group, while endowed simultaneously with an individual style and features distinguishing him

---


27 Zhou, “Thoughts on Realism,” 342.
from the social group he represents. In the worlds of one thinker: “every character is a type, and at the same time a fully unique individual –‘this one,’ as Hegel said.”

Zhou asserts that “a type is not a copy of a model nor is it a fantasized image.” According to him, writers should “use their rich imagination to take an actually extant or embryonic personality common to a certain social group, synthesize it, magnify it and render it as accurately and truthfully as possible.” In his view, typical figures must be archetypes of a certain social group, or characters in mythologies that symbolize certain human qualities, including virtue and vice. Zhou Yang quotes Gorky as saying that “true art operates by the rules of enlargement and exaggeration. Hercules, Prometheus, Quixote, Faust – these are by no means simply ‘products of fantasy,’ but are entirely normal and inevitable poetic exaggerations arising from objective facts.” In Zhou Yang’s view, classical idealism, supported by exaggeration and enlargement, is considered to be an important element of realism if it is rooted in objective facts. This unique type of realism does not modify objectivity, but “stand[s] even higher than

28 Ibid.
29 Ibid., 343.
30 Ibid.
reality, by no means separating man from reality, but elevating him above it," to use Gorky’s words.31

The polemic of revolutionary romanticism that Lukács raised in his criticism of the Stalinist regime, therefore, seems to overlook the primary characteristic of socialist realism; namely, that it aimed to stand even higher than reality, to transcend the objective forces of society and even foster a subjective, imaginary, mythic and, as a result, idealized social reality in the human psyche. Mao’s revolutionary romanticism had nothing to do with objectivity or objective truth. Also, Lukács disregarded the primacy of romanticism embedded in socialist realism. Such Chinese critics as Zhou Yang and Hu Feng considered romanticism to be part of the intrinsic nature of realism. Realism and romanticism, these currents often intertwined, permeated each other, mingled, and fused together.32 The notions of individuality, typicality, and universality were retranslated into the realm of the visual arts and revolutionary art criticism. Both Chinese artists and critics embodied and used these concepts in creating socialist artworks and in explaining and critiquing them during the Maoist period. The typical became a key word and the core quality of socialist realist aesthetics, as well as the language of art criticism. Most important of all, typicality had a crucial role in sustaining the idea of classes. Despite the fact that due to the mixed economy of Maoist China, the

31 Ibid.

32 Zhou, “Thoughts on Realism,” 336-337.
Chinese working class (including factory workers, peasants, and farmers) became the producers of commodities and exchange value, these social groups often appeared to be the revolutionary classes. The economic roles they played were represented as highly politicized and virtually constructed.

**Individuality and Typicality**

Before analyzing how the typical was used to virtually construct the idea of classes, it is necessary to discuss the dialectical relationship between individuality and typicality embodied in individual sculptures. The statues of single individuals demonstrate the synthesis of individuality and typicality that He Rong conceptualized above. Compared to grouped sculptures – a set of sculptural bodies organized under a unitary theme – the statue of a single person was not an effective form for representing and narrating the history that was played out by typical people under typical circumstances. Sculpture has a semiotic constraint that compresses the life story, the biography of the model, into a single moment. Such a semiotic limit entails a simplification, easily failing to transform the individual into the typical. The individual character of the model becomes dominant. The typical historical circumstances under which the model is situated became unrepresentable insofar as the individuality (gexing)

---

33 I use “virtual” here in a Deleuzean sense. Without resembling the actual, the virtual has the capacity to bring about actualization. In Deleuze’s view, the virtual and the actual are mutually exclusive but jointly sufficient characterizations of the real.
of the protagonist sometimes wins out over typicality (dianxing) and the story line (qingjie) often disappears in the basic unit of story-telling, which is the single sculptural body.

The statues or busts of historical figures and national idols such as Lu Xun (1881-1936), Liu Hulan (1932-47), and Xiang Xiuli (1933-1959) did not exemplify the typicality of a certain human type; however, they commemorated the individualities of national heroes since the models for the sculptures were well known and demanded authenticity. In order to verify the authenticity of the well-known and already-dead figure, artists tended to seek the individuality of the model by copying the appearance of the real person so that the viewer could recognize him or her. Xie Jiasheng’s sculpture titled Lu Xun [Figure 60] shows this conflict between individuality and typicality. In 1956, Xie crafted the head of Lu Xun (1881-1936), a left-wing writer and revolutionary thinker from the generation of the May Fourth Movement (1919). Chinese artists often appropriated Lu Xun’s image in order to establish a historical genealogy between the left-wing thinker and the CCP, although during his lifetime he was never a radical communist. The realistic portrayal of his head, its verisimilitude, literally reveals the individual identity of the idolized Lu Xun. The sculpture conveys the aura and authenticity of a historical figure who had lived in a certain time in a certain place. Lu Xun’s head itself, rather than portraying the typical personality of a revolutionary thinker, illustrates the brand name of Lu Xun in order to commemorate his lifetime
achievements in the initial stage of China’s anti-colonial, left-wing culture. He was not a role model to be emulated by the masses. Rather, the statue of Lu Xun appeared as an authority and a source of admiration. Individuality is much stronger than typicality in this case. Through the sculptural work, this charismatic nationalist who was concerned about China’s future took on the aura of a revolutionary thinker. This man of unimpeachable integrity became a historical personage and a cultural icon of China’s on-going revolution.

Wang Zhaowen’s statue of Liu Hulan (1932-47) [Figure 61] raises a similar question about how to embody typicality within a single narrative unit. Wang (born in 1909) produced the statue of the young CCP heroine who died during the Civil War. The popular image of Liu often manifested itself in political (so-called propaganda) posters (xuanchuanhua) as well as in plastic arts, especially after Mao’s calligraphy – “a noble life and a glorious death” (sheng de weida, si de guangrong) – was dedicated to Liu when her monument was built in Shanxi province in 1957. Wang embodied the national heroine as standing with her hands clenched, her facial expression uncompromising. This textbook expression of the communist heroine, armed with an unflinching fighting spirit against the national enemy, begot numerous replicas in the sphere of Maoist revolutionary culture. This iconic and idiomatic representation of the national hero was similarly copied for the reproduction of nameless but typical personalities that symbolized

---

34 The statue was created in 1950 and 1955.
China’s patriotism. In this light, the individuality of Liu Hulan became a departure point from which one kind of typical character for the Chinese patriot appeared.

The statue of Xiang Xiuli (1933-59) [Figure 62] is another example that demonstrates the dynamic synthesis of individuality and typicality. Xiang died for others in a local factory in Guangzhou. In 1961, Cao Chongen (b.1933), a professor at Guangzhou Art School (guangzhoumeishuxueyuan), carved a marble statue of Xiang Xiuli to honor her heroic sacrifice. Xiang, known as a labor union member of the CCP, died of severe burns from a fire caused by a bottle of raw alcohol in a pharmaceutical factory in her local village. She went into the factory to extinguish the fire, and in doing so protected public property and saved her coworkers. After this tragic but honorable event, Xiang became nationally recognized, especially by many socialites, including Lin Baiqu and Dong Biwu who wrote eulogies for the heroine. For communists, the marble bust of Xiang, while not losing its individuality, became the symbol of a paragon of all virtues. The plebian heroine was considered to be the incarnation of self-sacrifice, the most important virtue of socialist nationalism. By immortalizing the deceased, these sculptures of national and communist heroes and heroines were meant to embody selfless devotion to the motherland and the CCP, and to imprint this devotion into people’s mindsets. Their lives and deaths were once again glorified in the hopes that they would be remembered and emulated by living people. The tensional relationship

between individuality and typicality was congealed in the materiality of the three-dimensional plastic arts.

**The Typical and Virtual Classes**

The typical penetrated deeply into the representational mode of socialist realism and Maoist images. Representation, as Jameson says, is “an essential operation in cognitive mapping and in ideological formation.” The representation of typicality played a key role in creating the aura of socialism by imposing a quasi-class consciousness upon the people. The Chinese people’s collective view of socialism was built upon the pseudo-opposition between capitalism and socialism. It was indebted to Mao’s cultural and political discourse under the rubric of the Cold War. As a means of making China’s domesticated and reterritorialized capitalism imperceptible and intangible, the party-state targeted the former bourgeoisie, including pre-liberation landlords and rich peasants. The state apparatus kept attacking this old category of the

---


37 Along with land reform and the collectivization campaign of 1955-56, traditional landlords and rich peasants were largely eliminated as social classes once private ownership of the means of production was largely abolished and the exploiting classes of the old society were purged. The urban bourgeoisie also disappeared as a social class insofar as the majority of the comprador bourgeoisie shut down their businesses and fled mainland China in 1949 (Meisner, 303). “The properties of the remaining ‘national bourgeoisie’ were nationalized during the ‘socialist transformation’ (1953-56), and the survivors reduced to a vanishing group of aging pensioners collecting paltry dividends from the state bonds given them in payment of their industrial and commercial enterprises” (Meisner, *Mao’s China and After*, 303). The perception of socialism was influenced by the eradication of class divisions, especially the old exploiting classes.
bourgeois class even after the state power of the PRC was nominally seized by the proletariat. Along with the state records of people’s class origins, the theory of class origin provided a legal basis for designating those whose parents were peasants, workers, soldiers, and cadres as genuinely “red.” This regulatory system of the state apparatus identified people from the families of landlords, capitalists, counter-revolutionaries, and intellectuals as members of “black” families, as the enemy of the people. Class origin at birth was considered a defining factor in determining a person’s social status. New groups of people – such as rightists, counter-revolutionaries, anti-party revisionists, capitalist roaders, traitors, and their children – were simply added as a new list of targeted people. In a series of political and economic mobilizations, they were considered as needing the special care of state power. The socialist state kept its citizens under surveillance based on class origins and political stances. Thus, classes in China in which the means of production became nationalized did not so much refer to the economic status of individual citizens, as it was a classificatory system for reorganizing people, recreating socialist social relations, and pinpointing the common enemies of the people.

Here class struggle turned into the primary method of governmentality by which the Chinese nation-state exercised control over its citizens. Although the new exploiting and ruling class, the party bureaucrats, replaced the bourgeoisie from the Republican era (1911-1949), the family bond kept haunting the people whose properties had already
been collectivized and whose bourgeois mindset had been “reformed” through labor-intensive reeducation programs and political rectifications. Under this circumstance, the typical functioned to rebuild a socialist hierarchy authorizing a new ruling class in the virtual construction of classes (classes are virtual because they are not actual but bring about the actualization of the idea of classes in a Deleuze’s sense) so that the classes of the revolutionary triad restructuring and sustaining the social relations of the socialist state.

Mao’s impulse for permanent revolution makes the function of class and class struggle more complicated, partly because he did not always identify himself with the party-state and its bureaucracy. He took advantage of his authority to identify himself with the people and attack the party-state, particularly during the Great Cultural Revolution. Class designations could be either emphasized or de-emphasized depending on the urgent political needs of Maoists or non-Maoists.38 When Mao perceived that reality had been stabilized along with bureaucratization, and that his power within the party was weakened in the aftermath of the Great Famine, he attempted to revitalize class struggles by recalling the class divisions of the old society. “Mao in 1962 even after the historic catastrophe of three bitter years disrupted the ongoing national recovery effort by forcing his colleagues to accept the renewed class

38 Meisner, Mao’ China and After, 303.
struggle, unquestionably rule by fiat.” Classes were both mutable and paradoxically stigmatized due to “the protracted, tortuous and complex nature of the class struggle in the period of socialism.”

Mao Zedong continually mobilized the people in the form of class struggle. He believed that class struggles should continue to exist in socialist society in order to suppress the contradiction between socialism and capitalism in the PRC. Here Mao’s strong conviction concerning permanent revolution was actually a cultural mechanism in China’s revolution to recall and reproduce the idea of classes and class antagonism. The Mao cult aimed to invoke the spirit of class struggle. This standpoint reflected Mao’s belief that “the socialist revolution on the economic front is not sufficient and cannot be consolidated by itself.” In other words, the abolition of private ownership of the means of production did not automatically secure the success of China’s socialist revolution. According to an editorial published in The Liberation Army Daily (jiefangjunbao) in 1966, “the victory of the socialist revolution on the economic and political fronts cannot be consolidated without the victory of the socialist revolution in the ideological sphere.”

---


41 Ibid., 10.
thus confirming Mao’s view. Therefore, the idea of classes did not refer to the economic position of individuals within society. Maoist tactics made it possible to shape contemporary problems differently by provoking intense antagonism among the people and also by eliminating Mao’s political rivals such as Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping. The typical here played a vital role in supporting the idea of classes and class struggles in China’s visual and material culture.

**History and Class Struggle**

The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles. Marx and Engels

The above epigraph about history provides a clue to a better understanding of how Mao Zedong incorporated the Marxist view of history into his vision of eternal revolution. In Mao’s vision, class struggle was indeed the essential drive for history’s progress and became a popular theme of Maoist plastic art. Because in a classical Marxist view the working class, more specifically the proletariat, leads the class struggle, its Chinese counterpart – the revolutionary triad of workers, peasants and soldiers – was frequently represented as playing a leading role in China’s revolutionary history. Here the typical (*dianxing*), the aesthetic principle of Marx-Engels’s realism, was incorporated into representations of class struggle as being the historical force of Maoist China. The typical

---

42 Ibid., 11.
became a method of representation for socialism and its history and for identifying the people as socialist subjects.

Socialist realism reflected the inside view of socialism, the perspective from which China saw itself as socialist. This altered the history of the past because, in Lukács’s words, “it revalued the entire historical scene as the new perspective threw light on previously neglected phenomena.”

Sculptured human figures such as Pan He’s two People’s Liberation Army soldiers provided a principal mode for understanding history as class struggle. More importantly, in the socialist realist view of the present, the class struggle of the past was colored by revolutionary romanticism, optimism, and heroism.

Pan He’s famous sculpture titled *Arduous Times* (*jianku suiyue*) (1957) [Figure 63] embodied two Chinese communist soldiers who fought against nationalist (guomindang) troops in 1950 on Hainan Island. Pan, who was originally commissioned in 1956 to create an oil painting about the Civil War (*hainanqiongyadouzheng*), created a romantic war scene about the Hainan Liberation during which, in spite of the PLA’s victory in the end, only twenty-five from among approximately 15,000 soldiers of the resistance forces survived. When Pan conducted an interview with the commander of the troop, Feng

43 Lukács, 109.

44 A number of communist soldiers belonging to the resistance force (qingya column) died in part because of delayed reinforcements.
Baiju (1903-73), the only survivor still alive in 1956, Pan listened to a story about one of Feng’s comrades. This comrade loved reciting old stories (*jiang gushi*) and sharing funny tales (*shuoxiao*) with his fellows. The artist was inspired by this factual, but nonetheless unidentified, war hero whom he learned about from Feng. 45 The interviewee’s characterization of the unknown soldier as a man with literacy, antiquarian connoisseurship, humor, comradeship, and optimism encouraged Pan to represent him as a flute player. This may have been due to the difficulty of visualizing “narrating old and funny stories” in sculpture. Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729-81) pointed out in *Laocoon* that the plastic arts – unlike poetry and possibly the realist novels that Engels had in mind – can embody only a single moment spatialized in the materiality of the sculpture. Pan He’s three-dimensional work was space-based, whereas narrating old and funny stories is time-based. He displaced the time-based act of reciting old stories with the space-based embodiment of a flute player who could be associated with music, which demands a certain duration of time. These verbal and temporal attributes were transposed into a visual and spatial sign.

Typicality played an essential role in visually reconstructing the historical event of the liberation of Hainan Island, and shaped public perception of the liberation. Although it was known that the twenty-five soldiers who fought against the nationalists were relatively young (they were in their twenties or thirties), Pan’s sculpture selected

from among them and simply depicted two soldiers – one old and one young. This created a contrast in age and a generational gap. His selection of PLA soldiers from two different generations was an attempt to convey universality. Through the inter-personal and inter-dependent relationship between the old veteran and the young neophyte, he made the effort to represent a comradely human relationship that transcended age. The plastic art of typicality extracted two out of the twenty-five soldiers, taking not the average soldier who appeared in the actual communist troop, but modifying the historical facts in order to create a typical and somewhat catholic human relation between the old and the young. These typical model soldiers were a result of displacing the particular with the universal and the ephemeral with the eternal, owing to the timeless value that the two individuals signified. The old veteran, while playing the flute, turned out to symbolize, as Chen Ye stated, “going through all kinds of ups and downs in life” (baojingfengshuang), whereas the young soldier leaning over the body of the old man, resting his chin in his hand, gazing at his senior and listening to the music played by him emblematized “the simplicity of the youth” (qingchundanchun). This inter-personal relationship formed a narrative structure via a semiotic nexus of contrasting and comparing.

46 Chen Ye, wushi niandai xinzhongguo meishujingdian, (the 1950s: New Chinese Art Bible, translation is mine), (Wuhan: Hebei Meishu Chubanshe, 2004), 128.
The old hand, playing his flute under the extreme calamity of the war, alludes to revolutionary romanticism and optimism. The twenty-five PLA soldiers hid in the mountains, ate wild herbs and vegetables and wore clothes made of tree bark. The historical figures, albeit reimagined by the sculptor, are depicted as ideal human types who live in the moment, in spite of their suffocating hardship and peril under the war that had broken out in a remote and isolated island. It might not have been the intention of the artist to glorify the liberation of Hainan during which a number of communist soldiers (approximately 40,000) used their weapons to compel fishermen into ferrying them to the island and then killed them to silence them forever. Pan’s work obviously follows the time period’s canon of Maoist socialist realism. Why did Pan pick this moment of respite on the battlefield? The typicality applied to the PLA soldiers is not intended to imprint upon its audience the general war imagery of attacking, shooting, and bombing during the guerrilla action; or the wounded, raped, and mutilated bodies and corpses that were the remainders of war. The poetic and even peaceful scene of the two communist soldiers, one playing the flute and the other enjoying the music, romanticize the violence and bloodshed of war. They re-present this historical event of the Civil War from the viewpoint of the CCP, glorifying the victory of the PLA. The class struggle between nationalists and communists that led to the Hainan Liberation is made beautiful and humane.
The revolutionary romanticism conveyed by *Arduous Times* reveals what Lukács called the “guilty conscience” of socialist naturalism. The romanticized and idealized depiction of the war scene may betray Pan’s anxiety about facing the historical truth about the Hainan Liberation, which may have led to his creating a psychological and emotional veil of pure romanticism that ignored tragic details about the war and disseminated a romantic attitude toward the bitter class struggle, i.e., the Civil War was symptomatic of the socialist naturalism that accompanied a “vague and generalized kind of romanticism.”\(^47\) This type of romanticism, according to Lukács, could not explain “the actual social origin of the tendency” and only “met the emotional artistic side of vulgar romanticism.”\(^48\) The typical was overtly adapted for supporting the CCP’s official view of the Civil War.

Wars may be the most intense form of class struggle supported by capital and mediated by science and technology in shaping the order of the world. Maoist material culture employed an anti-colonial, i.e. anti-Japanese, war theme for China’s history-making. It modified, restructured, and reproduced the ideas of class and of class struggle in order to establish the legitimacy of the party-state through the display of “typical” martyrs. The theme of eight female martyrs composed of multiple ethnicities was a popular subject in Maoist plastic arts. For instance, Wang Shenglie’s 1959 *guohua*

\(^{47}\) Lukács, 124.

\(^{48}\) Ibid.

252
was titled *banütoujiang* [Figure 64], which literally means “eight women threw themselves into the river.” Eight women warriors of the United Front – Leng Yun, Hu Xiuzhi, Yang Guizhen, Guo Guiqin, Huang Guiqing, Li Fengshan, Wang Huimin and An Shunfu – fought for the independence of their countries against the armed Japanese colonial power. According to the legend propagated by the party, the eight female soldiers entered the Mudan River in Linkou xian Heilongjiang when they ran out of bullets and were being chased by Japanese soldiers. They preferred to gloriously end their lives rather than be humiliated and victimized by their enemies. The young women thus threw themselves into the Mudan River and drowned. The suicidal act of these comrades in arms – six Chinese and two Korean women soldiers – became a popular theme in socialist realist and Maoist art, including history paintings and sculptures. Both genres capture the moment when the exhausted but uncompromising women warriors are wading into the turbulent waters of the Mudan River.

The frozen moment of the female warriors plunging into the river demonstrates a hierarchy in the aesthetics of socialist realism. Chinese artists made a choice in selecting this theme and narrating, in three-dimensional art, the heroic story of the eight women soldiers. Artists usually pick the moment when the women martyrs are entering the river and they never show the protagonists painfully drowning. The theme of the eight female martyrs softens the extremity of the tragedy – drowning – by showing a lesser degree of pain. Lessing, in *Laocoon: An Essay upon the Limits of Paintings and Poetry*,

253
explains how important the selection of a single moment in painting can be. Lessing argues:

Since the artist can use but a single moment of ever-changing nature, and
the painter must further confine his study of this one moment to a single
point of view, while their works are made not simply to be looked at, but
to be contemplated long and often, evidently the most fruitful moment
and the most fruitful aspect of that moment must be chosen. 49

For Chinese artists, typicality became a significant standard for choosing the fruitful moment (shike). This standard raises questions about who were typical characters, what circumstances were typical, and how typical characters should react to typical circumstances. In addition, painters’ and sculptors’ decision-making process for selecting a single moment depended on an aesthetic hierarchy in socialist realism and Maoist visual culture. Romanticism occupied a higher position than realism. Truthful expressions of pain and tragedy were less important than the pursuit of optimism and beauty in reconstructing the CCP’s past and its history. The typicality of socialist realism, after the typical became equivalent to party-mindedness, encouraged artists to select moments of glory, victory, and noble spirit – i.e., the pregnant moment of sublime heroism. The typical helped artists to materialize and spatialize the pregnant moment

through a series of painterly and sculptural practices: first, the compression of time; second, the selection of an essential scene from a series of temporally arranged bodily movements, story-telling strategies, plot points, and narrative devices; and finally, the depiction of possible sequences in a composition. These enable the viewer to imagine what would come next within the limits of the art medium – in other words, the specific limits given the nature of the medium or genre; for instance, poetry (syntax) vs. plastic art (bronze). They also take the viewer beyond the confinements of medium and genre through transmediality – for example, between sculptures and posters, or between revolutionary ballets and posters.

Because of the characteristics of the medium and genre of his art, Yu Jinyuan’s plastic art, under the same title as Wang Shenglie’s painting banütujiang, shows a slightly different interpretation of the same historical event. Influenced by Soviet sculptor Nikolai Nikolaevich Kelindurov (克林杜霍夫), who in 1956 joined the advanced class of plastic arts (diaosu yanjiuban) at the CAFA (Beijing) to teach Chinese students, Yu made Eight Women Martyrs in 1958 [Figure 65], depicting the popular river scene. Yu however depicted the heroic guerrillas as if they were marching over the ground. Unlike the historical paintings that portray the eight women already half-submerged in the water and arranged in a disorganized manner, Yu’s work features the group still

---

roughly in line, just as they are about to step into the Mudan River. The Chinese figure in the lead is walking. She carries her comrade, who has fainted or is perhaps already dead, as if in a religious ritual; a modified secular version of the Pietà in which the Virgin Mary held the dead body of Jesus in her lap. She keeps her chin up and gazes forward with a solemn expression. The other soldiers follow this central figure as if they are on a long march. On the left side of the leading figure a blinded woman walks. Both of her eyes are bandaged, and she follows the leader by holding the hem of her clothes. On the right side, another soldier wearing a traditional Korean outfit (hanbok) looks backward, watching for the Japanese soldiers in pursuit. Next come two women soldiers who carry a severely injured fellow soldier over their shoulders; one of the women gazes determinedly in the direction they are heading. The last person faces backward; she keeps a watchful eye as she holds her rifle tightly, prepared for the potential attack of enemy troops. This positioning of the group of eight warriors echoes the legendary long march of the CCP to Yan’an in 1934-35. The substantive difference lies in the fact that the Chinese communists marched to live, whereas these women soldiers marched in order to die, gloriously without ignominy. In history painting, rivers sometimes symbolize an impending obstacle on the way to the bright future of the CCP (and China) in its revolutionary history. Socialist realist aesthetics beautified and varnished the inevitable obstructions in the teleological progress of history. The Mudan River may similarly emblematize the fatal challenge that the female martyrs were destined to encounter in
such an epic narrative. In order to dramatize the heroic suicidal scene, the sculptor exaggerated the surface of the river in Heilongjiang, even though as Chen Ye states we cannot observe such turbulent waves in reality.

From a classical Marxist perspective, history is the history of class struggle. Mao however altered this view by designating the GMD (the KMT) as capitalists, as opposed to the CCP, which was led by the communists representing the working class. Therefore the Civil War was considered a form of class struggle between the GMD and the CCP. The Anti-Japanese War was also interpreted in relation to the class contradiction between Japan and China under Japan’s colonial rule. China’s international relationship was retranslated by Mao into a global class struggle as well. This political discourse was intended to spark strong anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist sentimentality and a pseudo-opposition between China (and its friends) and its enemies. In this way, the Maoist visual images that depict socialist subjects fighting against their enemies merge class consciousness into national consciousness, with this latter tending toward and sometimes becoming nationalism per se. The virtual notion of classes came to sustain China’s patriotism through this the ideological conflation. The Maoist cognitive mapping in which capitalism was othered functioned as the organizational principle of socialist state ideology as it continued to produce the binary structure of “we-ness” and “they-ness.” Typicality here led to a serious generalization that divided people in the world into two groups – good and evil.
War and Universality

Lenin believed that an age is the sum of many phenomena; it contains not only typical but many other non-typical elements. To him, war is a typical product of imperialism, while imperialism is typical of capitalism. In this light, the Korean War might be typical of the age of Empire, when the conflicting interests of multiple countries and the power relations of two superpowers were locally expressed on the Korean Peninsula. The seemingly ideological battlefield where socialism and capitalism fought each other was supported by an agreement between Stalin and Mao, who found the war advantageous to them because they believed “it disrupted U.S. preparation for the third world war, thus ‘hurting the U.S. vitality.’”51 The Korean War (1950-53) was the first international war the PRC joined after being de-colonized, in an attempt to assert its standing in the world after regaining its national sovereignty. Many of China’s history paintings on the theme of “the War for Resisting America and Aiding Korea” (kangmei yuanchao zhanzheng), the Chinese name of the Korean War, reflected a parochial China-centered view of this international war that mirrored the complex geopolitics of the Cold War.

Korean War paintings usually depict the soldiers of the People’s Volunteer Army helping Korean civilians. Maoist images usually depict Korean villages where Korean men have disappeared and only the old and the weak, usually (old) women and children, remain. For instance, Xu Yun’s guohua, China-Korea Friendship (zhongchao youyi) (1959) [Figure 66], portrays two Chinese soldiers bringing firewood to a Korean “grandmother” who seems sick and is living alone. Another way of representing the Korean War is to describe Korean women, children, and the elderly welcoming the Chinese troops and voluntarily supporting these foreign soldiers. Dong Xiwen’s oil painting Resist US Aggression and Aid Korea (1951) [Figure 67], Liang Yulong’s oil painting Blood Transfusion (1956) [Figure 68], and Yan Han’s woodblock print Freshly Picked Apples (1954) [Figure 69] all exemplify this second interpretation of the Korean War. These two approaches to the Korean War illustrate how Maoist China officially envisioned the Korean War as a way of aiding Korea, threatened by so-called American imperialism, and how it constructed an imagined community based on a quasi-familial bond.

These visual images also reflect China’s own national identity, which emphasized its global leadership and the exercise of its own national sovereignty to protect the territory of the PRC from the United States. Yet the constructed image of China as being an independent country veiled its dependency on the Stalinist Soviet Union, whose “basic strategy was to leave the U.S. deeply bogged down in Korea,
consume a great deal of U.S. strength, thereby containing and weakening U.S. ability to act in Europe.”52 Mao’s strong anti-America stance coincided with Stalin’s strategy and Mao needed the approval and support of Stalin when becoming involved in a war of a neighboring country. Nevertheless, Chinese socialist realist paintings tended to illustrate a typical approach to the Korean War in which typically humanist and benevolent Chinese soldiers behaved in a typical manner by serving typically poor and weak Korean women and children. In this way, the history paintings of “the War for Resisting America and Assisting Korea” aimed to promote the global leadership of the Chinese people – a popular form of socialist subjectivity during the Maoist regime. Here the portrayal of typical Chinese soldiers in sincere friendship with Koreans became a visual and cultural code that promoted a simplistic understanding of the Korean War as a war in which China, in spite of the numerous casualties of the People’s Volunteer Army, including Mao’s own son, served the people in Korea. The idealization of the Korean War took shape by becoming the locus for brotherhood, friendship, and humanism. Maoist plastic arts suggested the carefully orchestrated juncture where typicality and universality intersected.

China’s patriotism and socialism were intermingled in the close connection between China’s statehood and its commitment to the international class struggle, occurring through events such as wars. China aimed at promoting international

52 Zhang, 69.
cooperation among peoples in the Soviet Bloc. Hua Tianyou’s plastic art, *Bulgarian Teacher and Korean Orphan* (*baojialiyanjiaoshi he chaoxianguer*) (1957) [Figure 70], illustrates on a personal dimension this new form of inter-state relationship. Typicality was a transcoding device; as it showed how individuals were connected to society and the world, it conversely condensed the inter-state relationship into an interpersonal one. Hua sculpted a female teacher from Bulgaria and a Korean orphan who lost her parents during the war. The selection of subject matter suggests a strong familial bond and metonymically implies the inter-state relationship of socialist countries in the Eastern Bloc. The bodily gestures of the teacher and the little girl embody their mutual love and compassion. The distressed orphan desperately leaning toward the female teacher may be longing for maternal love and care. The teacher, like a substitute mother, gives a loving look to the girl and holds her hands. The oversized hand of the Bulgarian teacher being cradled in the small hands of the orphan emphasizes a universal feeling of humanity that is bounded neither by a traditional family structure nor by nationality. The absence of Chinese figures makes this plastic art even more universal and exceptional. This corporeal representation of the inter-state relationship, which commemorates the Korean War, sheds light on a certain aspect of that war in order to invoke sympathy.

Hua’s work provides a certain mode of remembering the historical event in order to avoid visualizing the inhuman aspects of brutal wars. Due to the limits of its space-
based medium and genre (capable of depicting only a single moment) and a hierarchy of socialist realist aesthetics, typicality was inclined to prohibit representations of the ugly side of the war. An emotional and empathetic approach to the Korean War, in the guise of humanism, negated the comprehensive and critical debates about the Korean War that questioned its underlying logic involving complex power relations between countries. The analytical view was considered to be the antithesis of the values of socialist realism, which included optimism and heroism as well as revolutionary romanticism. “The schematic optimism,” in Lukács’s words, changed the exceptional into the typical and made abstract what the war represented in the everyday lives of ordinary people. The typical, while avoiding concrete truths about the Korean War and veiling the inhumanity of the war, constructed the universal idea of humanism.

The Maoist plastic arts created an ahistorical, emotionally charged, typology about war. The pseudo-universality that bound China and its former enemy, Japan, targeted the growing influence of the U.S. military force around the globe. The underlying intent of the plastic arts was to characterize China as a peacemaker in global history working against the international extension of so-called American exceptionalism. The collective piece by Chinese artists – whose contributors included Xiao Chuanjiu (1914-1968), Su Hui (b. 1917), and Fu Tianchou (b.1920) – titled The Tenth Anniversary of the 1945 Hiroshima Bombing (andaò beizhà shìniánjì) (1955) [Figure 71] illustrates the public moral and psychological economy dominant in Maoist material
culture. This plastic art depicts a Japanese mother and her son standing in front of the grave of his father, the deceased victim of the Hiroshima bombing of 1945. The visual representation of the Japanese victims of the atom bomb is quite different from the anti-Japanese revolutionary realism of the 1940s, when Japanese people in China’s popular images were usually conceived as perpetrators, rather than victims. The Japanese mother who kneels down is sobbing bitterly while covering her face with her hands. Her young son is standing next to her holding a crumpled cap in his tightly clenched fist. The young boy in his school uniform looks very resolute. This representative, and typical, image of the Hiroshima victims – the widow and the fatherless son – allude to the missing father and the destroyed family structure. The tragedy of the family is dramatized by the weeping mother and angered son, who emit a sad and gloomy ambience. The grave scene symbolizes the intense feelings of the survivors and their indelible scars. In spite of the unresolved complexity of world politics that led to the atomic bombing in Hiroshima and the role reversal for Japan from perpetrators to victims, the three-dimensional rendering of the Hiroshima victims is meant to highlight the universal suffering of the victims of the Second World War. The fruitful moment, in Lessing’s words, is incapable of telling the whole story because it compresses too greatly the time required to articulate causation – the cause and effect of this international world – in a reasonably complex manner.
Instead of antagonizing Sino-Japan relations, the monument emphasizes an anti-American stance by showing the suffering of the Hiroshima victims. The object of the young boy’s anger remains unarticulated, but the behavioral code of the resolute boy – standing with clenched fist – suggests to whom his righteous anger is oriented. It allows the viewer to imagine what happens next – when he becomes an adult. This kind of compositional and narrative device of socialist realist and Maoist plastic arts alludes to the invisible presence and the ferocity of invaders and perpetrators; however the typical moment avoids the direct visualization of the cruelty and ruthlessness of war.

Here Chinese artists’ empathy in commemorating the Hiroshima bombing of 1945 and their condolences for the victims resulted in reinforcing China’s national and international image as a peacemaker when the monument was displayed at the 1958 international youth art festival exhibition (guoji qingnian lianhuanjie meishuzhan). The noble-minded Chinese sculptors, according to art historian Chen Ye, wanted to impress people at the exhibition who loved peace. Even though Japan once invaded and colonized China, violated the country’s political and economic sovereignty, and caused the suffering of colonial citizens, the Chinese artists attempted to commemorate Japan’s misfortune. Their humanist overtone emphasized China’s global leadership in bringing peace and harmony to the world against the war-machines of a few super powers.

51 Chen, 82.
Race was another significant factor embodied in typical figures, i.e., figures of the enslaved Third World peoples in pursuit of the solidary of Asia, Africa and Latin America. The Maoist worldview was intended to promote Mao’s politics of border-crossing emancipation. The aforementioned *African Mother* (*feizhoumuqin*) (1964) [Figure 27] by Long Xuli (b. 1941) demonstrates how the typical operated reciprocally with the rewriting of colonial history, and how in its depictions of anti-imperialist guerrilla wars typicality decontextualized the archetypal image of black African people. *African Mother*, for example, poeticizes the armed struggles of African people against imperial power. By invoking heartfelt sympathy toward the mother warrior and her baby son, the selected subject matter highlights the epitome of humanity that is symbolized by perhaps the most pure and primary of human relationships. The plot (*qingjie*) of this anti-colonial war allusively features the Maoist political idea that people of color in the Third World jointly should continue the class struggle against white imperialism. It symbolically indicates the expansion of Mao-led permanent revolution into the unified geopolitical unit of the Third World. The gestural language of the sculpted human figures, the African mother caressing her baby, turns the abstract idea of the anti-imperialist and anti-colonial war into the concrete form of a human relationship. What is staged is not a war scene, but the locus of maternal love. This beautifying effect presents “innocent” Third World people as desiring peace and freedom; this makes it possible for
them to hold the moral high ground, because protecting one’s babies from the enemy metaphorically justifies the pursuit of war.

In contrast to the aforementioned cases concerning the statues of Lu Xun, Liu Hulan, and Xiang Xiuli, typicality sometimes negates individuality. The nationality of the black African mother and her son remains unknown. The anonymity of the mother and son represents Africa, making this typical representation of an African family a national allegory so long as they become the metonym for Africa in the viewer’s cognitive mapping. Neither the sculpture itself nor its title hints at who they are, or when and where they fought; it is as if there were no identifiable models. The statue only implicitly explains what they fought for because of the popular discourse of Mao’s Third Worldism, which became a timeless theme of socialist realist and Maoist art. The historical context that converts the ongoing history of colonialism and imperialism into the story of a mother and her son creates an allegorical structure in which typicality plays a role in essentializing nameless but seemingly authentic characters. Here Africa, the imagined entity, is represented by someone who is a love-giver and, at the same time, a fierce warrior. The black African woman becomes a locus where Mao’s revolutionary history intersects with the local and global histories of colonialism. Whereas the PRC’s invisible enemies remain extremely abstract (thus the enemies become the qualities of various human vices), the colonized take the concrete form of virtuous human figures, thanks to the materiality of three-dimensional art. This approach, while antagonizing an
unidentified colonial power, moralizes history based on Mao’s schematic view of colonial history.

The typical generated a rigid scheme to reinforce a certain type of cognitive mapping, as a way of shaping the public perception of socialism as a reality. The portrayal of the heroic revolutionary people fighting against colonialism, imperialist capitalism, and the white First World was a method of imposing the otherness of capitalism upon the people’s mindsets. To historicize class struggles in other locales of the world was also part of China’s own history-making, insofar as it set out to locate the socialist subjects of China within the world history of capitalism and to establish Chinese history as the history of class struggle against capitalism. As I argued earlier, Mao did not characterize history as the history of class struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. Rather, Mao in the 1960s constructed a mental map in which history was constituted by the class struggle between the league of the post-colonial Third World, led by Mao himself, and imperialist countries like the United States and the Soviet Union. Thus the idea of classes became a concept applicable to any geopolitical, geo-cultural entity or regional unit, as well as to nation-states that shared a colonial history. In this light, the expansion of Mao’s permanent revolution and international class struggle around the globe established a strong ideological and moral foundation. Maoist China became the Good in the fight against whomever it called its enemy, whether U.S. imperialists or the abstract entity of capitalism.
Ideology of Development and Economic Topology

Drawing on Karl Korsch’s view of Marx’s two different descriptions of history, Fredric Jameson introduces two fundamental languages and codes of Marxism – class struggle and capital accumulation (or the law of value). These two fundamental languages of Marxism, which according to Jameson, “could alternate with one another, be substituted for one another or translated into each other,” were often appropriated for the production of Maoist visual and material culture. The gigantic monument titled *Long Live the People’s Commune* (1959) [Figure 72], which consists of a pair of huge public sculptures, illustrates how “the subjective description of history as class struggle” was translated into, in Karl Korsch’s words, “the objective description of the historical progress as a development of productive forces.” The collective work of Chinese artists, however, demonstrates how the objective description of history as a development of productive forces was re-transcoded into a language of national development whose origin could be found in Stalin’s theory of “socialism in one country,” as introduced in Chapter One.

After being assigned to complete a new commission, a group of Chinese artists that included Yang Meiying and Qu Naishu from the Department of Plastic Arts at Lu

---

55 Ibid.
Xun Art Academy (luxunmeishuxueyuan diaosuxi) chose two main themes for designing this public art project. The themes had two agendas. The first was “industries, agriculture, commerce, education and national defense celebrate the establishment of the People’s Commune” with drums (gongnongshangxuebing lieguhuanqing renmingongshe de chengli). The second was “agriculture, forestry, animal husbandry, sideline production and fishery celebrate a good harvest” (nonglinmufuyuxiqingfengshou). Placed outside the National Agricultural Exhibition Center (quanguo nongye zhanlanguan) in Beijing, this monument of the spirit of the Great Leap Forward applied typicality to the sculptural representation of collective hope for China’s economic growth.

The basic unit of each sculpture consists of a magnificent horse with a music player (one is a drummer and the other is a Chinese-cymbal player) riding on its back. Each main figure of the horserider is surrounded by six socialist workers (three each on the right and left sides). Each individual socialist worker, as a synecdoche, symbolizes a sector of China’s national economy. The first group is led by a male drummer who is raising a thick drumstick high to signal the beginning of his performance as he rides on horseback. The other six individuals, male and female, young and old, signify industries (gong), agriculture (nong), commerce (shang), education (xue) and armies (bing). Each figure holds a symbol of the economic sector or job that the individual represents; for instance, a fisherman carries fishing nets and a soldier holds a rifle. The uplifted spirit of

56 Chen Ye, 2003.
the workers, accompanied by the beat of the drum, promises dramatic increases in productivity. Similarly, the other sculpture places a female cymbal player (the counterpart of the male drummer) on horseback at the center. Encircling the cymbal player are six male and female figures that appear to symbolize the primary industries of China and the key divisions of China’s rural economy during the years of the Great Leap Forward. This group, in which each individual represents a sector of China’s national economy, personifies the objective history of productive forces and transcodes the rules of capital accumulation (or the law of value) into the visual language of socialist workers. The ideology for promoting the growth of the national economy supports the virtual construction of a socialist economy by encoding the hegemony of capital, which demanded the surplus labor time of surplus labor power during the Great Leap Forward.

The representative group of Chinese laborers depicted in the monument illustrates the iconography of China’s socialist economy. It serves as a pictorial diagram that shows how China’s economy works under state socialism and displays typical images of socialist workers by associating them with their means of production and with the division of labor. In particular, peasants who work in the agriculture sector are presented with rakes and shovels. In this way, the division of labor is emphasized. It is not individual human figures who epitomize the key divisions of China’s rural economy during the Great Leap Forward. Rather the entire sub-divided economy of socialist
China, including its primary industries, is personified in the diverse human forms that exist in a totalizing and allegorical vision of China’s national economy.

Economic roles and occupational identities created through the division of labor were one of the important factors in constructing the idea of classes in socialist China. Presenting typical socialist laborers as the celebratory bodies of the national economy reveals the reconfigured distinction of class under Chinese socialism. Mao’s identity politics categorized individual citizens based on their assigned roles in spurring China’s economic development. The massive, masculine, and robust bodies of socialist workers – neither machinery nor science nor technology – imply that the physical bodies of the Chinese populace, as the embodiment of ethnic and racial superiority, became the fundamental source and foundation for building up the national economy – i.e., they were the primary force for the capital accumulation needed to fulfill China’s labor-intensive development model.

The running horses generate a sense of speed. The pulsating sound of the drum and cymbals, albeit imagined, interacts with the strong driving force of the motivated revolutionary workers caught up in an excited, uplifted, and festive mood. The rhythmical beats of Chinese musical instruments and the traditional ornaments on the horses, which look like imaginary folk-tale creatures, display the influence of indigenous folk art and vernacular culture. The energetic movements of the drummer and the cymbal player – who lift their arms up high as if they were about to begin a race – allude
to a historic launch, and anticipate the phenomenal success that it is believed the Maoist radical plan will bring. In contrast to the plastic arts that embodied historical events and reconstructed the past, this collective work functions to imagine and promise the future prosperity that the Great Leap Forward was supposed to create very soon from amid the Great Famine. All the artistic devices and expressions used in the monument imperceptibly place emphasis on the significance of the people in China and their roles in building up the national economy. This imposes a classificatory scheme on human beings – individual citizens are categorized as certain types of socialist workers, peasants, soldiers, fishermen, farmers, basketmakers, and so on. Here individuality disappears once people exist as economic role-players performing as individualized and personified economic sectors.

The Typical and Memory Politics

Memory politics, induced by mass mobilization, forced people to see the past as being in striking contrast to the present. The typical representation of the past shaped people’s cognitive mapping of Chinese history as revolving around continuing class struggles. The group sculpture Rent Collection Courtyard [Figure 73-1] by Sichuan artists (1965) exemplifies how Maoist plastic arts drew the virtual idea of classes from the past and merged it into the national consciousness of the people during the Socialist Education Movement. In the various individual sculptures within the group, the artists
applied the typical to the visual representation of class antagonism under feudalism. Built in the original manor of a local landlord, Liu Wencai from Dayi County, Sichuan, the clay sculptures portray the landlord collecting rents from his tenant peasants. To galvanize the class struggle, Rent Collection Courtyard arranged one hundred and fourteen life-size people, including the landlord Liu, his servants, and tenant peasants, in order to depict their class conflicts. These village-history monuments portraying rent collection (cunshi jinianbei) are divided into four stages and illustrate the typical social and production relations that existed between landlords and tenant peasants under, to use Marx’s notion, “the Asiatic mode of production.” The group sculptures consist of four narrative units: first, “being forced to pay rent” (beipojiaozu); second, “brutal exploitation” (yanzupanbo); third, “calculating an account book and forcing peasants to pay rent” (suanzhangbizu); and finally, “walking toward a struggle” (zouxiangdouzheng). The historicization of past events exactly corresponds to the development of the bourgeoning class consciousness of the peasants. Typical characters under typical circumstances appear to empower themselves in order to subvert the oppressive reality of feudalism and rebel against the landlord.

Memory of the past was intended to shape national consciousness in the present. Rent Collection Courtyard was used for a class education program called yikusitain (忆苦思甜), which means “remember the bitterness of the past and think about the sweetness of the present,” during the Social Education Movement. This Maoist sculpture
used the method of sanjiehe, which combined three factors: the leader’s thought (lingdao), the artist’s technique (zuozhe), and the skills and the masses’ life (qunzhong). Through their sculpture-making, the artists conformed to Chairman Mao’s thought and thought about the lives of the peasants in the past. The whole process of art-making ultimately aimed to educate the people living in the present moment. Under the banner of “Never Forget the Class Struggle,” issued at the Tenth Plenary Session of the Eight Central Committee of the CCP on 24 September 1962, the Chinese Artists Association (the CAA) forced artists to serve 500 million peasants through their art. They were required to analyze class situations, place people in the context of the revolutionary development of society, collect empirical knowledge about peasants’ lives and struggles, and gather visual materials about people through the lens of class struggle. Given these circumstances, the Sichuan sculptors tried to serve politics by staging the historical theater of class struggle.

The sculptural representation of the typical circumstances of feudalism in Rent Collection Courtyard (1965) constructs a virtual reality in order to educate the viewers. In order to galvanize class struggle, the sculpture was used for public education, partly for the purpose of preventing the restoration of capitalism. An editorial titled “Never Forget the Class Struggle” was published on May 4, 1966 in the Liberation Army Daily (jiefangjunbao). This article emphasized the still existing class struggle between capitalist roaders and communist revolutionaries, while showing the clay sculptures from Rent
Collection Courtyard. A caption stated that, “We cannot go on living like this...,” as the article showed “the peasants’ smoldering revolt against the injustice perpetrated against them before Liberation.” The group sculptures, reproduced as a tool for class education, reenacted the typical characters of pre-liberation peasants under the typical circumstance of exploitation by their landlords.

With the launching the Great Cultural Revolution, the typical sculptures of Mao’s mass culture were advertised and reproduced as model works of art and as an ideological tool for political education. Critics like Li Shaoyan and art historians like Qin Jingxia used the term, the typical, in interpreting well-known model sculptures. Considering that the rate of tenancy in traditional China was not particularly high, the typical was intended to represent neither the average nor the general in visually constructing the social reality of pre-liberation China. Sculptures of verisimilitude were to document the life of thirty percent of peasants – maybe the poorest and the most unfortunate. As a result, this partial truth excluded the reality that existed for seventy percent of the peasants around 1918, during the pre-liberation, semi-feudal, and semi-colonial Republican era. In its sculptural reconstruction of social reality, the typical was employed for presenting a particular case, that was neither universal nor general, of

---


58 According to statistics by the Department of Agriculture and Commerce, in 1918, 50 percent of China’s peasants were owner-occupiers, 30 percent were tenants, and 20 percent were part-owners and part-tenants (Tawney 1964), in Chai, 16.
Dayi County in Sichuan where class antagonism was particularly intense. The Asiatic mode of production was represented by the notorious landed property owner, Liu Wencai, who had practically tortured the peasant village residents who cultivated his land. The case study of Rent Collection Courtyard substantiates the true nature of the typical under the overarching influence of Maoist revolutionary culture.

Owing to the methodology of art creation called sanjiehe (the trinity of leader’s idea, artists’ techniques and skills and the masses’ lives), certain examples of model artworks were designated “typical.” Sculptors including Zhao Shaoxi and Wang Guanyi coordinated the key principles of the typical with the goal of the Socialist Education Movement, during which artists were encouraged to produce artworks to serve the huge population of the peasantry by reenacting class struggle. In this process, artists vigilantly informed themselves of the current party line and created large-size group sculptures accordingly. The nineteenth-century notion of typicality became identical with party-mindedness, i.e., Mao Zedong Thought in 1960s China.

The public display of the sculptures conveying the class antagonism between destitute peasants and landlords aimed to underpin Mao’s politics of class struggle. The visualization of the wretched demonstrated the vicious circle of economic inequality and disparity that continued from generation to generation. Chronic hunger was inscribed in the scraggy bodies of peasant families. The behavior and facial expressions of a blinded old man [Figure 73-2], an absent-minded mother, weeping children and enslaved male
peasants [Figure 73-3], full of sadness, hopelessness and agony, strongly delivered a didactic message to an audience that knew how the wicked landlord class came to an end after Liberation. The eventful life of the pre-liberation peasants unfolding at the site of the rent collection courtyard alluded to the inception of class struggle. The courtyard itself became a typical circumstance of the pre-capitalist mode of production in which landed property owners like Liu Wencai exercised their power in local areas under feudalism. This reconstruction of typical peasants and landlords under typical circumstances embodied representative human qualities and ideals such as greed, righteousness, injustice, agony, and liberty. Its theatrical staging of the class struggle came to represent the age of the agrarian feudal society.

Beyond genre and media differences, transmediality also plays a vital role in connecting the present to the past through the operation of typicality. Lessing provides an insight into the limits of paintings and sculpture in contrast to poetry in terms of narrating a storyline. Poetry requires a duration of time, and the time-based nature of poetry enables listeners or readers to imagine the course of an event. However, paintings and sculpture must choose a moment (shike), a “fruitful moment” in Lessing’s words, because they are space-based. Maoist visual culture often recycled, in different venues and without parody, popular typical images of revolutionary art. Among others, Jia Xiongtong’s poster titled Childhood (1973) [Figure 74] exemplifies such a reproduction during the Cultural Revolution (1966-76) of the model Yan’an art Rent Collection
Courtyard (1965). In the poster, Jia depicts a group of students, including young pioneers with red scarves, visiting an exhibition, probably in the village of the former landlord, where the group sculptures are displayed. Through the reproduction of Rent Collection Courtyard eight years after the original was made in 1965, the poster image recalls this fragment of memory about the past, creating a thought pattern that links the present to the past. Jia juxtaposes the sculptural image of a crying boy from the past guiding his blinded grandfather with the young audiences viewing the sculpture at the present moment. The typical scene of class struggle continues to exist in a repetitive mental web that connects different media and bridges the temporal gap.

Hang Mingshi’s poster titled Continue the Revolutionary Tradition and Become Revolutionary Successors (1965) [Figure 75] similarly demonstrates inter-artistic borrowing between a three-dimensional plastic art and a two-dimensional poster image. Hang mixes Pan He’s Arduous Time (1957) with his image of a young pioneer girl. In the poster, the young pioneer is sitting in her room at a desk on which a biography of Lei Feng, a national hero to emulate, is placed. The girl is drawing a picture of the two PLA soldiers during the Hainan Liberation of 1950. Hang appropriates the romantic war scene by showing against the red background a somewhat surrealist outline of the two soldiers enjoying music in Arduous Times. The visual effect of the surrealist composition and use of red color dramatizes the referential imagery of the Civil War. The past is mediated by the artwork of revolutionary romanticism (Pan’s sculpture) and
again by the girl’s imagination. The poster is intended to encourage the viewer, as a socialist subject, to reenact the past and continue the tradition of revolutionary culture that had begun decades ago. Colored by revolutionary romanticism, the revolutionary tradition of the past (e.g., Pan He’s Hainan Liberation) is somewhat differentiated from the feudal society of the past that is depicted in revolutionary realism (e.g., Rent Collection Courtyard in Sichuan). The interconnectivity of visual messages in this way provides the viewer with a certain mode of registering the past.

**The Typical in the Image of Tibet**

The visual representation of ethnic minorities raises critical questions concerning the conception of classes in Maoist China. Ethnicity played a crucial role in the vision of the Chinese nation-state as one unitary body, because the nationalism of each minority group could threaten the unity of the PRC as a multi-ethnic state. Developed from the discourse of Sun Yat-sen, the founding father of the Republic of China who attempted to integrate fifty-five ethnic minority groups into the modern nation-state, Maoist China publicly promoted its open-policy toward ethnic minorities and their ethnic cultures. On the other hand, the possibility of inter-ethnic conflict was repressed, governed, and unacknowledged as socialist constructions – e.g., collectivization, socialist modernization, and Mao’s revolutionary upheavals – enforced regulatory rules and laws upon ethnic minorities and classified them as distinct nationalities (minzu).
Maoist plastic arts employed two ways of representing ethnic minorities, although the common approach to minority groups was to focus on harmonious coexistence and cooperation between the Han majority and ethnic minorities. As articulated in Chapter Two, artists with Han nationality tended to objectify ethnic minority women. Their painterly practices de-politicized and muted sensitive political issues about China’s interethnic conflicts. The ethnographic gaze of the male outsiders often projected an idealized image onto the local life of ethnic minorities; while a second approach documented the lives of “inferior” nationalities. One example of the first approach is the socialist realist paintings of Tibet, which were painted by Han artists and displayed in urban centers such as Beijing to “bring the reality of a community at the periphery of the Maoist empire into the consciousness of those at the center.”\(^\text{59}\) Zhou Changgu’s Two Lambs (1954) [Figure 76], Shi Lu’s Outside the Great Wall (1954), and Dong Xiwen’s Spring Comes to Tibet (1954) [Figure 77] are examples of these paintings.

The second way to portray ethnic minorities was to impose a paradigm of (socialist) modernization upon them as “uncivilized pre-modern” people. Ethnic minorities often became icons of the Maoist model of development, namely, industrialization without urbanization. On this view, minority peoples had distinctive cultures with timeless traditional values, and became modernized, civilized, and economically productive mainly owing to the modernization brought by the Han. The

\(^\text{59}\) Clare Harris, *In the Image of Tibet: Tibetan Painting after 1959*, (London: Reaktion Books LTD, 1999), 126.
benefits of the superior Han culture included Western-Soviet-origin technology; a scientific model of progress; mechanization; entertainments like Soviet films, opera troops, traveling libraries, including Mao’s little red books; medicine; and school systems. Here the typical ethnic minorities were the beneficiaries of Han-led party policies such as the national literacy campaign of the early 1950s.

As with Jiang Yan’s guohua, kaokaomama (1953) [Figure 78] that portrayed a mother and daughter studying together, Yuan Xiaocen’s sculpture Studying Mother and Daughter (munüxuewenhua) (1955) [Figure 79] is an example that shows how ethnic minority women were represented in accordance with party policy. Yuan made a sculptural image of a mother and daughter from an ethnic minority learning Han culture (wenhua) during the national literacy campaign (1951) in Yunnan. As the title implies, mandarin Chinese generally meant superior Han culture and civilization. The hidden message of this sculpture is that the uncivilized and illiterate minority women became enlightened and literate thanks to the national campaign of the PRC. The typical coincided with party-mindedness in that the artist intended to show the benefits of party policy by representing the typical mother-daughter relationship. The daughter, who has already been educated in a public school built for ethnic minorities in 1951 Yunnan, is teaching her mother how to read and how to become cultured. The traditional mother-daughter relationship (the mother educating her daughter) has changed, alluding to the advent of a new society under socialism. The depiction of such a typical mother-
daughter relationship, on the other hand, reflects the artist’s willingness to cater to the overriding political demands of the newly established state. The new social life envisioned the unification of the multi-ethnic state through modernization in education under the leadership of the party-state. Assimilation and acculturation into Han culture aimed at merging various ethnic minority groups into one homogenous civilization, while still embracing a certain degree of ethnic diversity.

More important, in class struggles such as peasant rebellions, ethnic minorities were set within a grand vision of China’s history of liberation. Such epic scenes became loci of the Chinese historiography of class struggles. Typical themes revealed the ways in which the PRC used history as a tool of governmentality over ethnic minority groups and subsumed distinctive groups with different ethnicities under the umbrella of Chinese citizenship. Among non-Han ethnic groups, the history of Tibet prior to the Chinese takeover in the 1950s became an important topic in reconstructing the notion of classes existing in the past. During the Cultural Revolution, Tibetans as with other Han nationals experienced violent political unrest. Tibetan Buddhism and its practitioners, such as the lamas and nuns, were under attack. In the middle of this historic turmoil, professors from state art schools, including the Lu Xun Art Academy, organized a working group to create a collective work, *Wrath of the Serfs* (1975) [Figure 80-1], which represented old Tibet and its history.
Wang Keping, Cao Chunsheng, Zaho Ruiying, Zhang Dehua, Zhang Dedi, Guan Jing, Shi Yi, Situ Zhaoguang, and Hao Jingping, among others, participated in this cultural revolutionary project. It is known that these professional artists and “liberated” (fanshen) former Tibetan serfs joined the great revolutionary criticism (geming dapipan) in the spring of 1974. Collectively, they lived, labored, and joined in class struggle sessions as part of a political education program prior to the creation of the group sculptures. The professional artists interviewed approximately seventy former Tibetan serfs to learn “why the liberated serfs deeply felt gratitude toward the party and Chairman Mao, why their indignation over the brutality of feudal serfdom was so intense that they were eager to build socialism.”

The group workshops aimed to inform the artists how the oppressed of old Tibet contributed to actualizing Chinese socialism in which the proletariat (wuchanjieji) took on the role of leadership in the new society. According to the pamphlet to promote Wrath of the Serfs, “the artists put forth great effort to insinuate the typical, compelling art images with the profound themes and their own strong class feeling by combining revolutionary realism with revolutionary romanticism.”

---

60 Wang Mingxian and Yan Shanchun (dui), 1966-76, Xinzhongguo Meishu Tushi, 2000, 286.

The main theme of *Wrath of the Serfs* was to illustrate the process of the dauntless Tibetan serfs’ liberation. Each section, which is like an act in a theatrical or operatic performance, shows a simulacrum of old Tibet. The large-scale group sculpture is composed of 106 life-size clay figures, six animals, including a donkey and horses, and four reliefs. The quasi-documentary scenes have four main sections: first, the feudal estate owners’ manors, subtitled as “the bitterest hell on earth” (*zuibeican de renjian diyu*); second, lamaseries, “dark man-eating dens” (*zuheiian de chirenmoku*); third, the reactionary local government of Tibet (*gaxia*); and finally, serfs rising in struggle and yearning for liberation. Again, ten sub-sections and themes chart the entire sequence of theatrical settings and create a linear historical narrative: first, the toil of serfs (*wulachaku*); second, unpaid laborers (*wuchanglaoyi*); third, bartering a child for a donkey (*renhuanlü*); fourth, inhuman living conditions (*feirenshenghuo*); fifth, extorting debts (*bizhai*); sixth, burying a child alive (*huomaihaizi*); seventh, conspiracy (*guojie*); eighth, struggle at an execution ground (*xingchang douzheng*); ninth, exile (*liufang*); and finally, serfs in an uprising (*nongnumenqilai*). The entire story line aims to invoke the class

---

62 In its attempt to deflect attention from the dreadful state of the country caused by the Cultural Revolution, the Chinese government promoted an image of old Tibet as “hell on earth.” The clay statues of *Wrath of the Serfs*, displayed in the Potala was one of the examples of China’s public education program about Tibet. Since then, foreign tourists had been required to see the historical pieces. According to John Powers, the Chinese government stopped convincing outsiders that the sculptures were telling an accurate story by dropping the exhibition tour from the tourist itinerary because the plastic arts invoked snickering or disbelief rather than sympathy and support for Chinese rule. John Powers, *History as Propaganda: Tibetan Exiles vs. the People’s Republic of China*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 141.
consciousness of the Tibetans and ultimately to dismantle Tibetan nationalism among this ethnically distinct people.

The first scene [Figure 80-2] demonstrates the social and production relations of old Tibet where conscripted serfs served as a means of human transportation for their masters. A male serf is carrying his master on his back, taking him up the cliff. The master sits on the serf’s back holding tightly to the serf’s arms, dangling precariously across the stooped body of the serf. The barefoot human bearer is frowning in hatred toward his master. On the other side of the first scene, a group of serfs are carrying heavy loads of butter, barley, and rice for the master. In the center, a young female serf in ragged clothes is carrying a heavy load. Her sagging body and dull eyes signal her exhaustion. The other element in the first scene consists of a group of people; it includes serfs and an overseer raising a whip to beat an old serf who just has fallen and is bleeding from the mouth because of the ponderous load he is carrying. Seeing the old man in pain, his little granddaughter kneels down and cries, with her hands covering her face. The class tension of the accident is dramatized by the appearance of a relatively young male serf who shields the older one, thus suggesting a sign of impending resistance. The women’s roles here remain relatively passive and supplementary. The women are used to highlight the hardships of physical labor; one woman who tries to obtain snow to quench her thirst and another woman who has fallen down after an attempt to lighten the load of the old man emphasize the physical weakness of their
bodies. They play a minor role in the resistance, but dramatize the cruelty of the old-fashioned mode of transportation. This typical circumstance under the serfdom of old Tibet conveys a strong sense of pre-capitalist class antagonism and hints at the seeds of class struggle.

The second episode discloses an unspoken but palpable tension filling the air. It depicts four individuals – a couple, their baby, and a superintendent [Figure. 80-3] – in two groupings as it visually constructs a story of unpaid laborers. The distraught mother pulls a plough, while her baby is practically abandoned in the field. The mother-serf leans her body into her work, which accentuates the intensity of her labor. A crow sitting on a branch casts a threatening glance at the baby, who is crying at a distance from its mother. The tantalizing distance creates a sense of crisis and urgency. Meanwhile the male serf, in iron shackles, and the superintendent glare hostilely at one other. The whip that the superintendent is holding signifies the exploitative nature of the production relation, while alluding to both potential violence and protest against it.

Prototypes of class conflict are given in the next scene in which children provide a motive for even deeper discord. The theater of class antagonism demonstrates a “typical” circumstance of old Tibet in which a child is being held hostage by evil-minded feudal lords, lamas, and stewards, so that they can steal a donkey from the boy’s grandfather [Figure 80-4]. The grandfather’s eyes have already been gouged out by the feudal lords. A steward is grabbing the grandson, who desperately struggles to free
himself. The deeply grief-stricken grandfather stretches his arms out from his emaciated body to reach his grandson. On the other side of the scene are two groups of people watching this tragic event from a distance. The first group is the ferocious lord of the manor and a lama who have together schemed to coerce the grandfather into bartering for his grandson. The other witnesses are other serfs. Among them is a female serf carrying water on her back. Her clenched fist expresses her strong indignation over the injustice happening before her. A male porter who has just dropped his burden on the ground begins to tighten his clothes around his waist. His behavior suggests his suppressed desire for revenge. The pregnant moment of immanent resistance and uprising remains implicit.

The next scene shows to the audience the inhuman existence of the serfs as they grind peas day and night for the master. Their oppressor appears as an obstruction to the realization of material, fraternal and familial love. In the scene, a mother is completely exhausted after countless hours of labor. Her hungry child cries out to ask for food by showing an empty bowl to the mother. And a sad-looking old woman – possibly the child’s grandmother – sits next to them helplessly, staring into the void. The facial expressions of these three figures are photorealistic, and even surreal, as the tears of the little child are oversized and protrude so that they can be easily noticed from a distance. The mother, holding the handle of the grinder, kneels and droops her head, displaying sorrow and frustration. She works not for herself and her family, but for her
lords – a typical scene of alienation and exploitation under feudalism. According to the official interpretation, the site alludes to the bitter reality in which “the wicked master’s grinder breaks the serfs’ bones and drains their blood but it can never destroy their vengeance born of blood and tears.”

Titled “Extorting Debts from Serfs,” the historical reconstruction of old Tibet continues in the realistic depiction of serfs’ lives under Tibetan theocracy. The contrast between good and evil shapes the basic story line in which a Tibetan laborer suffers from a large inherited debt to a lamasery. In order to pay back his grandfather’s debts, which the lamasery has saddled him with, the grandson “had to herd cattle and sheep, carrying water and cutting firewood for the lamasery only to suffer this agonizing end.” This inter-textual story about the boy’s past – the causal connection between his grandfather’s past and the grandson’s suffering – is omitted because of the semiotic constrains of the plastic arts. Instead, the herder is caught in this particular moment in which he drags his body with his two shackled arms and shoulders, as if the lower part of his body is glued to the ground. Although the herder keeps his head down, the audience can see the towering hatred in his face. The canine steward-lama who retrieves a horse with which to drag the destitute herder for his debt and another lama who kicks the bony body of the herder emphasize the wickedness of the torturers.

63 Wrath of the Serfs: A Group of Life-Size Clay Sculptures, unpaged.
64 Ibid.
The ruthlessness and cruelty of religious authority is highlighted through the idiomatic expressions of the typical lamas who try to bury a boy alive as a sacrificial offering in the hall of a Buddhist temple [Figure 80-5]. Inside the temple, a cassocked lama pushes down upon a small boy’s head as he holds tightly onto the boy’s arm and shoves the boy into a box that will be buried underground. The realistic depiction of the lama’s arm muscles, blood vessels, and wicked wrinkled face accentuate the violence of this religious tyrant. Meanwhile, the boy’s outstretched arms and wide-open mouth and eyes signify his desperate resistance. The dramatic moment of the boy’s life-and-death struggle is intensified by his mother who is outside the temple. She is frantically crying and stretching out her quivering hands, asking for her child back. This typical gesture, a theatrical and melodramatic gesture used in revolutionary ballets, is employed here in Rent Collection Courtyard in the mother’s plea to “give me back my son” [Figure 80-6].

The positioning of the two groups of lamas in different spatial divisions, the inside and the outside of the Tibetan Buddhist temple, may allude to the duplicity and hypocrisy of religious authority. The two lamas standing outside the temple attempt to block the mother from coming into the temple, as if nothing is happening inside this secret place for Buddhist worship [Figure 80-5]. A living Buddha is represented here engaged in religious practice, chanting and praying with his beads. He is flanked by a gatekeeper lama armed with an iron staff. Their snobbish and awkward faces seem to stress the deceitful nature of religious tyranny. As he witnesses this absurdity, a
carpenter sitting next to the boy’s mother expresses his enormous sympathy and indignation. The spatial divisions that distinguish the inside and outside of the temple imply the class distinction between the oppressors, who have access to the temple, and the oppressed, who are spatially excluded and denied from this privileged site of Tibetan theocracy, which is under, according to the voice of Maoist propaganda-machine, “the man-eating barbarous rule of the feudal serf system” in Tibet.

The next sculptural representation of Tibetan history features the “living Buddha” — reactionary local government officials directing the drop-off of ammunition shipped from a foreign country. This setting, though factually questionable, asserted the existence of a conspiracy between the local Tibetan government and foreign imperialists. This site of Tibetan history prior to liberation is meant to show an anti-Chinese scheme in which “serf-owners use the lamaseries for conniving with foreign imperialists and selling out China’s territories in exchange for arms and ammunition as a means of crushing the serfs’ revolts and maintaining their reactionary rule.”65 In this scene, the local government is presented as an ally to western imperialists in order to maintain its political and economic privileges and its supreme power in the remote kingdom. The invited foreign power that can protect the vast territory that the Tibetans occupy is seen as a serious threat to the PRC. The sculptures that describe this conspiracy theory were used to justify China’s sovereignty over Tibet.

65 Ibid. unpaged.
In other words, this Maoist sculpture inserts the PRC’s position about Tibetan issues into the visual representation of old Tibet and its history. It sheds light on the complex class and inter-state relationships as a means of denying that Tibet is a unitary and autonomous nation. Instead, the typical theme of class struggle focuses on the working class of old Tibet; its serfs, herders, carpenters, blacksmiths, and so on. The pre-capitalist and so-called pre-modern class of the exploited appears to be the most defining factor of the social and production relations under Tibetan serfdom. The Tibetan working class becomes rebellious and subverts the Tibetan lamas and aristocrats, achieving their liberation in the end. Although no communist party members are visible in the sequence of events, the typical circumstance turns out to harbor a critical symbol of the party and Mao Zedong: in the finale of the serfs’ victory, a red star is inscribed on the surface of a rocky mountain [Figure 80-7]. This theatrical apparatus claims that Tibetan revolutionaries were led and inspired by Mao Zedong and his party. Under the sovereignty of the PRC, Tibetan serfs appear to be asking for the political legitimacy that they acquired after liberation. The red star, the symbol of Mao, intensifies the emotionally charged loyalty to Maoist China, and creates a new sense of belonging based on the class identity of the Tibetan serfs, rather than their ethnic identity. In this way, Tibet’s political sovereignty, if it ever existed, is subordinated to the sovereignty of the PRC.
Rather than expressing the leadership of Mao and the CCP in a vernacular and realistic manner, *Wrath of the Serfs* uses a ritual of the Mao cult as a means of showing Tibetan serfs’ loyalty to Mao and the party-state. For instance, a young girl in the final scene re-draws the red star with her blood [Figure 80-7]. As described in the official catalogue, in this ritualistic act the girl “traces” in blood “to express her longing for the serfs’ deliverer Chairman Mao and the Communist Party.” The red star, which is Cultural Revolutionary iconography and also the symbol of Mao himself, sends a significant message to the audience; the presence of the red star on the rocky mountain indicates that Chinese communists such as the PLA were in Tibet prior to 1949. This could be used as historical proof, albeit virtual proof, for refuting the Tibetan view of history, which claims that there were no Han Chinese or Chinese communists in Tibet before the early 1950s and that Tibet had been independent until recently. The fact that the red star has already been inscribed on the mountaintop suggests that a Tibetan sympathizer of Chinese communism or a CCP member has already arrived in Tibet and left the sign. The symbolic presence of the communist party and Mao in old Tibet functions to confirm that Tibet was part of China even before 1949. The red star is actually an indicator of the PRC’s ownership over the land of Tibet. The final part of *Wrath of the Serfs* [Figure 80-1] reveals that this public art project is for the political education of the masses. In the last scene, the Party and Mao appear as problem-solvers

---

Ibid. unpaged.
for old Tibet’s internal class conflicts. Mao is represented as the mediator and liberator of the Tibetan people, freeing them from the vicious circle of economic, political, and religious despotism.

How did typicality work in this group project of PRC history-making? Theatrical and melodramatic realism was used in two ways to portray the Tibetan people. First, they are weak, miserable and needy; namely, they are innocent victims. Second, these victims of the Tibetan feudal system then turn out to be rebellious, righteous, and courageous, and become heroic revolutionaries in the end. The atrocities of the armed estate-holders, serf-owners, and lamas who cut off people’s limbs, gouge out eyes and hearts, burying children alive, etc., make the Tibetan rebels superheroes. The last several scenes in particular portray typical heroes who do not submit themselves to the evil power of their class enemies. The “site of execution” demonstrates the fearless heroic figures who are situated among the amassed Tibetan people and are ready for a class war. The female protagonist [Figure 80-8], a woman serf, points her index finger at the “bloodsuckers” to denounce their crimes and injustice in front of the Potala Palace, even though she is about to be executed by the class enemy. It is known that she led an uprising and destroyed the manors and the property of the Tibetan bourgeoisie. Now she has been brought to the site of punishment. However, the heroine is portrayed as a woman of charisma and iron-will who will make her enemies tremble until the last moment. The Tibetan martyr who is not afraid of dying for Tibet’s liberation has been
turned into a typical hero of the Maoist era. By using her index finger, the heroine performs the universal body language of accusation. This gestural language of revolution operates as a useful method of communication for delivering the message of class struggle to the audience. A blacksmith who is handcuffed and imprisoned in a wooden cage looks out solemnly; his magisterial gaze emits the aura of a religious saint. Here the typical characters of revolutionary heroism resist against the typical circumstance of old Tibet, which is characterized as a brutal theocracy.

The epic scenario of old Tibet’s liberation ends with a final scene titled “the serfs struggle for liberation,” in which “the serfs’ rebellions shake the entire Tibetan Plateau and they fight heroically for their final emancipation.”67 Here the main protagonist is a male serf wearing torn clothes and holding smashed fetters. Such visual codes are very similar to the self-empowering images of Third World peoples discussed in Chapter One. The serf looks down on two defeated estate-holders: one of them has died after being pierced in the back by an arrow shot by the serf. The estate-holder’s corpse appears pathetic and ridiculous. The arrow shooter, who is a Loba national, is a serf who has just smashed his yoke and broken his shackles. This image borrows from the popular visual language used to describe the downtrodden in allegorical images of the Chinese nation-

67 Ibid., unpaged.
state in danger. These frequently used symbols of broken fetters, yokes, and handcuffs, as well as crushed cages and open prisons, often appear in order to embody a transitional period in the Chinese history of emancipation, from oppression/national humiliation to emancipation/liberation. Led by Mao and his party, the epic narrative of revolutionary history comes to include the history of old Tibet and its transformation from a hellish serfdom to a utopian socialism. In this way, the group sculptures spatialize the grand progress of history – the class antagonism and ensuing class struggle in the contradictory forces of feudalism and socialism. Here, the typical is a quilting point that sews together the totality of Maoist art across diverse media and genres. Reflecting the preference of Jiang Qing, Mao’s wife, the exaggerated body movements in revolutionary model operas and ballets, such as *the Red Detachment of Women*, also appeared in sculptures of individual serfs and working-class people. The heroic protagonist raises an arm high to suggest the uplifted noble spirit of the serfs – a sign of going forward to lead the masses. The grand-scale theater of the class war envisions the spectacular triumph of the Tibetans.

The question of how to characterize old Tibet broaches a critical issue in establishing the legitimacy of China’s rule over Tibet; or in claiming the latter’s

---

68 The visual codes were popular in the woodblock prints produced by left-wing printmakers under Japan’s colonial rule since the early twentieth century.
independence, as John Powers argues in *History as Propaganda*. Wrath of the Serfs visualizes the old Tibetan era as an inferno where brutish Tibetan Buddhist lamas and aristocrats dominated the Tibetans, most of whom were serfs. According to the official view of the PRC, Tibet has been part of China since the dynastic eras, and Han China has brought economic prosperity and the advantages of modernization to backward and uncivilized Tibet. In contrast, the Tibetan exiles under Dalai Lama insist that Tibet prior to the Chinese takeover was a closed and independent country in an idyllic state of non-conflict. The polarized and partial views of each side have provoked endless debates about historical truths, and generated many perplexities based on different and conflicting assumptions, worldviews, and historical records written by people on one side or the other. Nevertheless, what is obvious is that Wrath of the Serfs reflects the PRC’s standpoint as a means of legitimizing the Chinese version of history. The revolutionary history of the serfs’ emancipation was meant to bring about the rebirth of the Tibetans as Chinese citizens. The dissolution of the old hierarchy became the foundation for the new social order based on the state’s ideology of Chinese socialism. Therefore the historical paradigm was oriented to negate the burgeoning nationalism of Tibet by igniting class antagonisms among people of shared ethnicity in the local communities of the Tibetan Plateau.

---


70 According to the Chinese version of Tibetan history, ninety-five percent of the population were serfs.
Mao’s essay “On Practice and Contradiction” enriches our understanding of the Maoist idea of class and class struggle. According to Mao, there are the principal contradiction and the secondary and subordinate contradictions; and their priorities shift. He believed that the primary contradiction is formed by the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. And the primary contradiction usually determines other contradictions between other groups of people such as “between the remnant feudal class and the bourgeoisie, between the peasant petty bourgeoisie and the bourgeoisie, between the proletariat and the peasant petty bourgeoisie, between the non-monopoly capitalists and monopoly capitalists between bourgeois democracy and bourgeois fascism, among the capitalist countries and between imperialism and the colonies.” ⁷¹ However, the contradiction between imperialism and an invaded country becomes the principal contradiction when imperialism launches a war of aggression against a country. Then all the various classes that might once have formed the principal contradiction must become united in a national war against imperialism. According to Mao, “all the contradictions among the various classes within the country become temporarily relegated to a secondary and subordinate position.” ⁷²

---


⁷² Ibid.
Then what was the principal contradiction of old Tibet? Since there were no such classes as the proletariat and the bourgeoisie under capitalism, the principal contradiction must have been the one between the feudal classes and the serfs. The principal contradiction did not change until the lamas allied themselves with foreign imperialists to sell out the territory of Tibet. The possibility of a colonial war justifies Han Chinese and Tibetan serfs’ cooperation because of a shift in priorities; the contradiction between imperialism and the invaded country becomes the principal contradiction. On this logic, ethnic identities and the national consciousness of Tibet are weakened.\(^{73}\) The possible contradiction between the Han and Tibetan, as a result, becomes secondary or subordinate. In the Maoist framework, it is impossible to expect the Tibetans to fight against the imperialism of China or a foreign country. The foreign imperialists are actually an indispensable constituent of the image of Tibet as part of China, where ethnic minorities are imagined as an organic and integral part of one body, the People’s Republic of China.

In conclusion, the Maoist drive for permanent revolution was characterized by a state-centered egalitarianism that emphasized the unity of the state. This condition led the aesthetic principle of the typical to develop in a particular direction. *Wrath of the Serfs*, the monumental and theatrical sculptures demonstrating class struggle, was meant

\(^{73}\) The nationalism of Tibet (the modern concept) in fact did not exist in old Tibet and it emerged after China’s takeover in the early 1950s.
utilize the virtual notion of classes to reinvent China as a modern and socialist state that included the territory of Tibet. This historical setting suggests that classes are the crucial criterion for the new citizenship of the socialist state, which nominally represents the working class. Maoist visual culture in coordination with socialist realist aesthetics invented diverse mixtures of identity politics in which versatile factors of identification such as ethnicity, sexuality, class, religion, and race were emphasized or deemphasized, depending on the political, economic, and cultural priorities of the party-state. However class often remains as the top priority among others, in order to sustain the national identity of China as socialist. In this light, *Wrath of the Serfs* shows how Chinese artists, after receiving a political education with liberated Tibetan serfs, employed the Maoist notion of class and the typical as a way of repressing the bourgeoning nationalisms of ethnic minorities and consolidating the imagined unity of the Chinese nation-state.

**The Typical and Beyond**

How influential was the typical in forming socialist subjectivity under Mao? It is true that, under the influence of the public education program of Maoist visual culture, people in China were exposed to a number of socialist realist and Maoist images that depicted typical characters behaving in a typical manner under typical circumstances. Yet it is difficult to determine how much typicality affected people’s mindsets – when identifying themselves, imagining their situatedness, and locating themselves in the
world of socialism and global capitalism. What this dissertation can do as one way of
approaching historical truth is to analyze the self-portraits of professional artists. Visual
and historical analyses can help us to understand the actual impact of typical images on
the lives of people who lived through the Maoist period.

**The Persisting Ego of Professional Artists and Their Self-Portraits**

Mao’s initiative for realizing socialism was partly achieved by undoing what
premature capitalism had done to people. Among other things, the elimination of the
division of labor was undertaken. Mao chose labor as the method for transforming the
nature of professionals into that of the well-grounded socialist subject. He believed that
physical labor as opposed to mental labor would lead to the dissolution of the division
of labor. The national project of dislocating the urban population to rural areas and of
forcing them to perform daily labor was considered a pivotal way of transforming
people into socialist subjects because it would eradicate the former division of labor.
Given the historical circumstances, the labor of art became an essential part of socialist
everyday life and was also a means of making life as beautiful as art. Professional artists
were sent to the countryside to learn from peasants and were expected to assimilate into
the peasantry. In the countryside, the painterly practice of amateur peasant artists and
the physical toil of professional artists were believed to change the orientation of their
labor – with peasants becoming artists and artists becoming peasants.
Mao’s position of cherishing the art of the masses is revealed in the formation of Maoist subjectivity. What is noteworthy, however, is the fact that the re-education campaign to dismantle the division of labor did not so much change professional artists into peasant workers as transform selected peasants into quasi-amateur artists. The ways in which the famous Hu Xian peasant painters were promoted and emulated supports this view, although this special case might not reflect the entire complex landscape of peasant paintings that flourished during the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution. During those years, anonymous and purely “red” people collectively participated in producing handicrafts, decorating village murals, posting big character posters, and displaying amateur works in local culture centers. This was the period when the amateurism of PLA, worker, and peasant artists was promoted as an important characteristic of the new socialist art and Maoist mass culture. Peasant paintings were popularized in order to advertise the de-alienation phenomenon of Maoist China, in contrast to the rigid stratification of capitalist society, which treated people based on the function of their labor in the capitalist production process.

The (self) portraits of professional artists function as a subtext of Mao’s policy on the politics of art. The pictorial images of professional artists often encode their self-identifications as these were affected by their “unreformed” and “petty bourgeois” mindsets, as well as their failures in denying the self. They reflected the inconsistent art being produced in the Chinese art world, which still valued the individuality of artists.
as the source of creativity, in opposition to the radical line of Mao’s art and cultural policies. This was a paradox of the art world of Maoist China. Influenced by the western notion of modern art, professional artists tended to regard the stylistic and formal innovations of individual artists as an important criterion when estimating the artistic value of their works. Although this view conflicted with the Maoist line that promoted the amateurism of non-professional artists, Mao and other elite party members such as Zhou Enlai and Guo Moruo also appreciated the importance of individuality in creating works of art. Depending on the shifts in party policies, Chinese artists would change their own identities. On the one hand, they attempted to assimilate into the masses, especially into the peasantry, when they were dislocated to remote areas. On the other hand, professionally trained artists retained their own self-images as individual and somewhat autonomous artists who believed, perhaps unconsciously, that in order to prevent the complete politicization of art, art should remain at a distance from politics.

But as mentioned above, Mao’s policy for de-alienation ended up advertising the creativity of individual artists who were from peasant families, rather than erasing the division of labor. Maoist mass culture instead endowed amateur painters with halos of peasant-ness. Ironically, the individuality of amateur painters became more important for demonstrating the success of Mao’s thought reform (sixiang gaizao) campaigns. Meanwhile, artists’ portraits betrayed the repressed internal contradictions and
unconscious conflicts that the professional artists had to cope with under Mao’s popularization policy, which aimed at suppressing the professionalism of Chinese artists.

Compared to the millions of copies of the omnipresent official and unofficial portraits of Chairman Mao, the number of artists’ portraits is relatively few. However, portraits of individual artists – ranging from the portraits of Qi Baishi by Wu Zuoren and Konstantin Maksimov, to the self-portraits by Wang Shikuo, Yao Zhonghua, and Gu Xiong – provide significant visual materials. In the portraits of professional artists, their persisting egos remain detectable: the painters maintain the aura of fine art, which also signifies their pride and self-conscious effort to communicate their professional status as artists. The paintings also show the artists’ irreconcilable and compromising gestures in drawing the boundary of the self in relation to or in separation from Mao, the people, the communist party, the nation-state, and finally the ideal of socialism. Derived from Mao’s Yan’an Talk on literature and art in 1942, the view that gave prominence to politics over art tended to conflict with the professionalization of art and the professionalism of artists. This created a constant tension between the so-called “red” and the “expert” in the Maoist pursuit of de-professionalization and de-alienation.

When the focal point of the CCP’s policy shifted from popularization to professionalization around 1953, portraits of respected master painters like Qi Baishi (1864-1957) appeared in the early 1950s. In 1954, oil and guohua artist and art professor Wu Zuoren, using the classic setting of the western oil portrait, painted Qi Baishi, the
master of traditional ink and brush painting who was also the president of the Central Academy of Fine Arts. The subject matter of Qi’s guohua included birds, flowers, shrimps and insects, and was so traditional and possibly feudal that the manifest content of his paintings seemed irrelevant to the orientation of the new social reality. To those who sought for a new form of socialist arts – e.g., the supporters of socialist realism, Jiang Feng and Ai Qing – the ink paintings by Qi Baishi did not measure up to the new expectations and standards of Chinese socialist art. However, they considered Qi to be an exception because this old master occupied an exceptional status in the Chinese art world. Qi was a senior artist whose lifelong commitment to art was widely respected. He was originally from a peasant family near Mao’s hometown in Hunan. To some extent, cultural nationalism approved of the old master’s extraordinary expertise in ink painting as a means for preserving the timeless national heritage. Given the fact that Qi was the president of the CAFA, the authorities secured Qi’s position in the state art school in an effort to raise the standard of art and take advantage of specialists in art for public and national projects.

Wu Zuoren’s oil painting titled Qi Baishi (1954) [Figure 81] highlights Qi’s exceptional status in the professional art world of 1950s China. In Wu’s portrait, Qi Baishi seems lionized by the painter in his admiration for the aged master. Reminding the viewer of western and socialist realist conventions of portraits, Wu depicts a noble man sitting on a luxurious chair that is covered with a decorative and exotic leopard fur.
Wu’s portrayal of Qi’s firmly set mouth, calm gaze, thick white eyebrows, wavy long white beard, and wrinkled skin give Qi a realistic facial expression. The artist’s hands are slightly highlighted, while his huge body in its dark green garment faces almost directly to the front. This image of the senior painter is far from the portrait of the down-to-earth version of the Maoist noble man in, for instance, “the old party secretary” portrayed by Hu Xian peasant painter, Liu Zhide (1973) [Figure 82]. Wu did not paint a typical figure representing the class of professional painters in the same way that Liu painted a typical party secretary whom anyone could bump into in the neighborhoods of their local villages. Instead, Wu placed Qi Baishi in the center of the scene. The gaze of the viewer is led to Qi sitting against a blank background, radiating the invisible aura of a noble man. The individuality of this guohua artist thus remains intact.

Inside academic circles of professional artists such as the CAFA, Mao’s policy of popularization did not transform the deeply rooted self-images of artists as autonomous individuals. While teaching at the school from 1955 to 1957, Konstantin Maksimov painted his colleagues, including Qi Baishi and Wu Zuoren. The Soviet socialist realist painter showed Qi working in his studio in 1956 [Figure 83]. The incomplete, abstract, and sketch-like painting style of Maksimov, embodied in the swift movements of the Soviet artist’s brush, create a rough, croquis-like contour of Qi and his surroundings. This stylistic character deviates from the classical and socialist realist approach to
portraits. The seemingly preliminary portrait by the Soviet painter is very dissimilar to Wu Zuoren’s conservative and classical rendering of Qi.

However, Konstantin Maksimov presented a different technique and style in his portrait of Wu Zuoren (1957) [Figure 84]. In this portrait, the young and determined artist, Wu, is standing and staring at the viewer. His bodily posture and hooded jacket may imply his extraverted character and activeness, while his firmly closed lips, reddish cheeks, and masculine countenance illustrate the physiognomic characteristics of this relatively young yet determined artist and professor. The aforementioned three portraits of professional artists do not show any recognizable signs of the typicality of the petty-bourgeois class to which they belonged – for instance, Qi Baishi’s peasant origins were revealed in none of the portraits painted by Wu Zuoren and Konstantin Maksimov. The ways in which professional artists portrayed each other reveal how the professional artists saw themselves in the image of the other – i.e., their colleagues. Partly because the emptied-out backgrounds of the portraits (with the exception of Maksimov’s portrait of Qi in his studio) remain blank and apolitical, the focus of the portraits lies in the single person of the artist himself, without any direct contextual and situational clues as to his class, social status, ideological commitments, or political and economic circumstances. The portraits are missing the basic elements required for being typical.

The tendency to portray professional artists as individual professionals continued, but diversified with the launching of the Great Leap Forward (1958-61).
During those years of the Great Leap Forward, the professionalism of artists was both encouraged and discouraged. Chinese artists, as Fu Baoshi stated, had to satisfy the production quotas of paintings and drawings set by the local Chinese Artists Association. The numbers of paintings and drawings produced became very important; therefore, professional artists had to devote themselves to the production and labor of art-making. At the same time, the content of their products was relevant to so-called popularism and had to be rooted in Maoist mass culture. This fact demonstrates that the professionalism of the painters was to some extent repressed. Meanwhile, Chinese artists had to participate in national projects such as melting steel in backyard furnaces. The division of labor and labor time (the duration of time necessary for people to be disciplined as professional artists through an academic system) operated against the professionalization of art practitioners. Jin Shangyi’s self-portrait betrays his strong sense of self. Based on what is literally painted on the paperboard, the artist’s own image of self is not associated with any collective identity of artists as a group or class, or their relationship to Chinese society as a whole. Jin Shangyi (b. 1934), a student of Maksimov who taught in the printmaking department of the CAFA, painted himself as a twenty-five-year-old artist. Using simple brushstrokes with a few oil colors, he straightforwardly completed the basic structure of his bust. Jin portrayed himself wearing a confident and somewhat narcissistic look by painting himself as a young man with his chin tipped slightly up.
In contrast to Jin Shangyi’s self-portrait, Wu Zuoren’s painting titled Peasant Painter (nongmin huajia) (1958) [Figure 85] shows a diversification or change in the portraits of professional artists. In Wu’s portrait of a peasant painter in the middle of the Great Leap Forward, the artist’s self-identification happens through a depiction of the other, i.e., the peasantry. Rather than focusing on a single person, Wu in the painting illustrates a beautiful rural landscape where a peasant is painting village murals of Great Leap Forward imagery such as vegetables, grain, and peasants – the scene of an imagined bumper harvest. The peasant is described as performing the labor of art-making as part of the daily routine of socialist life. If we imagine the full picture that remains invisible to the viewer – the entire situation in which Wu is painting a peasant making village murals – it is possible to see the inter-subjective relationship between Wu and the peasant painter. Here the portrait of the amateur peasant painter turns into a metonymy or a mirror image of the professional artist, Wu, himself.\(^4\) This analysis coincides with Wu’s own view since, in 1959, he asserted in Meishu\(^5\) that a portrait inevitably reflects the artist who painted it. This portrait of a peasant painter suggests Wu’s efforts to accomplish a rapport (xiangqi) between the model and the artist.”\(^6\) The

---

\(^4\) Jacque Lacan’s notion of the specular image is useful in the sense that the human being is captivated by the mirror image: this is the basic reason for the power of the imaginary in the subject and explains why a human being projects this image of his/her body onto all other objects in the world around him/her.


\(^6\) Ibid., 46.
essential principles of portrait painting include a deep understanding of the model. In order to appreciate the true nature of the model, i.e., aspects such as strength and weakness, personality, and inner mind and spirit, as well as an accurate countenance, the artist should come to know the model in person (qinzi renshi). To Wu, the peasant amateur painter is the model he should come to know and assimilate to.

The mutual understanding between Wu and the peasant painter also exemplifies the implementation of Mao’s strategies for eradicating, through role changes, the division of labor and alienation. By this process, one must transform into a socialist subject. Wu and the peasant painter carried out what was called “professional artists becoming amateurs” (zhuanye huajia de yeyuhua) and “[peasant] amateur painters becoming professionals” (yeyuhuajia de zhuanyehua). While being sent down to the countryside, the relocated urbanite artists painted what they saw, experienced, and were involved in at the rural sites. There they were de-professionalized, according to Mao’s theory, by doing a great deal of manual labor everyday with peasants. And an imaginary identification was to follow. Under Mao’s policy, “learning from the masses,” “petty bourgeois” artists were supposed to change or liquidate their class and become new Maoist subjects through a continuous laboring process at the sites of socialist construction, collectivization, and mass mobilization. Along with the body movement of physical labor, the re-education program was designed to facilitate the physical and

77 Gu, 138.
spiritual reform of the mental laborers. Here manual labor became a crucial method for injecting socialist consciousness into people and switching the roles of professional artists and the peasantry.

The labor of art – a tool for public service, capital accumulation, and revolutionary enforcement – was connected to the imaginary identification of professional artists, “the identification on behalf of a certain gaze in the other.” The gaze of Mao, like the superego, was internalized in the process of the imaginary identification of professional artists. They were encouraged to imitate the model image of the peasantry and to play the role of the peasant. The socialist subject, including professional artists, was supposed to enact the ideal role of the peasantry in order to meet Mao’s expectations about them. In this process, the artists enacted the peasantry, and identified the peasants they met with the model image of the peasantry Mao ideally envisioned.

In this light, Wu Zuoren’s portrait, Peasant Painter (1958), suggests that the peasant was not the only object of his painting. Wu projected the image of the peasant onto his imaginary identity. Thus, in a reversal, he portrayed a peasant acting like an artist. The huge gap between the idealized peasantry and real peasants constituted the inter-dependent and mutual identification of professional artists becoming the peasantry

78 Zizek, the Sublime Object of Ideology, 106.
and of peasants becoming artists. Here the depicted peasant painter becomes a typical figure, rather than an individual, representing the age of the Great Leap Forward. Maoist images illustrate the illusionary identification that results from the confirmation of the subject’s existence in the image of the other (professional artists in the image of the peasantry and peasants in the image of the professional artists). The existence of both socialist subjects however was to be confirmed by none other than Mao Zedong. In this way, a set of socialist realist aesthetics, including typicality, enabled Maoist images to visualize a new type of human relations, which was understood as socialist. De-alienated and de-professionalized groups virtually formed and constituted the Maoist and socialist realist terms of social relations as a means of transforming the class of petty bourgeois artists into that of the peasantry.

The self-portraits of two Chinese oil painters, Wang Shikuo (1911-73) [Figure 86] and Yao Zhonghua (b.1939) [Figure 87], make an interesting pair in that these two contemporary self-portraits show a historical continuity and also an ambiguity in constructing the multiple and conflicting characters of the artists amid the chaotic first three years of the Cultural Revolution (1966-76). Wang Shikuo, a veteran artist from the CCP’s Yan’an years, painted his own image in 1967. The realistic oil painting shows a sharp and determined artist wearing a Mao badge, the symbol of the artist’s loyalty to Chairman Mao and his commitment to Mao Zedong Thought. Wang presents himself as a passionate and devoted follower of Mao, the red sun. The individuality of the artist
can still be detected in that the slightly combative and militant image of the artist in a Mao’s suit conveys the character of the individual artist and his strong personality. Yet his individuality is mediated by the voice of Mao and Mao’s invisible presence in the gold-colored badge on the artist’s chest. In the Mao-centered socialist universe, Mao’s words practically become natural law, as the populace, like sunflowers, follow the sun that is Chairman Mao. As in the self-portrait of Wang, Mao’s vision of the world endowed individual artists with the historical mission of socialist revolution, situating them in the register of messianic time. The imagined unity of the great Maoist family intervened in adjusting and configuring the boundary of the self under the surveillance of Chairman Mao. Wang’s resolute countenance seems to eliminate, purify, and sublimate the complexity and perplexity of human beings, their internal anxiety and contradictions, in bare pursuit of the Maoist ideal. Wang in his self-portrait appears to wear without clumsiness the somewhat formulaic and typical mask of the desirable Maoist man.

The manifest content of the portraits, however, does not fully explain the latent intentions of artists and the conditions of their unconsciousness. Like a moment in a Freudian joke – when the superego accidentally allows the ego to generate humor against the demands of society – Yao Zhonghua’s self-portrait (1968) seems to untie the tongue of the artist and incorporate his unspoken words into the visual codes of his own image. Yao’s self-portrait sends out encoded, ambiguous, and mixed signals mainly
because he uses the symbol of the Mao cult, the little red book (the anthology of Mao’s quotations and essays) in an obscure way. He tries to present his self-portrait as fine art, not a popular poster image, since the title of his red book is not explicitly shown. This allusiveness turns the painting into a kind of fine art when compared to other inexpensive, mass-produced political posters in which the sent-down urban youth hold Mao’s red books with their titles visible and recognizable. In Yao’s self-portrait, it is hard to tell whether the seated Yao in his studio is holding a little book with a red cover, or holding the Book of Mao as the symbol of the artist’s commitment to the Maoist cause. Therefore the intention of the artist, who does not want to disclose the title of the red book, remains hidden. As a result, this ambiguous gesture creates a difference from the popular poster images of the Cultural Revolution in which, as I mentioned already, the Red Guards carry Mao’s red books wherever they go. Detached from the kitsch value of reproducible mass culture, Yao’s self-portrait maintains the aura of high art. The canvases and a palette, placed in the background of the oil painting, illustrate Yao’s wish to be identified as a painter and artist rather than as a revolutionary hero or comrade in arms. This explicit statement about himself, with his unidentifiable belonging, i.e. the book in his hands, generates an ambiguous message.

There is no clear difference between the self-portraits of professional artists during the Republican era (1912-1949) like that of Sun Zongwei (1945) [Figure 88] and the self-portrait by Yao. The only recognizable discrepancy lies in the presence of a
suspicious book. This phenomenon, thus, shows the historical continuity in the construction of the identity of professional artists as reflected in diverse self-portraits.

The repetitive patterns and styles in their self-presentations betray the vestiges of an unchanged or persisting “petty bourgeois” mentality that values artists’ independence and celebrates the freedom of art unbounded by politics. This attitude of seeing artists as creative and autonomous individuals echoes the myth of high modernist capitalism imported from the West.

Yao’s ambiguous message could be read as his not so passive, but perhaps unconscious, resistance, against Mao and his revolutionary utopianism. Considering that Yao painted the self-portrait in 1968 when armed factions of the Red Guards had swept in and paralyzed (art) schools through the blind worship of Mao, and when educated urban youths had begun to be dispatched into remote regions of rural China, Yao’s self-image offers multiple meanings. Although the self-portrait might not intend to directly denounce the nonsense and unquestioned violence exercised over the populace during the Cultural Revolution, a strong self-consciousness is present and tangible in his painting. Even during the high point of Mao’s revolutionary experiment, which entailed harsh self-criticism and violent public accusations and punishments, professional artists (a group targeted for public self-criticism) tended to maintain a firm grip on defining who they were. The cases of Pan Tianshou (1897-1971), Dong Xiwen (1914-73), Huang Yongyu (b. 1924), and Shi Lu (1919-82) – albeit ironically in his
madness, show that such professional artists, despite suffering from the instability prevalent in the whole society, maintained homeostasis regardless of the high pressure exerted from the external world. Many respected artists took a critical stance in confronting the absurdity of the historical turmoil led by Mao, Jiang Qing, and the Gang of Four.79

Whereas the “redness” of Cultural Revolutionary art was toned down in the “high” art of Yao’s self-portrait, the popular iconography of Maoist mass culture was transplanted in other self-portraits by Chinese artists. Gu Xiong’s drawing [Figure 89], which expresses the moment of the artist’s disillusionment about Mao’s utopianism (suimie huanxing), demonstrates the residual impact of the typical on Gu’s self-image. In the aftermath of the “up to the mountains and down to the villages” policy (shangshan xiaxiang), Gu (b. 1953), an educated urban youth from a “black” family, was sent down to the Daba Mountain Region at the border of Shaanxi and Sichuan provinces – “the most remote, impoverished, and backward areas in China,” according to Gu.80 There he lived with six families in a courtyard house, had to climb to the top of the mountains to gather wood to cook, and worked from sunrise to sunset, sometimes twenty hours a day, during spring and fall, with no leisure time.81 In his autobiographical essay Gu says that

79 Mao’s last wife, Jiang Qing, and her associates, Zhang Chunqiao, Yao Wenyuan, and Wang Hongwen.

80 Gu Xiong, “When We Were Young: Up to the Mountains, Down to the Villages,” Art In Turmoil, (Vancouver: UBC Press, c 2010), 110.
“although the peasants knew more than we did about farming, we distinguished ourselves with our superior artistic talent and earned their respect.”\textsuperscript{82} With a keen sense for differentiating “we” from “the peasants,” in Gu’s words, his view explains the difficulty that artists had in assimilating themselves to the peasants and their life styles. In spite of Mao’s aim to eradicate the distinction between manual and mental labor, it must have been hard to subvert the old hierarchy of different types of labor, given that Gu distinguishes his “superior artistic talent” and the exalted labor of art” from the “inferior” manual labor of farming.

Gu’s self-identifying standpoint may be symptomatic of the ultimate failure of Mao’s project for de-alienation and elimination of the division of labor. Marx and Engels thought that under communism “the subordination of the artist to local and national narrowness, arising entirely from divisions of labor, and also the subordination of the artist to some definite art, thanks to which he is exclusively painter, sculptor, etc. would disappear.”\textsuperscript{83} For them, the labor of art — “the name of his activity (such as painting and sculpturing) adequately [expresses] the narrowness of his professional development and his dependence on division of labor; therefore, “in a communist society, there would be

\textsuperscript{81} Ibid., 112.

\textsuperscript{82} Ibid., 115.

\textsuperscript{83} Marx and Engels, “The German Ideology” (1845-46), reprinted in Lee Baxandall ed. Marx Engels on Literature and Art, 71.

316
no painters, but at most people who engage in painting among other activities” allegedly thanks to the destruction of the capitalist or socialist division of labor.

Gu’s *Shattering Illusions* (1974) captures an enlightened moment that the artist had after a series of frustrating experiences. Because his father had been accused of being a rightist and country-revolutionary during the Anti-Rightist Campaign (1957), Gu’s father was sent to a labor camp and spent almost thirty years there. After that, Gu’s mother, brother, and sister were classified as rightists and discriminated against. During the Cultural Revolution, the family was under attack partly due to the stigma of the rightists class. While Gu’s mother stayed alone in the city, Gu and Gu’s brother and sister were relocated to a remote area. Gu worked hard to prove himself clean so that he could return home and be with his mother. But he was rejected five times by potential employers because, due to his father’s political background, he had been born into a black family. According to Gu, it was believed that only five percent of all children born into black families could be re-educated, which meant that the ninety-five percent majority of these unfortunate children were never supposed to be rehabilitated. This was a pre-determined and obviously hierarchical social condition that was necessary for maintaining the socialist stratum under Mao’s rule. In his essay Gu writes:

In the beginning, I believed that if I worked hard, I might fit into this category [the five percent] and eventually find my way back to the city. But my dreams were crushed, and I lived with the shame of having been
born into a “black family.” My inner feelings and longings surfaced in the white pages of my sketchbooks.\footnote{Gu Xiong, 117.}

With the momentum of his frustration and abysmal misery, Gu expresses his feelings of despair, anger, and defiance; sensations exactly the opposite of the sensations of socialist realism, which was full of happiness, optimism and satisfaction, against the injustice caused by the caste system of socialist China. Sketching became a channel for Gu, in his early twenties, to expose his latent desire, yearning, and hope.

Paradoxically enough, the pictorial monologue of Gu’s sketch, hammering with a clenched fist, looks very similar to the popular revolutionary imagery in which the allegorical figures of China’s revolution – for instance, masculine, staunch and heroic commanders – take on a belligerent posture, smashing enemies with clenched fists. The contemporary Maoist poster, \textit{Smash the Dog Heads of Soviet Revisionists (zalan suxiu de goutou)} (1967) [Figure 90] depicts the gigantic body parts of two comrades in arms, one Chinese and one Russian, crushing the heads of Soviet traitors. The oversized masculine arms and rolled-up sleeves compose the main axis of the entire scene while the faces of the two revolutionaries convey the justice of their actions. The emphasis on physical power expressed through the black, red, and white colors and the bold contour of the shoulders and arms as they come down into tightly closed fists is increased by the
perpendicular movement of the two strong arms. Whereas the poster clearly shows the small-scale enemies being crushed, Gu Xiong’s self-portrait does not directly express who the enemies are. He instead adapts and appropriates the popular body language of Maoist men in order to embody the moment of his own disillusion with Maoist values and beliefs. Gu had seen numerous posters depicting typical revolutionary characters during the Cultural Revolution when the dogmatic principles of Jiang Qing emphasized red, bright, and shining (hong, guang and liang); and lofty, grand, and complete (gao, da and chuan) in Yan’an style arts. Pointedly, Gu reproduces the iconic images of the Maoist new man – stiff body postures, muscular arms, clenched fists, rolled-up sleeves, determined face, thick eyebrows, tightly sealed lips, well-built bodies in a bold silhouette etc. – in order to refute and denounce what the visual codes were originally employed for. The socialist realist, Maoist, and typical characterization of socialist subjectivity was intended to sustain the fantasy of socialism. The inevitable consequence of recycling such imagery was the idealization of the self insofar as Gu’s self-image ended up creating another heroic character.

The repetition of typical visual codes might indicate a lack of “originality” on the part of an artist who, in his attempt to imagine a new self and to immortalize the ephemeral moment of self-enlightenment in his drawing, was incapable of creating an alternative language or style that could replace the norms of Maoist visual culture. But the graphic illustration of Gu’s diary-like sketch on September 1, 1974 (approaching the
end of the Cultural Revolution) shows how deeply and profoundly the accumulated experience of Maoist mass culture had penetrated into and shaped the unconsciousness of the self-identification of Chinese artists. All in all, Mao’s re-education program seems to have been partially successful to the extent that Gu drew the boundary of the self, detached from and also attached to Mao Zedong Thought and Mao’s vision of the new man. The enigma of this self-portrait stems from the power of the dominant mode of representation, i.e., of socialist realism, including typicality. The overarching influence of socialist realist aesthetics set a limit to how empirical data about the Chinese artist could be registered in the visual. The anti-Maoist image of the reborn artist still resonates with the indelible impact of Maoist visual production upon people’s mindsets under Mao’s reign.

In conclusion, the self-portraits of Chinese professional artists demonstrated that the putative totalitarian society of Maoist China did not lead professionally trained artists to lose their self-conscious sense of being individual artists, although the latter was often incompatible with Mao’s socialist consciousness. This historical fact however

85 Along with the half-work and half-study policy to combine education with manual labor (this program became effective nationwide in 1958, was reinvigorated in 1964 on an increasingly large scale, and finally reached its peak during the Cultural Revolution), de-alienation intersected with de-professionalization since the orthodox Marxist view of socialist men was well grounded and multi-tasking. The ideal of Maoist laborers, capable of both mental and manual labor, appeared in visual images and bodily representations of pleasure and libidinal desire.

86 Another interpretation of Gu’s image could be that it is an ironic manipulation of Maoist imagery, a parody that appropriated the typical image of Maoist man against Mao.
does not mean that all Chinese artists retained a strong sense of the self as they underwent Mao’s labor-intensive de-professionalization and de-alienation projects. Rather, the surviving portraits of professional artists, a very specific genre of so-called bourgeois art, illustrate signs of the artists’ negotiations in re-establishing their identities. The artists came to terms with incongruous images of the self, depending on shifting and inconsistent party-policies. Here the typical exercised its power in constructing socialist subjectivity to some extent, as Gu Xiong’s drawing exemplifies. This chapter has discussed the ways in which typicality, in coordination with socialist realist aesthetics, constructed the fantasy of socialism. The idea of classes and class struggles created a socialist temporality and helped people to perceive historical time as a series of class struggles. In spite of China’s domesticated capitalism and an inconsistent social reality that was unsuitable for the ideal of socialism, the socialist fantasy led to a social contract that sustained the collective belief that socialism was real. Maoist images played a key role in maintaining the consistency of the socialist fantasy, in spite of the inconsistent empirical data of the lives of individual citizens.

---

While their self-identifications betray the dynamic interaction between “ideal ego” and “ego ideal”, the readjusted and sometimes self-censored images of the artists show the fissure between their imagined perfection in the imaginary and a lack in the symbolic.
EPILOGUE: Afterthought

Kojin Karatani, in *The Structure of World History* published in 2014, raises a noteworthy question: “Why have Marxist movements always stumbled badly in the face of the problems of the state and nation?”¹ According to Karatani, Karl Marx mistakenly regarded nation and state as part of the ideological superstructure. Marx therefore believed that once the capitalist system was abolished, nation and state would naturally wither away. Karatani argues that Marx “failed to see that state and nation like capital have their own real bases and hence cannot be dissolved simply through acts of enlightenment” even if the capitalist system is overtaken.² To Karatani, understanding the complex social formations of capital-nation-state is important for overcoming the weakness of Marx’s view and for rethinking world history from a new perspective.³ Here the case study of Chinese socialism – perhaps an example of “a failed Marxist movement” – suggests a critical question about how the material bases of the nation and state interact with capital. How have the social formations of capital-nation-state, which possess their own real bases, interacted with and responded to the universal economic


² Ibid.

³ His point of view focuses on the mode of exchange rather than the mode of production. According to Karatani, the various social formations – clan, Asiatic, ancient classical, and Germanic – are not successive linear historical stages but instead exist simultaneously and in mutual interrelationship, Ibid., 22.
laws of capital? What kind of insight can Karatani’s argument provide for us in trying to appreciate Chinese socialism?

**Identity and Difference**

In the wake of China’s overarching market-economic reforms, Deng Xiaoping, the new leader of China, insisted on the historical continuity of socialism in post-Mao China. In his essay, “To Build Socialism with Chinese Characteristics,” Deng proposes a nodal point where capitalism and socialism converge:

Planning and market forces are not the essential difference between socialism and capitalism. A planned economy is not the definition of socialism, because there is planning under capitalism; the market economy happens under socialism, too. Planning and market forces are both ways of controlling economic activity.⁴

By blurring the borderline between socialism and capitalism, Deng claimed that economic bases such as planned and market economies could not be the essential criterion that distinguishes socialism and capitalism. To Deng, the growing scale of China’s market economy did not harm the socialist identity of China as long as the

---

⁴ Deng Xiaoping, “Jianshe you Zhongguo tese de shehuizhuyi” (To Build Socialism with Chinese Characteristics), Deng Xiaoping xuanji disanjuan (selected works of Deng Xiaoping, vol.3), (Beijing: Remin chubanshe, 1993), 63.
market economy or market forces already existed under socialism; in fact, such forces might even be an integral part of socialism. Deng’s standpoint was premised upon the realization of socialism in China because his denial of the socialism built up during the Maoist era would have jeopardized the authority and legitimacy of the socialist state that were necessary for a seamless transition to the post-Mao market economy. Socialism, not mutated capitalism, existed in the past and would continue into the future once “socialism with Chinese characteristics” was effectively established. Then where does the intrinsic discrepancy between the two different social formations lie?

Socialism often remained as an empty signifier since everything created in the Soviet Union and China could be called socialism. The historical lesson to be learned from China’s socialist experiment is that if socialism per se is achieved by a state power, realized in the territorial, material base of the nation-state (like Stalin’s policy of “socialism in one country”), and implemented by state institutions, then this putative socialism often turns into something else. Therefore many scholars, including Fredric Jameson (1996, 2007), Arif Dirlik (2005), and Wang Hui (1998), have found that Soviet and Chinese socialisms are inseparable from their role as a technique and strategy for their countries’ modernizations. An undeniable fact about Chinese socialism is that it was a method for, in Deng’s words, “controlling economic activity.” More precisely, socialism was a tool for facilitating and accelerating the process of capital accumulation and building national wealth.
The modern nation-state is the basic unit of the world economy. The transnational globalization that has surpassed the metropolis-satellite or core-periphery structure of the process of capitalist expansion, e.g., the networks of Empire, did not fundamentally and completely invalidate the instrumentality of the nation-state in the interrelationship between capital, nation, and state. Unevenly accumulated and distributed capital around the globe was frequently imagined, measured and articulated using the language of the political and economic sovereignties of individual countries. This condition tended to provide the masses with an orientation and desire to catching up with more advanced and more developed countries, and it has caused civilizational, cultural, racial, regional, and religious conflicts. China’s memory politics, a way of invoking this mentality, aims to recall its semi-colonial history prior to 1949 and to reenact the “national humiliation” which began with China’s defeat in the First Opium War (1839-1842). Colored by such patriotic rhetoric and nationalist discourse, the developmental trajectories of socialism never disappeared and often converged in the collective desire for national wealth. This historical fact may refute Marx’s “naïve” assumption that nation and state would naturally disappear once the capitalist system was overthrown, as Kojin Karatani points out.

---

5 He uses this complex social formation of capital-nation-state for criticizing Marx’s view of nation and state. The modern capitalist economy, state and nation historically took shape through the combination and subsequent modification of the fundamental modes of exchange, according to Karatani.

6 Karatani, xvi.
Drawing from Karatani’s idea regarding the tripartite relationship between capital-nation-state, what distinguishes socialism and capitalism may lie in the bases of the nation and state (the first two players in Karatani’s scheme) since socialism and capitalism share the universal laws of capital, as I have argued throughout this dissertation. Each country has its own social formation of capital-nation-state controlling economic activities that shape quotidian mental and performative daily praxis. If so, in what ways has the nation-state, not as an imagined country but as a material base, created the intrinsic discrepancy between socialism and capitalism? Fredric Jameson answers this question in the following way in Representing Capital:

The identity and difference between the stages of capitalism, each one remaining true to the latter’s essence and structure (the profit motive, accumulation, expansion, exploitation of wage labor) at the same time that it marks a mutation in culture and everyday life, in social institutions and human relationships.7

Jameson points out the site or register where capitalism in its different stages is marked by mutation. This field includes “culture, everyday life, social institutions and human relationships” all of which require the material bases of nation and state, or more

---

7 Jameson, Representing Capital: A Reading of Volume One, 9.
broadly “the entirety of space” in Henri Lefevre’s term.\textsuperscript{8} In this light, the fact that China’s capitalism mutated under Mao indicates that while the identity and difference between the stages of capitalism, in either socialism or state capitalism, remained true to capitalism’s essence and structure in terms of “the profit motive, accumulation, expansion and exploitation of wage labor,”\textsuperscript{9} “culture, everyday life, social institutions and human relationships” – the venues where the mutation took shape – remained socialist. This was the field where Mao’s radical socialist experiments occurred while his regime remained true to capitalism – the laws of capital. Here socialist realism played a crucial part in creating socialist culture, organizing communal life styles, and implementing the institutional reforms via the creation of a socialist spatiality. This massive, radical project entailed the formation of a new social and technical division of labor and of desirable (interracial and interethnic) social and production relations as a means of reinforcing the unity of the socialist camp or the multi-ethnic state. However, as long as the locus of mutation was affected, regulated, and dominated by China’s complex and shifting social formations of capital-nation-state and the communist party-state’s laws and institutions, the spatial base did not remain simply socialist.

**Dialogue between Adam Smith and Karl Marx**

\textsuperscript{8} I mentioned this term in the Introduction.

The historical continuity that ties the Maoist era to the post-Mao period is not only the continuing presence of a market economy (as Deng said), but also the lineage and polity of the Chinese Communist Party that came into being in 1921. The founding and ruling party of China, once it took state power in 1949, endowed China with a socialist identity, in that the Party proclaimed that the Communist Party represents the interest of the working class (peasants and factory workers) and identifies the working class with that of the people, i.e. Chinese citizens. Throughout the country’s transition from Mao’s socialist-state capitalism to a more market-oriented post-Mao capitalism, the unchanged polity has justified and spurred China’s consistent drive and yearning for national wealth. In this paradigm, class interests never conflict with the national interest.

Therefore, Giovanni Arrighi may be right about applying the economic theory of Adam Smith to modern/contemporary China. It may be that we should listen to Smith, who emphasized the significant role of the government, in order to understand the historical experience of China’s state capitalism beyond the phenomenology of Chinese socialism. In criticizing the prevalent misinterpretations of Smith’s works, Arrighi argues that:

Nowhere does Smith suggest that the invisible hand of the market acting on its own can get the economy unstuck from such a trap [of “stationary state” or “high-level equilibrium”]. If anything or anyone can, it is the visible hand of the government through suitable changes in laws and
institutions. Closely related to the above, it is also clear that, in bringing about changes in laws and institutions, governments are not just subject to powerful social constraints, as previously noted, but respond also to contradictions of the process of economic development that are primarily social rather than economic.\textsuperscript{10}

It is not the invisible hand of the market, but the visible hand of the government – by making proper changes in laws and institutions – that can resolve and respond to the problems caused by the contradictions of the process of economic development (such as the accumulation of capital, the falling rate of interest, and the social and technical division of labor). The undeniable fact is that “socialism with Chinese characteristics” to a great extent resulted from the existing authoritarian polity of China – the central government’s altered attitude toward the transnational market economy along with the party-state’s proactive rejoining the global capitalist economy that is led by the United States. Until quite recently, the Chinese government’s efforts to change China’s policies and laws in order to invite foreign capital turned the country into a global market for the labor outsourcing of multinational enterprises.\textsuperscript{11} At the same time, this revealed the capitalist tendency to overcome barriers to the self-expansion of capital through the


\textsuperscript{11} State ownership over land, which is often interpreted as equal access to the land, is a primary element of socialism in the PRC.
creative (maybe not so creative) destruction of the social frameworks on which economic expansion was previously based. In the middle of this tremendous transformation, the pursuit of national wealth (and ensuing national power) was the core value that directed the individual economic activities of the Chinese populace.\textsuperscript{12}

The ways in which the Chinese government employed and appropriated socialism reveals that the party-state has implicitly followed Adam Smith’s logic for national wealth, albeit not always successfully. In line with his main concern about the proliferation and empowerment of nations, Smith considered important “the establishment and preservation of the central government’s capacity to pursue the national interest.”\textsuperscript{13} In the same vein, he thought that to “protect the society from the violence and invasion of other independent societies” was “the first duty of the sovereign and of much more importance than opulence.”\textsuperscript{14} The military power of nations therefore became essential in protecting and creating national wealth and national power. In contrast, Karl Marx shifted Smith’s focal point of governments and legislators to social classes.\textsuperscript{15} Marx paid attention to “the enrichment and empowerment

\textsuperscript{12} See Richard Curt Kraus, \textit{The Party and the Arty: The New Politics of Culture}, (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2004). Giovani Arrighi defines the market as an instrument of government, of competition, and of the division of labor while the national economy or national wealth is a source of national power. Arrighi, \textit{Adam Smith in Beijing}, 41.

\textsuperscript{13} Arrighi, 65.

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 65.
of the possessors of capital vis-à-vis the possessors of labor-power.” The conflicting and at the same time mutually reinforcing views of Adam Smith and Karl Marx exemplify the dialectical nature of so-called “capitalism with Chinese characteristics” or “socialism with Chinese characteristics.”

Socialist realist and Maoist images convey such an interesting admixture, a virtual encounter between Marx and Smith, in the visual representations of China’s socialist reality. The images of Soviet elder brothers and African younger brothers, the allegorical figures and also the mirror images of China’s national condition, betray China’s hidden desire for national wealth and national power under the rubric of the anti-imperialist, post-colonial discourse of a divergent Leninist Marxism. The collective and totalizing representation of Third World peoples often ignores the conflicting interests of individuals and of different classes, while Third World peoples, especially black Africans portrayed in Maoist images, appear to represent each individual country of the Third World. The allegorical figures never fail to express the unity and totality of

---

\[16\] Ibid., 73

\[17\] Ibid. The generalized capitalist development, Marx believed, would “flatten” the world due to “the capitalist production on the premise of a borderless world where the labor force is fully dispossessed of the means of production and all commodities are exchanged freely at prices more or less equal to their production costs,” Arrighi, 74. According to Arrighi, Marx did not privilege competition in the marketplace, but class conflict and technical changes in the workplace. Ibid., 73.
the people and the country they represent under the presumed leadership of Maoist China.

The socialist realist landscapes that I analyzed in Chapter Two likewise allude to the Maoist proclivity for quenching the tension between the Smithian dynamic of national wealth and the Marxian standpoint about class interest. The world economy during the Cold War period was dominated by “the tendency of the United States and the USSR which used abundant mineral resources as a basis for forging powerful military-industrial complexes based on large-scale production in the steel, aircraft, armament, space, and petrochemical industry.”

The aftermath was the dominance of the two superpowers since “their capital-natural resource-intensive developmental path created new opportunities for profitable specialization not only in labor-intensive industries but also in the relatively resource-saving sectors of capital-intensive industries.” Amid the global dynamics of different available developmental paths, e.g., capital (and natural resource)-intensive or labor-intensive paths, Maoist China chose the labor-intensive model of development and industrialization. A variety of socialist realist landscapes, including the utopian images of self-reliance that portray spatial capital,

---

17 Arrighi, 35-36.

18 Ibid. According to Arrighi, “Japan promptly seized these opportunities by shifting from labor-intensive industrialization – a strategy that aimed at combining directly within particular industries or factories imported technologies and cheap labor trained to replace capital – toward the development of interlinked industries and firms with different degrees of labor and capital intensity, while retaining a strong overall bias toward the East Asian tradition of greater utilization of human than of non-human resources,” Ibid.
such as infrastructure and Dazhai-style terraced fields, allude to China’s local response to the Cold War economic hegemony. By aestheticizing labor in the imaginary world of socialist utopia, the poetic depictions of socialist-construction sites emphasize the universal value of labor. Labor is not depicted as the cause of class conflict or exploitation of the working class, and thus implies the potential for liberating the exploited. The site of socialist labor is both a place for interracial and interethnic harmony and entertainment and a site that embodies the Maoist virtues of hard-work, diligence, and self-sacrifice.

Finally, the Maoist plastic arts of typicality are the epitome of so-called Yan’an spirit (or Yan’an model arts) that utilizes the face value of Marxism in the visual representations of class. The revolutionary classes frequently become equivalent to Chinese citizens. The plastic arts that depict typical characters behaving in a typical manner under typical circumstances are inclined to emphasize the political and economic roles of the people, although they are expressed in the terminology of Marxism and Maoist class struggles. The typical iconic figures often turn into well-disciplined (often heroic) Chinese citizens armed with revolutionary spirit. The economic logic of creating national wealth (the accumulation of capital through the strong state-intervention) is merged into the teleological narrative of class struggle and anti-Japanese, anti-imperialist revolutionary history. The Smithian desire for national

---

19 The re-territorialization and de-territorialization of capitalism in local China.
(military) power is transposed into the egalitarian, humanist spirit of liberation through the visual idioms of typical and socialist realist canons. Mutated capitalism remained unrepresentable in Maoist China where capitalism in general, due to the people’s cognitive mapping influenced by the dominant mode of representation, often remained imperceptible and impossible to register. State capitalism, however, genuinely existed and created an impact, penetrating into people’s lived experience. In this light, Maoist visual culture illustrates how the encoding and recoding processes of painterly and photographic practice enabled capitalism – which was inevitably represented because it was so close to life – to be represented in the visual production of capital.

---

20 In the Lacanian Symbolic.

21 History is the Real, according to Jameson. I use the Lacanian Real as a means for positioning the mutated capitalism of Maoist China, as state-capitalism in struggle with the contradictions of capital kept failing to register in the Symbolic.
SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Mr. science and chairman mao’s cultural revolution : Science and technology in modern china2013. , eds. edited by Chunjuan Nancy Wei and Darryl E. Brock., Darryl E. Brock and Chunjuan Nancy Wei. Lanham: Lexington Books, 
http://search.library.duke.edu/search?id=DUKE005887289; Cover image

Socialist realisms : Soviet painting, 1920-19702012. , eds. catalogue by Matthew Bown, Matteo Lafranconi, Faina Balakhovskaya et al JJ authors, Faina Balakhovskaiä, Matthew Cullerne Bown and Matteo Lafranconi. Milan; London: Skira; Thames & Hudson distributor], 
http://search.library.duke.edu/search?id=DUKE005741227.

Zhongguo yi shu bian nian shi : 1900-2010 = A history of chinese art year by year from 1900 to 2010 / 中国艺术编年史 : 1900-2010 = A history of chinese art year by year from 1900 to 20102012. , ed. Lü peng zhu bian. / 吕澎主编. Beijing: Zhongguo qing nian chu ban she; 北京 : 中国青年出版社, 2012, 
http://search.library.duke.edu/search?id=DUKE005585017.

http://search.library.duke.edu/search?id=DUKE005050916.

“Si da zhu yi” yu zhongguo mei shu de xian dai zhuan xing = “four -isms” and the modern transformation of chinese fine arts / “四大主义”与中国美术的现代转型 = “four -isms” and the modern transformation of chinese fine arts2010. , ed. Pan Gongkai zhu bian. / 潘公凯主编. Beijing: Ren min chu ban she; 北京 : 人民出版社, 2010, 
http://search.library.duke.edu/search?id=DUKE004918567.

http://search.library.duke.edu/search?id=DUKE004312386.


Totalitarian art and modernity2010. , eds. edited by Mikkel Bolt Rasmussen & Jacob Wamberg., Jacob Wamberg. Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 
http://search.library.duke.edu/search?id=DUKE004914059.
Shijiazhuang: Hebei mei shu chu ban she; 石家庄: 河北美术出版社, 2009.
http://search.library.duke.edu/search?id=DUKE004668221.


Burden or legacy: From the chinese cultural revolution to contemporary art2007. , eds. edited by Jiang Jiehong, Jiehong Jiang. Hong Kong; London: Hong Kong University Press; Eurospan distributor], http://search.library.duke.edu/search?id=DUKE003906150.


In the party spirit: Socialist realism and literary practice in the soviet union, east germany and china 1996. , ed. Hilary Chung. Amsterdam; Atlanta: Rodopi B.V. Editions.


The great cultural revolution in china 1968., eds. compiled and edited by the Asia Research Centre., Asia Research Centre.Rutland, Vt., C. E. Tuttle Co. 1968], http://search.library.duke.edu/search?id=DUKE001245388.


Croizier, Ralph. 1999. The crimes of the gang of four: A chinese artist’s version. Pacific Affairs 54 (2) (Summer).


http://search.library.duke.edu/search?id=DUKE002696350.

http://search.library.duke.edu/search?id=DUKE004659942.

http://search.library.duke.edu/search?id=DUKE000669073.


http://search.library.duke.edu/search?id=DUKE002636049.


http://search.library.duke.edu/search?id=DUKE003379881; Table of contents.


346


Kong, Shuyu. 2002. For reference only: Restricted publications and distribution of foreign literature during the cultural revolution. *Yishu* 1 (2).


http://search.library.duke.edu/search?id=DUKE003956810.


Wang, Mingxian. 2002. From street art to exhibition art: The art of the red guard during the cultural revolution. *Yishu* 1 (2).


Zhao, Jijun, and Jan Woudstra. 2007. 'In agriculture, learn from dazhai': Mao zedong's revolutionary model village and the battle against nature. Landscape Research 32 (2): 171-205.


BIOGRAPHY

Young Ji Lee was born in Seoul, South Korea. She attended Korea University in Seoul where she earned her B.F.A. in painting and art education and graduated cum laude. She participated in many museum projects as a curatorial assistant. Her paintings have been displayed in group exhibitions, including the 2000 Kwangju Biennale held in South Korea. Before she came to Duke in 2005, Young Ji studied modern and contemporary art in East Asia and earned an MA in art history at SUNY (Buffalo). Young Ji has been a James B. Duke fellow since 2005. At Duke, she specialized in modern art and visual culture in China and joined the certificate program in East Asian studies. In 2007, she received a Chinese Government Scholarship that gave her the opportunity to study Chinese language and culture at Beijing Normal University for an academic year. She received summer research grants from the APSI (the Asian Pacific Studies Institute) and conference travel grants from the Duke Graduate School. She presented papers at several conferences including the AAH (2013) and the ACLA (2014). During the spring semester of 2013 at Duke, as a full-time instructor she taught the undergraduate-level course Chinese Art 1900 to Present.
FIGURES

1. CHAPTER ONE

Figure 1: the Soviet Union is Our Example, poster, 1953, Collection of Stefan R. Landsberger.
Figure 2: *The Soviet Union's Today is Our Tomorrow*, poster, 1956, Collection of Stefan R. Landsberger.
Figure 3: Boris Ioganson, *In an Old Ural Factory*, oil painting, 1937.
Figure 4: Fedor Shurpin, *The Morning of the Motherland*, oil painting, 1948.

Figure 5: Mikhail Khmelko, *The Unity of Russian People*, oil painting, 1948.
Figure 6: Li Binghong, *Nanchang Uprising*, oil painting, 1959, Collection of the National Museum of China.

Figure 7: Ilya Repin, *Reply of the Zaporozhian Cossacks to Sultan Mehmed IV of the Ottoman Empire*, oil painting, 1880-1891, Collection of the Russian Museum.
Figure 8: Vasily Surikov, *the Boyarynya Morozova*, oil painting, 1887.

Figure 9: Issac Levitan, *March*, oil painting, 1895.
Figure 10: Arkhip Kunidzhi, *Lake Ladoga*, oil painting, 1873.
Figure 11: Valentin Serov, *The Girl with Peaches*, oil painting, 1887.
Figure 12: Ilya Repin, *Ivan the Terrible and His Son Ivan*, oil painting, 1885.
Figure 13: Dimitri Nalbandian, *The Great Friendship*, oil painting, 1950 (top), black and white image (bottom), reprinted in *Soviet Union*, April, 1953.
Figure 14: Issac Brodsky, *Lenin at Smolny Institute*, oil painting, 1930.
Figure 15: Feng Zhen and Li Qi, *the Great Meeting (weida de huijian), guohua*, 1950, Collection of the National Museum of China.
Figure 16: Ding Hao, *Study the Soviet Union's Advanced Experience to Build Our Nation*, poster, 1953, Collection of Stefan R. Landsberger.

Figure 17: Li Zongjin, *Study the Soviet Union’s Advanced Production Experience for Our Country’s Industrialization*, poster, 1953, Collection of Stefan R. Landsberger.
Figure 18: Wu Dezhu, *Learn from Soviet Elder Brothers* (*xiang sulian lao dage xuexi*), 1951.

Figure 20: Long Live Marxism, Leninism and Maoism, poster, 1970.

Figure 21: Wu Biduan and Jin Shangyi, Chairman Mao Standing with People of Asia, Africa and Latin America, oil painting, 1960.
Figure 22: Chairman Mao and His Friends, photograph, reprinted in China Reconstructs, January, 1962.
Figure 23: a cartoon image from Ahmed’s *The Bandung gentleman on an African Safari*, (New Delhi: Bhawnani, 1964).

Figure 24: *Friends from afar are Coming to Visit*, poster, 1961.
Figure 25: image title *Break the Chain of Colonialism*, printed in *China Reconstructions*, August, 1960, pp. 20-21.

Figure 26: *Arise!*, sculpture, circa. 1965.
Figure 27: Long Xuli, *African Mother (feizhou muqin)*, sculpture, 1961.

Figure 28: *Chairman Mao is the Great Liberator of the World Revolutionary People*, poster, 1968.
Figure 29: Revolutionary Friendship is as Deep as the Sea, poster, 1975.

Figure 30: Tianjin tielu fenju zhigong yeyu san jiehe changzuozu, Serve the Revolutionary People of the World, poster, 1971, Collection of Stefan R. Landsberger.
2. CHAPTER TWO

Figure 31: Sun Xueni, *the Creation of the New World* (*kaitian pidi di yi hui*), *guohua*, 1958.
Figure 32: All Reveal Genius Riding the Winds and Waves, nianhua, c. 1958, from Twentieth-Century Chinese Art History (Beijing: Beijing Daxue Chubanshe, 2008).
Figure 33: Jiangsu painters, *The People’s Commune’s Dining Hall (renmingongshe shitang), guohua, 1958.*
Figure 34: Song Wenzhi, The Workplace of Stone-Quarrying, guohua, 1958 (part) from Twentieth-Century Chinese Art History, (Beijing: Beijing Daxue Chubanshe, 2008).
Figure 35: Ying Yeping, *The Lofty Mountains Bows Its Head, the River Yields to a Road*, guohua, 1956.
Figure 36: Shao Luoyang, *the Whole People Make Steel (quanmin liangnag), guohua*, 1959.

Figure 37: Song Wenzhi, *Transformation of Mountain and River (shanchuan jubian), guohua*, 1960.
Figure 38: Jin Zhiyuan and Song Wenzhi, *Pull Down Mountain and Bring Water*, *guohua*, 1958.
Figure 39: Lin Maoxiong, Water (shui), oil painting, 1958.
Figure 40: Dazhai Landscapes from *China Reconstructs*, January, 1966.
Figure 41: Zhang Yuqing, *Dazhai Aerial View*, poster, 1975, from *Chinese Posters: Art from the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2007).

Figure 44: Unknown artist, *Spring is Everywhere in the Deep Valley*, poster, 1973, from *Chinese Posters* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2007).
Figure 45: Li Keran, *Terraces on the Mountain Top, guohua*, 1974, from *Twentieth-Century Chinese Art History* (Beijing: Beijing Daxue Chubanshe, 2008).
Figure 46: Ye Qianyu, *Fullshow by Xingtai Militia*, guohua, 1966, from *Twentieth-Century Chinese Art History* (Beijing: Beijing Daxue Chubanshe, 2008).

Figure 48: Tian Tian, a Record-breaking Team of Village Girls Tamp Down the Earth, photograph, printed in China Reconstructs, August, 1958, p. 4.
Figure 49: Li Fuyi, *Morning in the Construction Site*, oil painting, 1962.

Figure 50: Leonid Heller, the Basic Conceptual Schema of Socialist Realism, in “a World of Prettiness,” *Socialist Realism without Shores*.
Figure 51: Yin Rongsheng, *Learn from Camrade Liu Yingjun: Carrying forward the Highest Instruction*, poster, 1964, from *Chinese Posters* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2007).

Figure 52: Chao Xinlin, *Agriculture: Learn from Dazhai to Make Great Changes*, poster, 1975, from *Chinese Posters* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2007).
Figure 53: Li Qi, *Peasants and Tractors (nongmin he tulaji), nianhua*, 1949.

Figure 54: Wu Fan, *The Cuckoo’s Cry (bugunian jiaole)*, woodcut print, 1956.
Figure 56: Benefits of Collectivization (hezuohua de haochu), poster, 1965, Collection of Stefan R. Landsberger.

Figure 57: Sun Jingbo, The New Song of Ah Xi, oil painting, 1972, from Twentieth-Century Chinese Art History (Beijing: Beijing Daxue Chubanshe, 2008).
Figure 58: Pan Shixun, *We are Walking the High Road* (women zouzai dalushang), oil painting, 1964, from *Twentieth-Century Chinese Art History* (Beijing: Beijing Daxue Chubanshe, 2008).
Figure 59: Zhu Naizheng, *Golden Season (jinse de jijie)*, oil painting, 1962-63.
3. CHAPTER THREE

Figure 60: Xie Jiasheng, *Lu Xun*, sculpture, 1956.

Figure 61: Wang Zhaowen, *Liu Hulan*, sculpture, 1950.
Figure 62: Cao Chongen, Xiang Xiuli, marble statue, 1961.

Figure 63: Pan He, Arduous Times (jianku suiyue), sculpture, 1957.
Figure 64: Wang Shenglie, *Eight Women Martyrs (banütojiang), guohua*, 1959.

Figure 65: Yu Jinyuan, *Eight Women Martyrs*, sculpture, 1958.
Figure 66: Xu Yun, *China-Korea Friendship (zhongchao youyi), guohua*, 1959.
Figure 67: Dong Xiwen, *Resist US Aggression and Aid Korea*, oil painting, 1951, from *Twentieth-Century Chinese Art History* (Beijing: Beijing Daxue Chubanshe, 2008).

Figure 69: Yan Han, *Freshly Picked Apples*, woodcut print, 1954, from *Twentieth-Century Chinese Art History* (Beijing: Beijing Daxue Chubanshe, 2008).
Figure 70: Hua Tianyou, Bulgarian Teacher and Korean Orphan (baojialiyanjiaoshi he chaoxianguer), sculpture, 1957.
Figure 71: Xiao Chuanjiu, Su Hui, Fu Tianchou and others, *The Tenth Anniversary of the 1945 Hiroshima Bombing (andao beizha shinianji)*, sculpture, 1955.
Figure 72: Yang Meiyi, Qu Naishu and others, *Long Live the People’s Commune*, sculpture, 1959.
Figure 74: Jia Xiongtong, *Childhood*, poster, 1973, from *Chinese Posters* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2007).
Figure 75: Hang Mingshi, *Continue the Revolutionary Tradition and Become Revolutionary Successors*, poster, 1965, from *Chinese Posters* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2007).
Figure 76: Zhou Changgu, *Two Lambs, guohua*, 1954.
Figure 77: Dong Xiwen, *Spring Comes to Tibet*, oil painting, 1954.

Figure 78: Jiang Yan, *Studying Mather and Daughter (kaokaomama)*, guohua, 1953.
Figure 79: Yuan Xiaocen, *Studying Mother and Daughter (munüxuewenhua)*, sculpture, 1955.
Figure 80-1: Wang Keping, Cao Chunsheng, and others, *Wrath of the Serfs*, group sculptures, 1975.

Figure 80-2: *Wrath of the Serfs*.

Figure 80-3: *Wrath of the Serfs*. 
Figure 80-4: Wrath of the Serfs.

Figure 80-5: Lamaseries, Wrath of the Serf.

Figure 80-6: Wrath of the Serfs.
Figure 80-7: A Tibetan Girl with the Red Star, *Wrath of the Serfs*.
Figure 80-8: Woman Tibetan Warrior, Wrath of the Serfs.
Figure 81: Wu Zuoren, *Portrait of Qi Baishi*, oil painting, 1954.
Figure 82: Liu Zhide, *Old Party Cadre, guohua*, 1973.
Figure 83: Konstantin Maksimov, *Portrait of Qi Baishi*, oil, 1956.
Figure 84: Konstantin Maksimov, Portrait of Wu Zuoren, oil, 1957, from Chinese Art in an Age of Revolution, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012).
Figure 85: Wu Zuoren, *Peasant Painter (nongmin huajia)*, oil, 1958.

Figure 86: Wang Shikuo, *Self-portrait*, oil, 1967.
Figure 88: Sun Zongwei, *In My Studio* (self-portrait), oil, 1945.
Figure 89: Gu Xiong, *Shattering Illusions* (self-portrait), drawing, 1974, from *Art in Turmoil* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010).
Figure 90: Smash the Dog Heads of Soviet Revisionists (zalan suxiu de goutou), poster, 1967, from Art and China’s Revolution (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008).