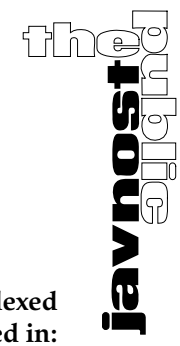

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION TO "COMMUNICATION AND CLASS DIVIDE CHINA"

YUEZHI ZHAO

Abstract

This introduction aims to accomplish two tasks. It first addresses the most important recent development in Chinese political communication by analysing the domestic and transnational dimensions of a multifaceted and high-stake communication war over the unfolding political drama centring on the explosive downfall of CCP Politburo member Bo Xilai and the crackdown on his "Chongqing Model" of development. It then uses this analysis as a backdrop to contextualise and introduce some of the main insights of the articles in this special issue on the one hand, and mobilises these insights to shed new light on the communication politics surrounding the Bo saga on the other. Communication, social consciousness, and class conflict over the future directions of China's transformation during the current turbulent period of globalised informational capitalism lies at the centre of this article and the entire special issue.

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In spring 2008, I could not have imagined what kind of political storm would hit China when I underscored the highly unstable and contested nature of communication politics in China by concluding my book, *Communication in China: Political Economy, Power, and Conflict,* with the popular Chinese saying, "The Trees Want to Be Quiet but the Winds Won't Stop" (Zhao 2008a). Nor could I have imagined the magnitude of the ongoing political, social and intellectual conflicts in April 2010, when I closely followed the media and Internet sphere to make sense of a new turn in the "liberal versus new left" split in the form of a sensational media accusation of plagiarism against Wang Hui, China's leading "new left" scholar. Above all, even though I have tried to analyse the tensions between China's "neoliberal strategies" and "socialist legacies" (Zhao 2008b) in the reform process and their domestic and global ramifications in and through communication in my recent publications, I could not have imagined just how challenging it is in trying to be "as radical as reality itself"in this intellectual endeavour.

By spring 2012, the complicated intersections of China's revolutionary legacies, elite divisions, central-local dynamics, popular discontents and inspirations, international geopolitics, not to mention the centrality of digitalised global communication flows, have created arguably one of the most epic thrillers in 21st century communication politics in and about China. As of this writing, the face of a close-eyed Bo Xilai, the leading protagonist in a Hollywood-style political drama spanning three continents and involving murder, betrayal, corruption, political intrigues, rumours of coup and everything else, had made it to the May 7, 2012 Asia edition of *Time* magazine. "Red Alert" is the cover title. Was Bo, a once-powerful "red princeling" – he is the son of a well-known Chinese revolutionary, really so close in bringing us back to the second decade of the 20th century, with yet another "red revolution" (i.e. the Belsvelk Revolution) in the aftermath of yet another devastating global capitalist economic crisis? Or, was this just a farce or perhaps something in between? In this extended introduction, I first address the most important current development in Chinese political communication by analysing the domestic and transnational dimensions of a multifaceted and high stake communication war over the unfolding political drama centring on the explosive downfall of CCP Politburo member Bo and the crackdown on his "Chongqing Model" of political economic and social cultural development. I then use this analysis as a backdrop to contextualise and introduce the major themes of the articles in this special issue on the one hand, and mobilise some of key insights in the articles to shed new light on the domestic and global communication politics surrounding the Bo saga on the other. In this way, I also hope to update, extend and deepen my own previous research on communication and China. Communication, social consciousness, and class conflict over the future directions of China's transformation during the current turbulent period of globalised capitalism lies at the centre of this introduction and the entire special issue.

The Latest Explosion in Communication: The Ruling Class and Its Coordinates

At 11:00 p.m., April 10, 2012, China's official Xinhua News Agency delivered what is now widely known as the "midnight fright" in the above-mentioned Hollywood-style real life political thriller. In a previous bombshell episode to this

unfolding saga, which originated in the Southwestern metropolis Chongqing and had consumed the whole nation for more than two months, Bo, who had been seen as championing a more left-leaning reform agenda by his words and his socio-economic and cultural experiments in Chongqing, was dismissed as Chongqing's Party Secretary on March 15, 2012. Now, Xinhua's mid-night news announced that Bo, who had been thought of as a serious contender for a position at the CCP Politburo Standing Committee at the 18th National Congress late this year, had been further stripped of his national political posts as member of the CCP Central Committee and its Politburo. Moreover, he was under investigation for unspecified "serious violations of disciplines," while his wife Gu Kailai has been under detention on suspicion of murdering Neil Heywood, identified as a "British businessman" who had close connections with Bo's wife and son. CCTV, the CCP's television mouthpiece, concurrently broadcasted the news.

Xinhua's and CCTV's synchronised announcements, however shocking to the ordinary Chinese, were not news to members of China's ruling class – party-state officials of above division and county-levels. Earlier in the evening of April 10, 2012, the CCP central leadership, following the way in which it informed the nation about the shocking news about the death of Mao's heir-designated Lin Biao in a plane crash as he fled to the Soviet Union after an attempted coup against Mao in 1971, had broken the news among the ruling political class through emergency internal meetings in an attempt to contain the potentially regime-threatening ramifications of the news. Yet, underscoring a crucial difference between 1971 and now, the news had been leaked to the Chinese micro-blog sphere even before its official transmission within the ruling political class. In fact, the micro-blog sphere had been such an important communicative space and the "rumour machine" (Wang 2012) surrounding it had been such a powerful driver of the unfolding drama that, earlier in April 2012, central authorities had temporarily suspended the commentary function of China's two most popular micro-blog sites, Sina and Tencent, and arrested 6 netizens for spreading rumours about an attempt coup in Beijing implicating Politburo Standing Committee member Zhou Yongkang, a presumed ally of Bo. Authorities had also suspended as many as 16 websites, including major leftist websites such as Utopia and Maoflag, which could potentially voice any dissenting view on Bo's case.

With the possible exception of the immediate post-June 4, 1989 moment, the extent of news management and control had reached an unprecedented level in China's post-Mao era, an era that is supposed to bring an end to the political turmoil of the Mao era. The *People's Daily*, the CCP Central Committee's print mouthpiece, published strongly-worded editorials during the three consecutive days of April 11-13, 2012, trumpeting obedience to party disciplines and the "rule of law." Most importantly, these editorials urged the entire nation to unify thoughts and rally behind the CCP central leadership under Hu Jintao. In a media phenomenon that is reminiscent of the Cultural Revolution, these editorials were widely reprinted by newspapers all over the country. Moreover, in yet another political communication practice that is highly reminiscent of the Cultural Revolution era, media organisations all over the country were pressed to rally support for the party's decision to oust Bo. The *New York Times,* highlighting the manipulated nature of Chinese state propaganda, was quick to point out: this "has arguably been the greatest mobilisa-

tion to support a decision by the party since the aftermath of the Tiananmen Square massacre in 1989" (Wong and Ansfield 2012).

Yet, ironically, it was Wen Jiabao, China's Premier, who had accused Bo's Chongqing leadership of trying to revive the Cultural Revolution at his news conference at the closing of the National People's Congress on March 14, 2012, the day before Bo's removal from his Chongqing post on March 15, 2012 (Wang 2012). To be sure, as I have demonstrated elsewhere, in media and Internet debates on the future directions of China's transformation in the past decade, neoliberal forces have often deployed the Cultural Revolution as a lethal rhetorical weapon against their opponents (Zhao 2008a, 56, 323). But I could not have imagined that this rhetorical trope would be deployed at the highest political level by a seating Chinese Premier to attack the policy orientations of the Bo leadership in Chongqing. There is a further irony. Although the authorities arrested bloggers for spreading rumours about a coup attempt by Bo and his ally, other observers have pointed out that the actual coup might well be the one executed by those who successfully ousted Bo. As Lin Chun (2012) has written, while Bo's reform model in Chongqing "is not fundamentally different from the national agenda of neoliberal global integration, it included more independent social policies. These proved so popular, it took what the *Financial Times* has called a 'palace coup' to crush it."

Bo was not the first Politburo member to fall from grace in reform era China. In addition to CCP former general secretaries Hu Yaobang and Zhao Zhiyang before and during 1989, Beijing's Chen Xitong and Shanghai's Chen Liangyu were his predecessors in 1995 and 2006 respectively. However, judged from the level of news management and information control, it is clear that the central leadership had the most to fear from news about Bo's downfall. The central authorities have not provided any official evidence against Bo; however, as if the central leadership had already realised the potential risks of Wen Jiabao's political attack or perhaps signifying that "[t]the government doesn't always seem sure which line to take on the affair" (Wang 2012), the April 10, 2012 announcements had effectively redefined Bo's case as a disciplinary and perhaps even criminal one.

However, Bo is no ordinary deposed high-ranking CCP official, no matter how corrupt he might be. Unlike the two Chens, Bo had an ambitious, well-articulated, and popular reform program and an entire range of developmental and governmental experiments in Chongqing – described variously as the "Chongqing Model," "Chongqing Experience," "Chongqing Experiments," or in the now suspended Chinese leftist websites as "the People's Livelihood Line" (contrary to the de facto capitalistic party line of polarised development). Under the banner of pursuing "common prosperity," the socio-economic component of the program put greater emphasis on equality, redistribution, and the role of the state-sector while also promoting foreign investments and encouraging micro-enterprises. Rather than pursuing the more brutal neoliberal forms of "accumulation by dispossession" (Harvey 2003) during the process of Chongqing's urbanisation, the Chongqing program included a land commodification process that gave more benefits to farmers and allowed the local state to accumulate the appreciated land values, which were then deployed to provide cheap rental housing to the lower income working class. At the same time, the program's "striking black" campaign aimed to reign in organised crime, street gangs, and the underground economy to make

the Chongqing urban space safe for the ordinary people. Concurrently, its "singing red" campaign aimed to promote moral values, uplift the public spirit, and to re-establish the CCP's cultural leadership by reclaiming its revolutionary, or red, traditions. As well, the program reinvigorated the CCP's "mass line" tradition by compelling officials to reconnect themselves with the grassroots through a whole series of institutionalised practices, including requiring officials at all levels to go into the villages, peasants' households, and the fields to eat together, live together and work together with the peasants (Huang 2011a; 2011b; Gao 2011; Cui 2011; Lu 2011).

To be sure, Bo never explicitly called his program "the Chongqing Model," and his experiments were controversial from the onset. The work-in-progress nature of these experiments had also led many sympathetic observers of these developments to refrain from calling it a "model." However, even Western journalists had acknowledged Bo's popularity and the political threat he posed to the CCP central leadership during China's once-a-decade year of political transition. The *New York Times* wrote: "Mr. Bo, 62, had won widespread popularity and become a rival to the party's mainstream leaders with an aggressive effort to create an egalitarian society with hints of neo-Maoism in Chongqing" (Wines and LaFraniere 2012). The *Guardian* concurred: "Inequality was falling. Investment was rising. The apparent successes of the 'Chongqing model' generated such wide coverage that Bo risked outshining president Hu Jintao or his anointed successor, Xi Jinping" (Watts and Branigan 2012). It would be impossible to discredit Chongqing's pursuits for "common prosperity" with a simple invocation of the Cultural Revolution.

In the aftermath of Bo's downfall and in line with the CCP central leadership's attempt to cover up a leadership division, let alone an ongoing "line struggle" – after all, this Maoist term had been abandoned by the post-Mao CCP, the unfolding saga is in danger of being dismissed as even involving "factional struggles." Writing for the *Financial Times*, Jonathan Fenby, for example, has gone so far as to characterise the affair as "not a matter of factional politics." Instead, Bo is viewed as a "rogue element" falling foul of the established factions (Fenby 2012). However, it can be argued that Bo is a "rogue" because, ironically, and despite all the outrageous crimes he was now being suspected of having committed, he had managed to present himself as a more popular and serious heir to China's revolutionary tradition than many of his more powerful Politburo fellows. Moreover, as if to underscore the anti-Bo propaganda line that he was an opportunist *par excellence*, Bo undertook the comprehensive political economic and socio-cultural experiments under the "common prosperity" banner in Chongqing at a time when China and the whole world is in search of potential alternatives to neoliberal capitalism in the aftermath of the 2008-2009 global financial crisis.

The implosion of Bo's experiments in Chongqing started on February 6, 2012, when Wang Lijun, Bo's right-hand man and Chongqing's famed gang-bursting former police chief, attempted to seek political asylum in the U.S. consulate in Chengdu, but was later taken by central state security authorities to Beijing. Since then, the whole world has been watching this unfolding Chinese political drama. With a high-level and atypical Chinese asylum seeker in a U.S. consulate, the fall of a charismatic and popular Chinese princeling, and the murder of a British national who was suspected of having been a British spy, this unfolding succession drama in

China has turned out to be just as, if not more, attention grabbing than the Russian election and American election primaries in this eventful year in world politics. The secretive nature of Chinese elite politics and the brevity and opacity of all the Chinese official announcements so far have intersected with domestic and transnational media's hunger for sensational news, Chinese micro-bloggers' insatiable desire for participating in the latest discussions, and rival political forces' deliberate fabrication of rumours and opportunist information management (Wang 2012) to make the entire unfolding saga a futile ground for explosive political communication in all forms. These intensive information-generating and meaning-making processes by all kinds of symbolic manipulators, in turn, have contributed to and will continue to shape the very nature of the political drama itself. Despite the Chinese party-state's widely publicised efforts at controlling, rumours continue to fly high both within and beyond China.

Most intriguingly and underscoring the global dimension of Chinese communication politics today, the international media – from the Chinese language broadcasts of VOA and BBC to reputable and less reputable Anglo-American commercial media outlets, not to mention seemingly fringe overseas Chinese language websites such as Boxun.com and Falun Gong media outlets, became key players in this unfolding political drama. The Chinese party-state's battle with "hostile" overseas websites such as Boxun.com and Falun Gong media has been protracted and well-known. But when China's official media outlets ended up validating "rumours" first appeared in Boxun.com and Falun Gong's *Epoch Times*, one wonders, who were the sources for these "hostile" overseas media outlets? When domestic leftist websites were being closed down and "hostile" overseas websites were suddenly unblocked, could it be the case that Chinese party state insiders had deliberately leaked "rumours" to these "hostile" overseas media outlets and then selectively unblocked them to allow these "rumours" to flow back to China to manipulate the unfolding political drama? When Boxun.com, a self-styled "citizen journalism" website and well-known recipient of large grants from the U.S.'s National Endowment for Democracy, became one of the most influential players in this unfolding transnational communication war over the future direction of Chinese politics, one wonders what kind of "citizen journalism" is it? What is the level of collaboration between Chinese, U.S. and British authorities in this ostensibly "Chinese" political drama at a time when it has become more important than ever for state managers of these countries to co-manage the crisis-ridden globe political economy? What are the nature and dynamics of interaction between Chinese and foreign media? As Wang Hui put it: "when it became difficult to distinguish between the coverage in the *New York Times*, the *Financial Times*, the *Wall Street Journal* and the Falun Gong's outlet, the *Epoch Times*, or to differentiate them from Chinese newspapers and websites," there is a question as to "whether there is a single intelligence at work, or a network of forces collaborating to bring about a particular result" (Wang 2012).

As of the end of April 2012, Bo has been accused of all kinds of outrageous crimes in sensationalist reports in established Anglo-American print media outlets and overseas Chinese websites: selling party-state offices for money and transferring massive funds to overseas – as high as 8 billion Yuan, sleeping with more than 100 women, illegally wire-tapping Chinese President Hu Jintao, and even staging a 2002

airplane disaster that killed 112 people just because the wife of his then political rival was on board! Lin Chun's observation is especially illuminating:

> *The current crisis may be the last milestone in the Chinese path of negating socialism. What is extraordinary about it is the alliance of a Communist leadership, rightwing anti-Communist factions inside and outside China (including Falun Gong), and western governments and press – a phenomenal example of 21st-century postmodern politics* (Lin 2012).

There is yet another important dimension to this astonishing 21st century post-modern global political communication spectacle. On April 26, 2012, Zhang Yannong, the Director of the *People's Daily*, or better, the CEO of the People's Daily press conglomerate, travelled to Shanghai's elite Fudan University to provide an exclusive "inside" account about how the paper came up with the above-mentioned three influential editorials in the campaign to denounce Bo and unify thoughts. In a clear attempt to define the competitive edge of his paper over its main rival, the Xinhua News Agency, Zhang spoke with great pride about how these editorials, along with eight related editorials in the paper's "Today's Topic" column, had "set the tone" for the Bo affair and had "served to create unity of thought for the Party and nation, and to reassure the public and stabilise the overall situation." In its treatment of the Bo Xilai affair, Zhang added, the *People's Daily* "had a powerful public opinion channelling capacity, and vested with high political value, news value and practical relevance" (People Net 2012). What Zhang did not make explicit in his speech is that the *People's Daily* was hoping to simultaneously convert its "high political values and news value" into its stock market value. Zhang spoke the day before People's Daily Online, operator of the website for the *People's Daily*, made its IPO debut at the Shanghai Stock Exchange on April 27, 2012. The first Chinese state-owned media outlet to be listed on the capital market, the shares are "selling like hot dumpling" (Millward 2012). As the Reuters reported, "China's People.cn Co Ltd finished 74 percent higher on its first day of trading in Shanghai after a $219 million IPO as investors flocked to the state-backed news portal, giving it a bigger market value than the *New York Times*" (Lee 2012). The story continued: "demand for People.cn shares were so high that the stock was suspended for most of the afternoon, after triggering multiple stock exchange circuit breakers" (Lee 2012).

So, Bo has vanished from China's political stage as a speaking subject. Leftist websites that once supported Bo's policies were suspended. The "Red Alert" that *Time* magazine spoke of was gone. Now, transnational and China's state-controlled and market-driven media and Internet outlets can usher in a new cycle of accumulation, with the CCP central organ *People's Daily*'s IPO leading the way.

Contexts, Connections, and Issues: The Middle Class and Its Gazes

Conceived a year ago at the founding of the Centre for Contemporary Marxist Research in Journalism and Communication (CCMRJC) at Fudan University in May 2011, the purpose of this special issue was to shed light onto the latest Chinese communication and culture politics from a critical perspective that foregrounds class analysis. The purpose of the CCMRJC, as Lu Xinyu and I had written in announcing a May 2011 conference in preparation for its establishment, was to promote

dialogue among critical communication scholars and contribute to advancing global communication scholarship that is capable of not only addressing the multifaceted problems of globalised informational capitalism, but also grasping the complicated dynamics of ongoing social upheavals in a crisis-ridden global political economy. All the contributors to this special issue were at the conference.

At the time,Bo's Chongqing experiments were in their full swing, and Chongqing Satellite Television (CQTV) had just shocked the Chinese media field with the March 1, 2011 highly controversial move of suspending any commercial advertising in an attempt to establishing itself into a "public interest" channel. I was interested in this drastic de-commercialisation effort. Subsequently, I published a preliminary analysis of the communication and cultural dimensions of Chongqing's experiments to provoke domestic Chinese scholarly debates on the future directions of China's media reform. While acknowledging that de-commercialisation must serve as a necessary starting point, I argued for the importance of broad participation and open debates in determining the future directions of China's social transformation as core elements to establish a meaningful Chinese public sphere (Zhao 2011a).

In August 2011, CQTV inaugurated the weekly current affairs discussion program "Public Forum on Common Prosperity" (gongfu dajia tan), which promised to broaden debates about China's developmental path. Centring around the theme of "reducing the three divides [between rich and poor, urban and rural, coastal and interior regions], promoting common prosperity," the 45-minute program focused on "people's livelihood-oriented Chinese reform practices from a global perspective," and posited itself as a platform on which Chinese political and academic leaders could "face squarely the contradictions and conflicts resulting from China's current uneven development, and respond to the needs for theoretical explorations" (Chongqing Satellite Television 2011). Guest-anchored by Yang Du, a professor from the Business School of Renmin University of China in Beijing, the program combined in-studio panel discussions with mini-documentaries, street interviews with ordinary people, as well as micro-blogger participation. It positioned itself in the Chinese national television market as the only large scale current affairs show dedicated to the theme of "common prosperity" – an issue, as CQTV claimed in the program's online launching publicity material, the CCP could not, and must not, delay in addressing. As leading anti-neoliberal and socialist-committed scholars such as Cui Ziyuan and Wen Tiejun who had largely been invisible in other television outlets became forum guests to put forward their visions for a more equitable and sustainable Chinese developmental path, the program threatened to resemble the post-1989 rally of liberal and neoliberal scholars on the column and forum pages of the *Nanfang Weekend.* As I will explain in more detail in the next article in this special issue, as a flagship market-oriented subsidiary of the Guangdong provincial party organ *Nanfang Daily*, *Nanfang Weekend* has played an instrumental role in spreading neoliberal reform visions and championing liberal democratic values as "universal values." Relevant parts of the papers by Changchang Wu and Guoxin Xing extend my analysis with their discussions of the influential role of *Nanfang Weekend*'s sister paper, *Nanfang Metropolitan News* in the micro-blog sphere and in news reporting respectively.

With the crackdown on Bo, the de-commercialisation of CQTV had become another manifestation of his accused political sin of trying to revive political sin of

trying to revive the Cultural Revolution. Even some of the above-cited "Public Forum on Common Prosperity" program publicity material at CQTV's official website has been purged. As Wang Hui put it, "Wen's rhetorical invocation of the Cultural Revolution served to single out the Chongqing experiment and seal it up, like the Cultural Revolution itself, as a forbidden subject, not available for public debate or historical analysis and fit only for political condemnation. Those associated with it can now be vilified as power-seekers, conspirators, propagandists or reactionaries who want 'to turn back the wheel of history.'" (Wang 2012). And indeed, leading left-leaning scholars who had studied the "Chongqing model" and written favourably about it had been demonised as cheerleaders of Bo (Rong 2012).

Although none of the papers in this special issue directly deals with the Bo Xilai affair, this recent crisis at the highest political level grew out of profound contradictions in the Chinese political economy, and as I demonstrate in my paper on the post-1989 politics of intellectual publicity, profound divisions in the Chinese media and intellectual fields. Even though China's post-Mao reform program was launched on the basis of a broad "anti-leftist" consensus among the political, intellectual and media elites, that consensus had collapsed by 1989, which saw a deep split in the CCP leadership and the downfall of first Hu Yaobang, and then Zhao Zhiyang. The violence of 1989 and the suppression of open debates on both the political nature and direction of the reforms paved the way for a whole decade of "neoliberalism with Chinese characteristics" (Harvey 2005) throughout the 1990s and the first few years of the new century. That decade saw the first relatively smooth transition of power from the Jiang Zemin leadership to the Hu Jintao leadership in 2002. It also witnessed the profound transformations in the Chinese media and intellectual fields that I describe in my paper.

However, by late 2004, the tensions between "neoliberal strategies" and "socialist legacies" had resulted in the "Lang Xianping storm," which ignited a protracted debate on the directions of the reform process in the Chinese media and Internet. Underscoring the pivotal role of intellectuals in Chinese communication politics and the impact of global intellectual flows, Lang Xianping, a Taiwan-born, U.S.-trained and Hong Kong-based transnational elite intellectual made effective use of the market-oriented media and the Internet to launch a challenge against the excesses of unaccountable privatisation of state-owned enterprises, and the general lack of social justice and equity in the reform process. Among other things, the "Lang Xianping storm" brought the "liberal versus new left" intellectual fissure, which had been confined to narrower academic circles since the late 1990s, to the media and Internet sphere. Significantly, Internet discussions between late 2004 and early 2007 were overwhelmingly on the side of anti-neoliberal forces. As I wrote, the Chinese Internet "public" at the time was a constellation of broad social forces, including "old leftists" who were compelled to use the Internet because they had been deprived of mainstream media access, leading humanistic intellectuals who had access to mainstream media but aim to enlarge their audience, young university faculty members, social critics, grassroots leftist commentators who did not have ready access to mainstream media, white-collar workers, and university students (Zhao 2008a, 305).

However, elite proponents of further market reforms aggressively organised their publicity counter-offensive in an attempt to rein in a mobilised oppositional

public opinion that threatened to put pressure on the Hu-Wen leadership to significantly re-orient the reform process. Not only was Lang Xianping disparaged for pursuing personal fame and catering to populist Internet opinion, but also he was framed as an "outsider" who did not understand China's domestic conditions. At a crucial moment of calling the capitalist class to arms in defending their class interests and becoming the dominant class in the realm of public consciousness, Zhang Weiying, a prominent neoliberal economist who has consistently spoken out for China's rising capitalist class, called upon members of this class to pay special attention to what he considered to be hostile public opinion on the Internet because "in our country, public opinion in society can easily become political pressure force, and the political environment itself" (cited in Zhao 2008a, 319). In the subsequent neoliberal ideological counter-offensive, prominent neoliberal intellectuals and legal scholars such as Gao Shangquan, Wu Jinglian, Xu Xiaonian, Jiang Ping, Hu Puping (a.k.a. Zhou Ruijin) and He Weifang became highly vocal and aggressive in crusading for further neoliberal reforms and defending capitalistic interests both in the media and in off the record meetings. For example, a widely circulated *Finance* magazine article featuring interviews with some of the above people claimed that "Shooting at the Rich Will Result in Very Grave Social Consequences" (Zhao 2008a, 322).

In the end, while social unrests, media debates and popular social contestations since the mid-2000s were linked to a slowdown in the process of state firm privatisation and the Hu-Wen leadership's heightened rhetoric on promoting social welfare in an attempt to contain explosive social tensions, neoliberal forces were able to not only contain and neutralize media and Internet critique against further capitalistic reforms, but also expand and consolidate capitalistic social relations in the Chinese political economy. The passage of the highly controversial Property Rights Law without any open debate at the March 2007 National People's Congress, as I argued, marked "a major step toward the legitimation and consolidation of the economic power of China's rising propertied class under the Hu Jintao leadership" (Zhao 2008a, 326). As Ying-fen Huang argues in her article, the enactment of this law "has the effect of deepening the class stratification and intensifying the tendency of "proletarianisation." In the aftermath of the 2008 global financial crisis, domestic and global struggles over the future directions of China's developmental path have intensified. By spring 2010, as my paper demonstrates, the *Nanfang Weekend*-led crusade against "new left" scholar Wang Hui had come to epitomise an even deeper division in the Chinese intellectual field. The case also exposed the more desperate and vicious tactics of China's liberal and neoliberal intellectuals in crushing their opponents, as well as the destructive impacts of media commercialism and media instrumentalism on the part of *Nanfang Weekend* and its allied intellectuals. This spells out the moral bankruptcy of China's semi-autonomous bourgeoisie "public sphere."

Meanwhile, the economic situations, social dispositions and political consciousness of China's "middle class," an ambiguous and ambivalent social stratum that has been vested with so much hope as a democratising social force, have become more crucial as China faces a crossroad in its future developmental path. It is in this context that I wish to locate the articles by Ying-fen Huang and Changchang Wu respectively in this special issue. Both papers focus on communication politics

relating to class relations and social consciousness centring on China's middle class. In her paper, Huang analyses the 2009 popular drama series *Dwelling Narrowness* as an index to class relations, social consciousness, and the political economy and cultural politics of media and urban development in China. As a series targeting specifically at members of the urban middle class as the favoured consumers of the advertising industry, the show reveals a multifaceted processes of class formation against the drawback of what Huang calls "spectacular accumulation" in rapidly neo-liberalising urban China. The middle class is a fuzzy sociological category in the Chinese context, as Huang argues. Contrary to optimistic forecasts of a steadily growing "middle class" as the backbone of a "well-off" (xiangkang) Chinese consumer society, many among China's white collar workers, especially its young and most dynamic stratum, are becoming another type of "new poor." Unlike the laid-off workers, migrant factory workers, and disenfranchised farmers, members of this "new poor" hold university degrees, live in the city, have white-collar jobs and receive a steady income. Above all, they harbour very high expectations in consumption and lifestyle patterns, including private home-ownership in China's metropolis as the most important hallmark of "middle class" status. However, in the context of skyrocketing real estate prices and other economic and social hardships, they have not only become "the new poor in consumer society and poor consumers" in the material sense, but also endured poverty in their mental life and value disorientations (Wang 2012).

Although members of the urban middle class are resentful of official corruption and the bureaucratic-capitalist alliance that is responsible for their plights, as Huang's reading of the depiction of their social consciousness clearly underscores, their gaze is definitively cast upward. Toward this end, one of the show's young urban white collar protagonists literally ended up with sleeping with a highly corrupt official by becoming his mistress, in exchange for her sister's fulfilment of her home ownership dream and the lavish consumerist lifestyle that she had desired for herself. Meanwhile, members of this class displayed only distain toward the working class, even though they have had to share the same living space with them. To the extent that there was any depiction of contestation against the dominant bureaucratic and capitalist class alliance by the working class, such contestation, especially radical working class consciousness, was neutralised in the show.

Wu's paper provides a further snapshot of the political gaze of the middle class as a class that is located between state and capital on the one hand and the working class on the other. The medium is micro-blog, or Weibo, a Chinese version of Twitter, which has emerged as the newest means of popular communication for China's middle class in the past couple of years. Reported to be around 300 million, the number of China's microblog accounts corresponds roughly to the size of China's urban middle class. I will discuss briefly the bias of Weibo as a specific communication forum later on, but for now, it is important to note that it turned out that the political consciousness of this micro-blogging middle class is not only trained upward toward a capitalist agenda, but also, as Huang also demonstrates in her paper, Western-ward. Guided by their micro-blogging intellectual vanguards, which can be seen as a consolidated and ever more radicalised version of the *Nanfang Weekend* and liberal intellectual alliance, or the "universal values" school in the "liberal versus new left" turned "universal values versus China model" debate, middle

class indignation against the corrupt state machinery and whatever that is left in the Chinese state's public ownership system reaches hysterical proportions.

In *Dwelling Narrowness*, the fictional middle class characters became complicit with the dominant class alliance of domestic bureaucratic-capitalists and transnational capitalists in order to secure their middle class lifestyle. Now, in the wake of the devastating high-speed bulletin train accident on July 23, 2011 that had killed this highly priced new class of train services' almost exclusive middle class riders, the horrified middle class members in the real life drama become instantly radicalised in the microblog sphere as a vocal speech community, embracing the further neoliberalisation of the Chinese political economy, specifically, the privatisation of China's railway system, and even more radically, overall regime change, as the only means to their salvation. To be sure, there were powerful expressions of ambivalence and self-reflectivity on the part of some middle class micro-bloggers. As one micro-blog that Wu cites put it, "We are indignant… not because we want to eliminate unfairness, but because we want to place ourselves in advantageous positions in unfair situations." Even more revealing, however, is the extent to which micro-bloggers idealise the U.S. as the perfect middle class liberal democratic utopia vis-à-vis the Chinese political system.

Although Wu emphasizes in his paper that the outburst of a pro-capitalist "middle class consciousness" against the state ownership system in the micro-blog sphere was the result of a number of contingent factors and that it is "ephemeral," the political and policy impact of such micro-blog sphere mobilisation has been profound in China in the past two years. Wu's paper was selected for inclusion in this special issue out of 10 case studies of "micro-blog events" reported at a workshop organised by the above-mentioned Centre for Contemporary Marxist Research in Journalism and Communication between March 31 and April 1, 2012. The original version in Chinese was much longer and I have taken the liberty to drastically cut it and rewrite it in English. Just as Huang's paper and Wu's paper complement each other extremely well in their analysis of the ideological articulation of the middle class with a neoliberal agenda, the general conclusions of Wu's paper resonate well with the Shanghai workshop's other case studies of recent micro-blog based online opinion mobilisations. For example, the controversy over the illegal fundraising case of Wu Ying, ended up with a powerful neoliberal crusade for the further liberalisation of the financial sector for domestic and transnational financial capital (Yang and Wang 2012); the controversy over the case of farmers uprising in the Guangdong village of Wukan, turned the more fundamental economic problem of farmer's land ownership rights into a liberal celebration of village election (Xiong 2012).

In fact, we can now put together a narrative about the escalation of the neoliberal counteroffensive against anti-neoliberal forces and the capitalist re-orientation of middle class online opinion from the days of Internet discussion forums in mid 2000s to the latest micro-blog sphere in the early 2010s. The "Lang Xianping Storm" I had written about (Zhao 2008a) marked the beginning of an intellectual and Internet-based challenge against the further neoliberalisation of the Chinese political economy. This was followed by escalating efforts on the part of neoliberal forces to reign in the kind of "unfavourable" public opinion environment that Zhang Weiying had spoken of in late 2005. As the 2008-2009 global financial crisis

further discredited neoliberalism and intensifies class conflicts, such struggles became uglier and increasingly brutal by spring 2010 in the media and Internet sphere. In the aftermath of the bulletin train accident in July 2011, we can see how neo-liberal and market-fundamentalist forces capitalised on a horrified and increasingly anxious and insecure middle class to aggressively advance a pro-capitalist reform agenda.

Even more disturbingly, as Wu makes it clear, in the debates over rumours and truths regarding the bulletin train accident, prominent liberal and neoliberal bloggers, including leading journalists at the *Nanfang Metropolitan News*, openly defended the legitimacy of rumours as a means to achieve their ideological ends. Here we see a dress rehearsal of the "rumour machine" that has been unleashed in the Bo saga. It is perhaps also within this context of intensified neoliberal efforts at reshaping the media and online "public opinion environment" toward a capitalist agenda that we can understand Bo's "rogue" status in a new light. Bo is a "rogue" because his "Chongqing model" deviated from more radical models of neoliberalisation and because he had the political will to use heavy-handed measures to extract concessions from the bureaucratic and capitalists classes on behalf of the working class – even though he might have been very corrupt himself. It is also within this context that we can appreciate the accusation that not only Bo had made the officialdom miserable by compelling its rank and file members to reconnect themselves with the poor, but also inflicted a "psychological collapse of the gotten-rich first middle class" (Jiang 2012), where "the gotten-rich first middle class" is a code word for the newly enfranchised capitalist class.

And surely enough, neoliberal reformers, led by Chinese Premier Wen Jiaobao, who was clearly identified by micro-bloggers as on "their" side in Wu's study, have been sparing no time in resuming their neoliberal program while the whole nation was busy consuming the political spectacle of Bo's downfall – a spectacle co-produced by a constellation of domestic and foreign state managers and symbolic manipulators of all sizes and shades. As Wang Hui reported, just as Bo was sacked, the State Council's Development and Research Centre held a forum in Beijing at which prominent neoliberals such as Wu Jinglian and Zhang Weiying announced their program of privatising state enterprises, land, and liberalise the financial sector. On 18 March, the National Development and Reform Commission issued a report that "contained plans for the privatisation of large sections of the railways, education, healthcare, communications, energy resources and so on. The tide of neoliberalism is rising again" (Wang 2012).

Most importantly, a high-level U.S. delegation had arrived in Beijing by the first week of May 2012 for the 4th annual strategic and economic dialogue between Treasury Secretary Timothy F. Geithner, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton and their high-ranking Chinese counterparts. As I have already alluded to earlier, the U.S. government has been collaborating very closely with the Chinese authorities in managing Wang Lijun's defection to the U.S. consulate in Chengdu and the sensitive information that Wang disclosed to the U.S. authorities. In fact, the U.S. government was seen as having played such a pivotal role in the entire Bo saga that many Chinese netizens have mused that U.S. President Obama has become the 10th member of the CCP Politburo Standing Committee: "After Wang Lijun ran into the [U.S.] consulate, the CCP Politburo added its 10th Standing Com-

mittee Member. He is Obama" (Kong 2012). On May 3, 2012, the *New York Times*, which has played a key role in reporting the whole Bo saga, including relaying U.S. government news about Wang Lijun at the opportune times, reported the results of the Sino-China strategic and economic talks with the headline "U.S. Stressed Concessions from China." The paper reported that China "had made tangible concessions," and that it "has gone further than ever … in removing advantageous financing and regulatory conditions to state-owned enterprises" (Lowery 2012). Not surprisingly, one Chinese web forum characterised these agreements, which also include major Chinese concessions in the financial sector, as "a payback to the U.S." and "a sellout" (Chaozheteng May 2012).

Contexts, Connections, and Issues: The Working Class and Its Struggles

But the game is not over. It is necessary to bring in the role of China's lower social classes in Chinese communication politics. Even though they have been rendered more or less invisible as communicative subjects in the dominant Chinese communication system, their struggles continue to play a role in China's social transformation. As the respective articles by Guoxin Xing and Wanning Sun in this special issue demonstrate, Chinese workers, especially the large segment of migrant workers, have struggled to communicate their own voices, build their own intellectual and cultural capacities, as well as developing their own class consciousness, or what Xing calls the "proletarian public sphere" against all odds. Xing's analysis of compounded pro-capitalist and anti-labour bias of *Nanfang Metropolitan News* and Xinhua News Agency in reporting the deadly and highly individualised capital and labour conflict provided further evidence illustrating how far China's bureaucratic capitalist media system has deviated not only from its origins as "a proletarian press," but also from the market-oriented media's own self-proclaimed professional standards. As well, as Xing's case study demonstrates, it was the legal system's failure to secure the worker's rights, as well as the capitalists' violation of the worker's legal right that led to a deadly confrontation between the worker and his managers. And it is within this context that one must understand the class-based and highly corrupt nature of China's emerging "law and order" regime, a regime that neoliberal intellectuals and legal scholars have spared no effort in promoting and defending in their attacks against Chongqing's heavy-handed "striking black" campaign.

However, as Xing's historical overview of radical and autonomous working class communication practices from the early days of the Cultural Revolution to the 1989 pro-democracy movement underscores, a radical working class consciousness had long informed Chinese workers' struggles against capitalistic exploitation in general and bureaucratic capitalism in particular. Similarly, contrary to the official media system's neutralisation of China's revolutionary legacies and the selective deployment of these legacies for the sole purpose of political legitimation, "red symbols" and revolutionary songs and slogans have been appropriated by the working class in their struggles against the new forms of exploitation in contemporary China. It is perhaps within the context of persistence working class resistance against China's bureaucratic capitalist formation that one can also gain a new understanding of a real fear of the Cultural Revolution, or more broadly, China's "red" revolutionary

tradition, in the current context. The Cultural Revolution had its moments of working class empowerment. Along with all the horrors of "class struggle", it opposed "capitalist restoration," and contained a radical egalitarian thrust. Moreover, not only the tactics, rhetoric, as well as the collective memories of the Chinese revolution continue to shape ongoing working class and peasant resistance against further capitalistic developments in China, but also the revolutionary ideologies of the Chinese revolution continue to provide resources for ongoing radical working class re-formation and online leftist mobilisation and ideological critique of the capitalistic reform process (Xing 2011; Zhao 2011b). For all these reasons, perhaps the dominant hegemonic bloc of domestic and transnational capitalists, Chinese and foreign state managers, and their aspiring middle class allies do have something to fear – with or without Bo's "singing red" campaigns. Just as fascism remains a permanent temptation, the "red scare" remains a constant obsession. In today's reformed and globally integrated China, this is no exception, even though the 'red scare" appears as the spectre of "the Culture Revolution".

Today, as Xing's paper underscores, the right to communication and online activism has become a life and death issue for workers. In Sun's paper, we can see the beginning of Chinese migrant workers' long revolution in cultural self-empowerment and working class consciousness formation. Specifically, she details how a small but growing number of migrant cultural activists are making creative use of digital media to create their own culture and to project their own voices "in debates on social inequality and citizenship." As her nuanced ethnographic analysis of working class cultural activism underscores, the process of forging a collective migrant working class identity is a painstaking one. It not only involves self-discovery on the part of workers, but also "the extent to which they are inducted and initiated into the technology-enabled process of politicisation and socialisation." Moreover, the results are often "contingent on the acquisition of a techno-political literacy on the part of both individual workers and the worker advocacy groups." Analogous to the pivotal role of mainstream media and neoliberal intellectuals in spearheading middle class consciousness formation toward a capitalist agenda in Huang's and Wu's papers respectively, one witnesses in Xing's paper the pivotal role of organic working class intellectuals in the articulation of radical working class consciousness, and in Sun's paper the involvement of "urban, middle-class and transnational cultural elites" in the initiation of migrant working class consciousness. Although there is no comparison in the scale and impact of such involvements, clearly not all members of the middle class are allying themselves with the ruling classes. At the same time, as all the papers underscore, it is important to acknowledge the experiential, affective, imaginative, and moral dimensions of class consciousness formation. It is also within the realm of the experiential, affective and moral dimensions that one can perhaps understand the popular appeals of not only Chongqing's "striking black" and "singing red" campaigns, but also the "mass line" revitalisation efforts.

Finally, by way of concluding this introduction, I wish to draw attention to yet another issue that underpins all the papers in this special issue, that is, the class politics of technology and cultural form. Along with the Bo affair that I discuss in this introduction, my paper and Xing's underscore the pivotal role of the news and informational media genre, including rumours in the increasingly pervasive form of

"unconfirmed reports" and the growing trend toward sensationalism and tabloid journalism. As class conflicts become more intensive within and beyond national borders within the terrain of globalised informational capitalism, the "information war" is becoming more intense and multifaceted, concurrently more open and more coveted, and above all, more consequential. For its part, Huang's paper foregrounds how the control of the "commanding heights" of the society's means of cultural production by the ruling class alliance has made the television drama series the most powerful and expensive story-telling form for the cultivation of dominant capitalistic ideology. Further, she demonstrates how the centrality of this cultural form in the process of class formation in favour of the capitalist class has been multiplied and reinforced through the digital technologies of dissemination and the active involvement of "prosumers" in online discussions of the television drama series.

In Wu's paper, one witnesses the astonishing power of China's microblog sphere, especially Sina Weibo, in rallying the middle class toward a neoliberal reform agenda. Although micro-blog, or Weibo, is considered as the Chinese version of Twitter, Weibo is different from Twitter in a number of ways. First, whereas Twitter can only accommodate 140 English characters, which do not amount to many words, Weibo, on the other hand, allows more words in Chinese. Second, whereas a Twitter post can only accommodates 5 comments and displays up to 50 re-tweets in the form of (50+), Weibo accommodates unlimited number of comments and displays the exact number of forwards (Dingxin Zhao 2012). These features are well illustrated in the examples that Wu cites in his paper. As Dingxin Zhao pointed out, these features have not only allowed Weibo to substitute blogs in China, but also amplify the role of "Internet Water Army" (i.e., ghostwriters posting online comments with particular content to influence social media conversation). Apparently, not only "zombies" or "phantom" fans haunt online statistics, but also "they can be bought and sold online for as little as 4 Yuan (63 cents) a thousand" (Xinhua Net 2011). All these have made it easier for dominant opinion leaders to emerge. Consequently, "there is a greater danger for netizens to be manipulated" in the Chinese micro-blog sphere. This analysis, in the context of Wu's account of the origins of Sina Weibo and its politicisation by the "vanguard of China's twitter class" in the aftermath of the prominent role of social media in the Arabic spring, assumes great importance in understanding the ideological orientation of China's micro-blog sphere.

Finally, Sun drives home the social nature of media technologies and particular cultural forms when she describes how domestic workers, armed with the video camera and all the technical skills and politicisation imparted by their middle class organic intellectuals, were not able to capture their working experience inside the private homes of the upper class on the camera. This, as she puts it, "seems to fly in the face of the truth-claim made on behalf of documentary as a genre which has a natural advantage of becoming more 'true.'" As she writes: "It is here we see the difficulty, if not the impossibility, of producing ethnography of work and life from the point of view of the subjugated class … The dominant class refused to be subject to the gaze, and has the power to act out this refusal." If Chinese workers have no choice but to embark on a truly bottom up cultural revolution, then this will be a very long march indeed.

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THE CASE OF *DWELLING NARROWNESS:* AUDIENCE COMMODITY, THE SPECTACLE, AND CLASS FORMATION

YING-FEN HUANG

Abstract

This paper illustrates the process of class formation depicted in and through the popular 2009 television drama series *Dwelling Narrowness* against the backdrop of spectacular accumulation in neo-liberalising urban China. The article points out the lines of tension and affinity that are emerging out of the processes of class formation inside China's "society of spectacle": the divide between the aspiring middle class and the working class, and the alliance between the urban middle class, the ruling political class, as well as the domestic and transnational capitalist classes. On the one hand, one witnesses a reified class interests-based hegemonic unity of party-state power holders, domestic private capitalists and transnational capitalists, and the emerging middle class. On the other hand, profound economic divisions and social injustices continue to arouse resistance amongst the working class, which are largely mediated by the Chinese state's socialist ideological legacies.

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Introduction

In September 2008, the world was awakened by the infamous global financial crisis, which erupted in the U.S. and quickly spread around the globe. It resulted in the busting of the housing bubble, the collapse of large financial institutions, the bailout of banks and industries by national governments, and prolonged massive unemployment. However, China, the world's second largest economic entity, seemed to represent a different story. China was not immune to the economic downturn, as factory closures in the coastal cities and the resulting lay-offs forced tens of thousands of migrant workers to return to their hometowns in the rural areas. China's growth rate dropped from 13 percent in 2007 to 8 percent in 2008. Compared with the plummet of the U.S. real estate market, which led to numerous evictions and foreclosures, the housing market in China remained prosperous. Because the local governments in China have used the commodity housing sector as the backbone to boost overall economic performance, property prices continued to rise against the backdrop of the financial crisis. For instance, the average price of commodity housing in Shanghai spiked 35 percent from 15,457 Yuan per square meter in 2009 to 22,370 Yuan per square meter in 2010 (Wenxin 2011). This represents the period when the financial situation deteriorated and when the State Council implemented property market tightening measures to curb escalating property prices. In contrast, the average monthly wage in Shanghai remained steady from 2009 to 2010, as low as 3,896 Yuan (China Daily 2011). Rocketing property prices became a major concern for the Chinese government and buyers as purchasing a flat has become an unrealistic dream for many ordinary urban dwellers. It was in the context of the global economic storm and the increasing unaffordable housing prices that *Dwelling Narrowness* (*Woju*), a hit television drama centring on purchasing a property by a young urban middle class couple, caught viewers' attention.

The 33-episode *Dwelling Narrowness* premiered in Shanghai and Jilin and achieved instant success in fall 2009. The hit drama focuses on the plight of two Guo sisters who come from a small town and resettle in a metropolis called Jiangzhou, which is believed to be a simulacrum of Shanghai. A series of events resulted from Guo Haiping's (the elder sister) intention to own a condominium home in the city. Longing for the splendid façade of urban dwelling, Haiping and her husband Su Chun aspire to buy a home after graduating from the city's top university. Therefore, they live an austere lifestyle and rent a tiny room in a decrepit old alleyway neighbourhood, sharing the kitchen and the sanitary facilities with their apparently working-class neighbours. Even though they lead their life pinching and scraping, they soon realise that their lofty goal has become more and more unapproachable. The real estate prices are skyrocketing. In the end, they end up buying a modest apartment and becoming "mortgage slaves" (*fangnu*), spending two-thirds of their combined monthly income on their mortgage payment. Meanwhile, Haizao (the younger sister) follows the footsteps of Haiping to relocate herself in Jiangzhou after university. Feeling obligated to alleviate Haiping's financial burden because Haiping had funded her university education, she betrays her boyfriend Xiaobei and develops an intimate relationship with Song Siming, a high-ranking corrupt official in the mayor's office, beginning her journey as a "professional mistress." Song exercises his power to assist Haiping and Su Chun through various difficulties.

A side story concerns Haiping's poor neighbours, Grandma Li's family, whose members have lived in the alleyway house for more than three generations. As laid-off workers struggling to make ends meet, Grandma Li's son, Lao Li, has a night shift job in an Internet café, while his wife Aunty Zhang works as a maid for a stingy bourgeois family. In the name of urban renewal, Song Siming colludes with developer Chen Sifu on a plan to turn Li's neighbourhood into a park and then modify the building permit to erect upscale condominiums, which will lead to a handsome profit margin. Knowing that the compensation payment that has been offered to them is meagre, the Li family stands out as a "nail household" (dingzi hu) to resist the demolition process. Grandma Li is killed by the violent tactic of the forced demolition implemented by Chen.

Dwelling Narrowness drew a great deal of attention from its targeted urban-oriented audiences, who generated a wave of heated discussions on the popular media. On the Internet, various social networking sites, searching portals' discussion sites, bulletin board services sites, blogs, and audio-visual file sharing sites were flooded with Chinese netizens' passionate comments as they performed their role as "active audiences." For a period of time, phrases such as "mortgage slave," "mistress" (xiaosan), "Song Siming" and "corrupt official" (tanguan) were the most popular online search terms. Apart from discussions in the virtual world, the DVDs and a novel version of the hit series, written by the show's screenwriter Zhang Xin, also garnered wide popularity.

Notwithstanding the sweeping success of the show, the broadcasting of the hit drama met with pressure from the government. After the full 33 episodes were broadcast in Shanghai and Jilin in late 2009, Beijing TV, citing "technical difficulties," pulled the drama series off the air after showing only 10 episodes. However, immediately after cancelling the show, Li Jingsheng, the director of the State Administration of Radio, Film and Television (SARFT), criticised *Dwelling Narrowness* for depending on vulgar "bone-baring" plots of sex and official corruption in order to mobilise public sensations. This official rhetoric triggered intense fury among netizens, who questioned whether the government was in fact embarrassed by the show's somewhat "authentic" representation of official corruption. The show's portrayal of official corruption is so vivid that commentaries posit that the character of Song Siming is modeled on the former Shanghai party secretary, Chen Lianyu, who had 11 mistresses and was charged for the misappropriation of pension funds after lending $3 billion Yuan to a number of real estate and construction companies. Meanwhile, a widespread online rumour citing *The 21st Century Business Herald* pointed out that Beijing TV was pressured by real estate developers to pull the show off the air, as the show would damage the reputation of the real estate industry. Nevertheless, even though the government seemed to have adopted the new tactic of "cold treatment" toward the show (Yu 2011, 36), the multiple forms of the show's distribution, including books, DVDs, and the digital versions online, were available for wide circulation and avid consumption. It remains unclear why the SARFT would ban the drama despite its high ratings and potentially lucrative commercial revenue. However, one thing is for sure – the ban has sparked discussions precisely because the show's "realistic" representation of the urban housing plight resonates with the netizens.

This paper illustrates the process of class formation surrounding *Dwelling Narrowness* against the backdrop of spectacular accumulation in neo-liberalising urban China. The article first utilises Dallas Smythe's concept of the "audience commodity" to ground a materialist analysis of the formation of the middle class in the political economy and cultural politics of the show's production, distribution, and consumption. To deepen the analysis through the show, the article then draws upon Guy Debord's concept of the "spectacle" to theorise the politics of land privatisation and resultant "class struggle" surrounding the process of urban renewal. The analysis reveals the lines of class unity and division within the "society of spectacle." On the one hand, one witnesses the emergence of a reified class interests based hegemonic unity, consisting of the transnational class, the state, the private capitals, and the emerging middle class. On the other hand, profound economic divisions and social injustices continue to arouse resistances amongst the working class, which are largely mediated by the Chinese state's socialist ideological legacies.

The Aspiring Middle Class as the Audience Commodity

Dallas Smythe visited China twice in the 1970s to study ideology and technological development. These trips resulted in a well-known report entitled "After Bicycle, What?" in which he suggested that the answer should be "in favour of public goods and services and against goods and services for individual, private use" (Smythe 1994, 243). At that time, television did not exist in China, and the Chinese government was eager to plan a truly nationwide television system. Smythe's advice to China was to avoid the western one-way model system and to design a "two-way system in which each receiver would have the capability to provide either a voice or voice-and-picture response to the broadcasting station" because, he wrote, "the existing TV technique had been developed under capitalism to make possible the sale of motion pictures and other commodities to people in their home" (Smythe 1994, 231-2). The "[issues] of the class character of technology, the ideological character of consumer goods and services, and the ideological character of innovation/investment" (Smythe 1994, 232) were at the heart of his concern against the television system developed under monopoly capitalism. As Yuezhi Zhao has discussed in some detail in relation to Smythe's engagements with China (Zhao 2007; 2011), the Chinese government, of course, did not take Smythe's aphoristic advice seriously, and it drastically changed its policies toward capitalistic reintegration with the West. After 30-odd years of "reform and openness," the Chinese communication industry today has wholeheartedly embraced a market imperative similar to the western model, making its contemporary mode of production more relevant to Smythe's other well-known piece on "audience commodity." Although the Chinese state remains on the "commanding heights" on collective ownership, ideological work, and content regulations, the profit-driven communication industry has submitted to the capitalist system of consumption (Zhao 2008).

In "Communications: Blindspot of Western Marxism," Smythe argues that, under monopoly capitalism, the primary commodity of the media is the "audience commodity" (Smythe 1977). As he argues, in a materialistic way, the audience commodity is created by the media to lure advertisers; thus, in this sense, the labour performed by the audience when engaging in consumption during their leisure time is the chief effort to articulate the communication system's economic function

in the reproduction of capitalist relations of production. The political economy of production and consumption of *Dwelling Narrowness* serves as a perfect illustration of the "audience commodity" concept.

Dwelling Narrowness is a product of China's private-capital friendly media policies, which introduced the mode of co-production between the state broadcasters and private media companies. The show was co-produced by Shanghai Media Group (SMG), Jilin TV, Huayi Bros Media Group (Huayi), and Jindun Shengye Film and Culture Co. (Jindun). SMG is one of the major state media conglomerates in China. The marketisation and conglomeration path of SMG can be traced back to the late 1970s, when Shanghai was positioned in the forefront of media commercialisation in China. In February 1979, advertising first appeared on Shanghai Television (Zhao 1998, 53), which marked the beginning of a new era that turned "the people" into the market-oriented "audiences." After pursuing various measures of commercialisation and desperately seeking audiences for two decades, SMG was formed in April 2001, on the eve of China's World Trade Organisation (WTO) accession. SMG was a result of a merger involving the Shanghai People's Radio, Shanghai Oriental Radio, Shanghai Television, and Shanghai Oriental Television. Since its formation, SMG has consistently undergone aggressive expansion. By 2011, it had become the second largest media conglomerate after China Central Television (CCTV), operating a multimedia platform and related cultural productions. To expand beyond its status as a regional monopoly, SMG has also forged significant international partnerships with major global media players, such as DreamWorks Animation and MTV Networks to distribute its programs around the globe. Jilin TV, a minor player in the co-production, is operated under the state-owned Jilin provincial media conglomerate Jishi Media Co. Ltd. Similar to SMG, Jishi Media was formed in 2001 under the pressure of China's WTO accession. Huayi Bros Media, formed in 1994, is one of the largest privately-owned media production houses in China. It owns a portfolio of film production and distribution, television production, advertising and marketing, recording and music production, artist management, game publishing, and theme park operations. *Dwelling Narrowness* was produced and directed by the well-known director Teng Huatao, who contracted with Huayi. Jindun Shengye is a relatively small private production house which specialises in the production of police drama.

Co-production is now a common practice in the television drama industry in China. The state broadcasters, which almost monopolise the production permits licensed by the SARFT, tend to prefer purchasing shows produced by private production houses or contracted producers, "rent-seeking" from the process of outsourcing production (Zhao 2008). However, by implementing the mode of co-production, the contracted private production houses have "to do the heavy lifting" (cited by Zhao 2008, 205) by financing the production and selling the advertising slots to potential advertisers in advance. Under these circumstances, the production houses have to intensify the shows' capacity to mobilise sponsorships in order to survive under the profit-seeking mechanism of the entertainment industry. Thus, this has propelled the private production houses, as noted by Zhao (2008, 211), to "[play] a major role in China's media's decisive reorientation toward entertainment." It is beyond dispute that the "rent-seeking" behaviour of state broadcasters and profit-making private media capital find common ground on serving their *de facto* "patrons" – advertisers – who provide the media subsidy.

Dwelling Narrowness, which was deliberately crafted to recruit the desirable "audience commodity," serves as the "inducement" (free lunch), in Smythe's term. The show was pulled off the air; however, it has produced an army of committed members of the "audience commodity" as the show's digital form has remained highly accessible. Then, the issues that surface here are that of the labour of the audience and the class containment function of commercial media, which turn citizens into consumers. In the case of *Dwelling Narrowness,* one should ask, what particular class consciousness and material practices does the show aim to reproduce? How does the labour of the audience contribute to the process of class formation? To avoid absolute "commercial indoctrination" (Meehan 2007, 163), it is also necessary to make a further scrutiny into the "free lunch" to reveal what, exactly, has been packed in the show to set the class agenda that best serves the interests of China's neoliberal-oriented market economy.

For Smythe (1994, 246), the free lunch "functions as a lure or bait to catch and keep people paying attention" to advertising messages. Nowadays, television programming employs the method of "product placement," in which "the product is woven directly into the story so it is unavoidable and its messages can be smuggled in when the viewer's guard is down" (McChesney 2004, 147). Namely, the "free lunch" itself is explicitly advertising in content so the labour of the audience is intensified. In *Dwelling Narrowness,* the storyline has been virtually "branded" to exhibit the values, tastes, aspirations, and lifestyles of the elite and the aspiring middle class. For instance, Haizao and Xiaobei discuss the pronunciation of the upscale luxury fashion labels "Salvatore Ferragamo" and "Giorgio Armani" while they are window shopping at the airbrushed boutiques. To showcase Haizao's "petty bourgeoisie complex" (*Xiaozi qingjie*), a plot highlights how she is virtually alienated by the seduction of the expensive Häagen-Dazs ice cream, and another plot shows how she is delighted at receiving an iconic doll crafted by the well-known Japanese artist Nara Nishitomo as a gift from Song Siming. Likewise, although Haiping subsists on a diet of instant noodles, her desire for consumption is further realised by her insistence on purchasing brand name (such as Disney) baby clothes and food for her daughter. As for the ruling elite, the possession of flashy cars, countryside villas, and mistresses are perceived as the status symbols by which their social and economic prestige is measured. A lengthy plot that features Song Siming cruising in a Land Rover (Luhu) with Haizao helps to build up such an image. As a passionate fan of the Land Rover, Song Siming boasts the car's unique specifications and glorifies the brand as "the British royal family designated vehicle," making this plot a quasi "infomercial" within the show. As of today, three years after the show's broadcasting, searching "Song Siming" and "Luhu" on Baidu, China's most popular search engine, still results in more than 44,600 entries. Of course, this "infomercial" was not inconsequential. The sales of Land Rover shot up 100 percent in 2010 (Chen 2011).

The show's popularity is tied to its realistic engagement with a few contradictory issues implicated in China's rapid neoliberal urbanisation. Since the introduction of the commodity housing market in the early 1990s, the commodification of urban spaces has been accompanied by rising property prices and class polarisation. Issues such as "nail households," illegal land grabbing, and official corruption are often convoluted with the entrepreneurial mode of urban redevelopment.

The consequence is an environment of spiralling real estate prices that fetters the emerging white-collar or middle class as "mortgage slaves." Besides the housing issue, the extramarital relationship portrayed by Song Siming and Haizao has been a common phenomenon among China's rich and powerful elite classes. The fact that the mistress, who accepts financial support from her elite class lover, tends to come from the middle or lower social stratum has generally revealed the class nature of asymmetrical gender relations and the ugly truth of male chauvinism. The mistress phenomenon has further belittled the role of women, casting them merely as men's sexual obsessions.

Television dramas in China usually shape public discourses, and *Dwelling Narrowness* is no exception. The audience's labour has generated a plethora of decidedly middle class-aspired discourses in both new and old forms of popular media, as the vast majority of the online commentaries, discussions, and postings focused on the issues such as the plight of the "mortgage slaves," the aspiring middle class' dream for home ownership, the love choice of being a mistress of the rich and powerful, and the conspiracy of the corrupt official and the developer to speculate property prices. It is worthwhile to note that a few online surveys launched by China's web media confirm the middle class orientation of the public discourses. For example, Tencent.com conducted a poll that drew more than 36,000 online voters. The result showed that the majority of the participating netizens agreed with the statement: "happiness is closely related to owning a home" (Feng 2009). Another survey run by Sina.com, one of China's major portal sites, showed more than 60 percent of 15,000 netizens agreeing that *Dwelling Narrowness* reflected the public sentiment on "mortgage slaves" (Feng 2009). Even CCTV, the state's flagship media, ran an online survey that asked netizens to state which love choice they would make between Song Siming (material security) and Xiaobei (untainted love). The result was predictable, with 32.61 percent voting for Song while 26.34 percent voted for Xiaobei. This seemed to suggest that the middle class feels desperation and will use any means to rise out of their situations. These examples also show the ways in which the online media, which did not produce the television drama, have been engulfed into the triad of "free lunch," "audience commodity," and advertisers. By providing space for online discussions, the online media have further valorised the labour of the audience in the effort to reinforce the middle class-centred discourses, and by spinning the related discourses, the online media proliferate more "audience/netizen commodities."

The effect of the labour of the audience/netizens on class containment is apparent. It has been very difficult to find comments and discussions regarding the unjust treatment toward the show's working-class Grandma Li family amongst the countless postings concerning "mortgage slaves" and "mistress." Even on the leftist website Utopia (wuyouzhixiang), one could locate no more than two Grandma Li- and demolition-related entries. Given the enthusiastic public discourses on *Dwelling Narrowness,* commentators from the side of audience studies can (and have) celebrate(d) the emancipatory discursive power of the "active audience/netizen." Yet, the truth is, if the criticism of the impact of corruption on the inflated property prices serves only to address the plight of the middle class "mortgage slaves," leaving behind the working class who have been forced from their homes, then the issue of "mortgage slaves," which functions to forge and even consolidate middle class formation, seems to be a hypocritical agenda.

The so-called white collar or aspiring middle class is the core of the class discourse represented in *Dwelling Narrowness.* The show has painstakingly painted a crude yet vivid picture of this class. Best represented by the characters of Haiping and Su Chun, the members of this class are considered the beneficiaries of China's economic reform. They have obtained college or university degrees in the city, and they have secured white collar jobs and have stable incomes. On the one hand, this is a class that desperately distances itself from the working class, primarily based on the class distinction of education. As Su Chun boasts of his middle-class credential of graduating from "the most prestigious Fudan University," he says to Haiping, "Just ignore those narrow-minded and shortsighted petty urban residents (xiaoshiming). They don't even finish high school … You shouldn't condescend to care what they say." Clearly, education is regarded as a form of cultural capital. Without higher education, the working class has been looked down upon or even despised by the middle class. Yet, on the other hand, this is a class that sides with the ruling elite and the transnational capitalist class. While Haizao is willing to be sexually subordinated to Song Siming's chauvinistic charm in exchange for material comfort, Haiping is unabashedly accepting of Song's financial and legal aids to meet her reified class interests.

Regarding the class relationship with the transnational class, the Guo sisters make no effort to disguise their aspirations to Mark's elite superiority. Mark is an American lawyer and Song's close friend, a minor character in the show, yet one who plays a decisive role in influencing the fate of the two female protagonists. Through Song's recommendation, Haiping makes good use of her middle class cultural capital to be able to teach Mandarin in Mark's expatriate community. It is through Mark's financial help that Haiping elevates her class position from a white collar "mortgage slave" who was once exploited by her Japanese transnational employer to an entrepreneur, the CEO of her own international language school, a joint venture with Mark's network of transnational capital. Similarly, at the end of the show, Mark assists the traumatised Haizao to relocate in the U.S., thereby helping her to acquire a membership of the transnational middle class. The transnational capitalist class represented by Mark, who is able to mobilise political and financial power inside and outside China, is indeed a "magic class," the ultimate "saviour" of the aspiring Chinese middle class.

More importantly, the construction of the consciousness of the white collar or middle class in the show is centred on the ownership of private property, the cardinal feature of neoliberal thought (Harvey 2007). Perplexed by her own class identity, Haiping said to her husband, "At least, we are university graduates. People would see us as white collar or the middle class. Why couldn't we afford to buy a house? I heard that in the United States, you would be considered as middle-class, as long as you own a house." Haiping's hysterical obsession with buying a home is compelled by an urge to acquire a self-proclaimed membership in the middle class to place herself in the dominant social strata of neoliberalised China. Haiping's idea is far from arbitrary. The focal point here is the newly enacted The Real Rights Law (the Property Rights Law). As Zhao (2008) reveals, the Property Rights Law was the subject of heated controversy in the aftermath of a media and Internet-based challenge against the further neoliberalisation of the Chinese political economy in the mid-2000s. Nevertheless, the ruling Chinese elite pushed it through at the

2007 National People's Congress (NPC) and the law went into effect on October 1, 2007. The newly sanctioned law, for the very first time in the history of the PRC, places private property on par with the state and collective ownership. Article 64 of Chapter 5 goes into detail about the legal rights associated with private ownership: "Private individuals have ownership rights to all legally obtained incomes, housing, daily use items, production tools and materials, and other movable and immovable capital." Wang Zhaoguo, the Vice-Chairman of the Standing Committee of the NPC, said that the stipulation of the property law was to stimulate "people's initiative to create and accumulate wealth" (Yardley 2007). The stipulation has been welcomed by entrepreneurs and the urban middle class (Zhao 2008), and it has played a pivotal role in shaping the middle class consciousness and the direction of class re-composition in China's new "economic and social realities" (Yardley 2007). It is precisely against this background that private home ownership becomes the most desirable feature of the newly emerging middle class.

The proliferation of the public discourses on the middle class is observable. The discussion generated by *Dwelling Narrowness* is just a small part of the ascendancy of the class discourse that widely pervades the popular media whose desirable audiences are the avid consumers of their program sponsors. The intellectual and elite discourse has not been absent from this "middle class fetish" (Guo 2009). A plethora of literature from inside and outside China, ranging from economic and sociological descriptions to anthropological studies, have contributed to define or to characterise this emerging social class. Many argue that the middle class has achieved a higher profile as China's economic growth has proceeded apace, while some remain sceptical and assert that the actual existence of this class is still very disparate and elusive.

For example, the work of Lu Xueyi and his colleagues represents a liberal paradigmatic model on the rise of the middle class in China. Lu optimistically points out that China's class formation has gradually transformed from the unequal pyramid shape to the onion (or olive) shape, indicating that the majority of the population will be predominately middle class. Following the onion model, Lu (2007) posits that China's middle class accounted for 15 percent in 1999 and 23 percent in 2008. Additionally, Lu maintains that the middle class grows steadily at 1 percent per year and that, in the year 2020, the size of the middle class should reach 38-40 percent. Disapproving of Lu's optimistic prediction, Philip C.C. Huang is emphatic that, given the increasing expansion of China's informal economy, the combination of peasant workers, non-agriculture workers, and laid-off workers has reached over 60 percent in the urban areas, growing faster than Lu's estimation of the alleged middle class (Huang 2009). Therefore, it is naïve to model after the U.S.-inspired onion-shaped structure that assumes the agriculture population would gradually convert into the middle class stratum (Huang 2009).

Huang's account sharply points out an uncomfortable truth of China's rapid urbanisation. While it is correct that there has been a growing prominence of the so-called "new rich" or well-off middle class emerging out of China's steroidal economic development, the increasing "proletarianisation" of the urban population seems to display more serious concerns. Grandma Li's son and daughter in-law, who depend on meagre income from the informal sector, which offers no job security, represent this tendency. Altogether they earn approximately 2,000 Yuan

a month. This figure is considered high amongst the wages offered in the informal labour market, simply because they are local residents. Migrant workers would earn much lower wages than the local labour force. In China's large cities like Shanghai and Beijing, the growth of the formal economic sector cannot be sustained without exploiting the informal sector, which hires laid-off workers, the urban poor, and migrant workers. It is almost impossible that persons like Lao Li and Aunty Zhang, who work as a store clerk and a maid respectively, could have any opportunity for upward social mobility by holding informal sector jobs.

Within this context, it is also important to understand the official scheme of income characterisation of the middle class. The National Bureau of Statistic (NBS) defines the households that have an annual income from 50,000 to 60,000 Yuan as "middle income" households (Xinhua 2005, cited by Guo 2009). Needless to say, Haiping and Su Chun, who have an annual income of 108,000 Yuan (with 9,000 Yuan a month), are definitely well-positioned above the middle rank designated by the NBS income scheme. As Zhao (2010) observes, the "middle class" in China still belongs to the upper rank of the society.

Spectacular Accumulation and the City

Dwelling Narrowness is based on Jiangzhou, believed to be a fictionalised alias for Shanghai. This "rendezvous" manifests the intricate relationship amongst the major characters over the issues of power, morality, affection, as well as monetary accumulation. Thanks to Jiangzhou's enthusiastic urbanism, gigantic skyscrapers are placed closely in a serrated formation throughout the city. At night, the city is adorned by sparkling lightshows of billboards, which brim with energy, glitter, and excitement. The fanciful window displays created by boutiques and department stores stop shoppers at their tracks. Dazzling as it is, this is the spectacular "image" that attracts the Guo sisters to leave behind their hometown and resettle in such a dynamic metropolis. However, this "image" of the metropolis is not unique. This is the "image" of a globalising city that all Chinese cities have deliberately crafted since the 1990s. Still, the term "image" cannot explain the process of rapid urban transformation that Chinese cities have experienced over the past two decades. The "image" of Jiangzhou is not what it appears to be. In envisaging the spatial and social transformation of a globalising city like Jiangzhou, the need becomes apparent to bring Guy Debord's critique of "spectacle" to bear upon this task, in order to identify the spatial logic of power.

Debord uses the term "spectacle" to refer to the reified social relations in capitalist society. In the society of spectacle, the power of spectacle and spectacle as image were realised as *commodity;* and both images as commodities, and commodities as images, permeate all areas of life. However, spectacle does not equate to images. Debord clearly states that "spectacle is capital accumulation to the point when it becomes images" (Debord 1995, 34). Images conceal their power by cloaking themselves within commodities.

For Debord, spectacular representation displays an affinity with commodification. Here, Debord's argument has close links to Marx's concept of "commodity fetishism," and to Georg Lukács' notion of "reification" (1968). The notion of spectacle is, in fact, a reformulation of both earlier concepts. Debord uses the concept of spectacle to illustrate the commodity structure, and the reified relations

of humans, produced and existing under the logic of capitalist accumulation. As long as commodities are produced, reproduced, and circulated, the modern society pacifies and mesmerises its citizens, turning them from subjects into objects, and from actors into spectators.

Debord's theory of spectacle was developed in the late 1960s; it was in an age where prominent social theorists had proclaimed "the end of ideology" (Bell 1962). He unleashed a savage polemic against the positive view of post war capitalism and liberal democracy when North America and Western Europe reinforced a consolidated ideological front opposing the socialist regimes of the Soviet Unions, Eastern Europe, and China. The Utopian mood of developed Western societies seemed to be confirmed by optimistic and opulent images – a spectacle created by commodities. Nevertheless, Debord's bleak assessment paradoxically anticipated the turbulent ride of capitalism beginning in the early 1970s. Some forty years later, by revisiting the concept of spectacle against the backdrop of the new cycle of the economic crisis and China's post 1992 "no-debate-on-ideologies" neoliberalisation, we find that Debord still has something to teach us.

The rapid urban transformation that most Chinese cities experience today is based on the principles of spectacular accumulation, as can be seen in the example of Jiangzhou's real identity – Shanghai. The Shanghai Pudong project, "grand in concept and bold in design" (MacPherson 1994, 61), has been positioned at the forefront of national reform since 1992. Jiang Zemin, the former Secretary General of the CCP and Chinese President, assigned Shanghai a role of leadership in China's "new" spatial economy. He stated, "Shanghai Pudong must be the principal economic 'dragon head' of Yangzhi River Valley." A slogan was then formulated by the Shanghai Municipal Government: "Revitalising Shanghai, Developing Pudong, Serving the Country, and Marching toward the World." To restore Shanghai's financial significance in the global economy, the Lujiazui Finance and Trade Zone was set up to replace the Bund in Puxi as the city's new business core. It is a flagship project within the Pudong mega plan. Moreover, Lujiazui was proposed as a "Manhattan of the East," the city's new international trade and financial district. The analogy to Manhattan is deliberate and meant to connote an "image" of a "global city." As Shanghai Pudong was "marching toward the world," Lujiazui was meant to appropriate images of a world-class city into its own system of representation.

The making of the global city does entail an aspect of media. From 1992 to 1993, the Shanghai Broadcasting Bureau took a bold step in establishing a commercial-oriented multimedia platform including Shanghai Oriental Radio, Shanghai Oriental Television, and Shanghai Cable Television. Shanghai's broadcasting reform largely resulted from Deng Xiaoping's famous southern tour talks in 1992, which aimed to further liberalise China's economy and to restore Shanghai's economic importance (Zhao 1998). Pudong, where Shanghai Oriental Television is based, has quickly transformed into a global vanguard city, with the Oriental Pearl Tower striving to become the new landmark. In light of this, Shanghai's broadcasting reform and the later conglomeration of the broadcast sector bore an additional profound strategic aim to secure Shanghai's role not only as a world-class city, but also as a flourishing cultural and media centre.

Over the past 20 years, Shanghai's cityscape has been transformed from a former industrial-agriculture site into a "Blade Runneresque city that [satisfied] the SMG's

[Shanghai Municipal Government] desire for a 'distinctive skyline' and the symbol of the reform era" (Olds 2001, 112). The consequence of these changes was quite apparent. The new skyline is coming into being right before everyone's eyes, like a theatrical play constantly adding new scenarios with international recognition, and with each one vying with the others for attention. The current and past mayors of Shanghai all have endeavoured to "mobilise urban spectacle" (Harvey 1990) in the city, from inviting elite architects to erect magnificent new edifices to hosting events such as the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) meeting in 2001 to showcase Shanghai's cityscape in front of the world's political and economic leaders and the spectacular World Expo in 2010 to draw consumption dollars and the attention of the global media. The tangible and intangible flows of the spectacle have converged in Shanghai. The city has become the biggest construction site in the world. During 2002, it was estimated that almost three-quarters of high-rise construction cranes in the world were operating in Shanghai (Huang 2008, 223).

It is the Debordian society of the spectacle that reified the Guo sisters and led to their being spectators (not actors) of their lives. "One should become an urbanite!" Haiping preaches to Haizao, trying to convince her to stay in Jiangzhou because it offers museums, concerts, the Oriental Pearl Tower, and Isentan (a Japanese department store). In a similar vein, Haiping argues with Su Chun, "There is no reason to move back to our hometown. Are there mansions, high-rise buildings, bustling and lively streets? Is it a dynamic metropolis?" The tendency of the educated youth to choose not to return to their hometown implicates an asymmetrical urban and rural divide in China. The spatial bias of China's neoliberal development, which prioritises the consumption demands of the new rising urban middle class, has made the Chinese countryside invisible on the theatrical stage of China's spectacular accumulation.

Song Siming, the sagacious official who signifies the power of the state to manipulate urban plans and speculate real estate values, understands the naked logic of spectacular accumulation too well. When Haizao complains of the sky-high property prices, Song responds with a Debordian overtone:

> *Underneath the bright colours, there are only shabby clothes. A big international city is like a theatrical stage, and everyone concentrated their focus on where the spotlight is, what they see is the beautiful, the splendid, and the surging. As for the backstage, where the light does not shine, even if there is dust, or even dead mice, who would notice? This is not specific to Jiangzhou, and has nothing to do with any particular social system; it would be the same even in New York, Paris, and Tokyo. All these cities bear a sensibility of decadent charm, and the real estate prices are skyrocketing – unaffordable for their residents, but never stopping the newcomers to settle there. The burdensome pain behind the glamour of the city is hardly perceptible … The game of capitals is not deemed to be played by ordinary people … One has no choice but can only struggle to survive.*

What Song Siming has hesitated to reveal is the profound unity and division of the spectacle implicated in China's rapidly globalising cities. This is the subject addressed in the next section.

The Unity and Division of the Spectacle – the Class Struggle

The spectacular accumulation that most Chinese cities experience today rests on the principles that run deeply contrary to any progressive socialist sensibility. As a drive for global integration, the entrepreneurial mode of urban development reveals the extent to which the state and private capital have formed a close partnership to generate lucrative profits from the commodification of space and the introduction of private home ownership, while the welfare of the disenfranchised classes is barely considered. As a result, urban development has produced spatial apartheid (Davis 1992) and class polarisations. For instance, to establish the "Manhattan of the East" has meant to relocate 60,000 residents and over 800 work units in Lujiazui to the further outskirts of the municipality (Huang 2008, 223). Not only have the evicted residents been eradicated from the social networks of their everyday lives, they are forever excluded from the valorised spaces of the spectacle – sleek skyscrapers, sumptuary malls, upscale condominiums, villas, golf courses, and industrial zones – which come to replace their homes. In *Dwelling Narrowness*, Grandma Li's case reflects a far cry from the financial suffering of the middle class "mortgage slaves."

To begin, Grandma Li perceives the urban renewal project as a "class struggle" between the capitalist class and the disadvantaged working class. When the demolition company tries to persuade her to accept the compensation plan, she dismisses the offer and says:

> *Relocation is a business that would make the poor cry and put a smile on the faces of the rich. They [developers] are businessmen. How could you possibly gain any advantage from them? … Our house is located in the heart of the city, taking full convenience of transportation. It is within walking distance of the hospital that I visit. For those low income and low social security families like us, wherever it could save us money is considered a good location. How can I afford to move to the suburbs? … Foreigners and new immigrants have kicked us out of the city. Now they are living in the best locations. We, locals and the poor, have become more and more despicable!*

Indeed, not only is urban renewal a process of spatial apartheid that makes the city centre the enclaves of the elite and the transnational capitalist class while it displaces the urban poor to the suburbs, but it is also a process of "accumulation by dispossession" (Harvey 2003), whereby the developer encroaches upon the commons for the aim of capital accumulation. If the Maoist collective land and the public housing policy were meant to eliminate class differences, then the new run of the land reform since the early 1990s, which unleashed the "land use right" (LUR) to the regime of market imperative and introduced the commodity housing market, means to restore class division.

Shanghai's urban renewal process epitomises a vivid example of the "class struggle." In 1990, the State Council officially sanctioned the LUR. Land still remained a form of state asset, but the LUR had become the new commodity, subject to trade, auction, and mortgage under private treaty. Under this new regulation, the state came to monopolise newly marketised property relations. In Shanghai, both municipal and district governments are the two state institutions administrating

urban land development. While the regulation requires all acquisitions to occur only by public auction, in actual practice, a vast majority of the land leasing is conducted by private negotiations before the development project goes public. This implicates the potential for (and actual) corruption between the state and private developers. As in *Dwelling Narrowness*, government officials like Song Siming, who wields enormous power, can hand pick a developer like Chen Sifu to win the land contact, and it becomes necessary for private capitalists to establish "patron-client" relationship with senior officials. Because there is big money to be made on the booming property market, bribery is rampant and has been formalised.

Leasing land to developers accounts for a major source of government revenue to finance urban infrastructure and to generate funds for new urban housing. During the high tide of land leasing and housing commodification, land leasing provided up to 50 percent of the district government's income (Olds 2001, 85). The lion's share of leasing fees have effectively encouraged bureaucratic entrepreneurial administration and an intense competition among districts within Shanghai because the level of administrative achievement has been evaluated simply by measuring the pace of redevelopment projects and the prosperity of the real estate sector as well as the inflow of foreign direct investment (FDI) in comparison with other districts. Under these circumstances, the district governments have competed to invite symbolic and profitable projects into the areas to heighten property and land values.

What is at stake here is the relationship between the ruling elite and transnational capital. Chun Lin reminds us of the interlock of these two classes: "The biggest beneficiaries of the boom [of China's economy] have turned out to be transnational profit seekers and those local power holders who abuse public positions for private gains, and these two [classes] are often connected with each other" (2009, 230). In China's economic reform process, transnational capital has been used to jumpstart the economy and, thus, has been granted privileges over domestic capital. It is unequivocal that the involvement of FDI is fundamental to urban development. Beginning in the 1990s, the inflow of FDI has been directed largely to land and real estate development. This tendency is particularly true in Shanghai. By 1998, it was estimated that approximately half of the inflow of FDI in Shanghai was directly linked to property development (Ramo 1998, 68). As the making of the transnational class is intrinsically bound up with the flows of FDI and the globalising of corporations, the transnational capitalist class remains as a class which has vested interests in China's rapidly expanding capital accumulation process. Moreover, the alliance of these two classes is reciprocal. For the transnational capitalist class, their primary concern is to mobilise policies favourable to their economic interests, while for the power holders, the linkage would serve as a reliable channel for corrupt officials to stash the embezzled wealth and families (including mistresses and love children) overseas. As a lawyer on *Dwelling Narrowness*, Mark's job is to provide legal services regarding local professional codes and governmental regulations for his transnational clients, namely, to ensure that his clients reap profits in China. To that end, he would have the inside track by being affiliated with prominent officials like Song Siming. It is based on such intimate class alliances that Song Siming entrusts Mark to launder funds and move his mistress abroad.

The urban renewal process has been described by the media as "relocation is gold" (Shao 2010, 205) to legitimate the relocation. The underlying message is

that "relocation [is] an once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for [the evicted residents] to gain financial freedom, and that they should grab it and set for life" (Shao 2010, 205-6). However, it is proven to be gold only for the state, corrupt officials and their patronised client companies. While the developer is responsible for the cost of the demolition and relocation compensation in Shanghai, the amount must be approved by the district government. According to municipal regulations, this amount must account for 70 percent of the land acquisition fee. However, it is impossible to prove that any final settlement follows the rule because no area of the process is subjected to any democratic oversight. So, how the cost of demolition and relocation is determined remains notoriously mysterious. Moreover, although the district government adopted a method to calculate the compensation package, the reality is that the actual compensation received by the residents seemed far lower than the officially alleged amount and revealed multiple standards as a result of "negotiations." Since the compensation standard is "negotiable" and there is no universal standard to follow, and since there is virtually no official channel for residents to know exactly how much compensation fee is settled with each household, the residents have to undergo an exhausting process of "negotiation" to acquire a favourable compensation package. With their own interests in the gentrification project, district governments have been unlikely to offer fair arbitration between demolition departments and evicted residents.

The compensation payments actually allow state and private interests to abstract more direct profit from the relocation process. Monetary compensation forces relocated residents to put money back into the real estate market, thereby increasing demand for housing and enhancing the market imperative. Relocated residents in Shanghai found they no longer enjoyed the low rental fees of public housing, yet they are also deprived by the pricey real estate market of living close by. Households with moderate stable income might manage to buy a home in a distant area, but the low-income families would be forced to move far out from the city by the dint of economic circumstances. In addition, as the land acquisition fee has risen along with the real estate market, the local government has profited enormously by maintaining relocation compensation at a low level. This is exactly Grandma Li's situation. The 200,000 Yuan compensation fee offered by the demolition company is far from enough to purchase a flat even in the suburbs of Jiangzhou.

A household that refuses to move out from the site is stigmatised as a "nail household" and has often been portrayed by the news media as demanding inflated compensation fees. Technically, the evicted residents can sue the evictor, but they have no legal right to stop the demolition process. In many cases, the residents who pursue lawsuits are denied justice and never receive the promised compensation. In the worst situation, when the negotiation reaches a deadlock, the demolition companies use verbal intimidation, threats, and physical attacks to solve the dispute. Demolition companies have often hired local hoodlums to threaten and beat residents, while the police stand on the side and turn a blind eye. If the residents still refuse to move out, the demolition company will apply for permission to proceed with a forced eviction. Violent incidents are the usual strategies in forced evictions. For instance, it has not been unusual for arson to force residents to flee.

The plot of the grassroots resistance of the "nail household" is one of the focal points in *Dwelling Narrowness*. As a veteran of political campaigns throughout her

life, Grandma Li utilises her organisational skills to mobilise a collective action amongst neighbours against the demolition. By so doing, she is labelled as a sleek, shrewd, and unruly person from the bottom rung of the society by the developer and the local authority. The show particularly emphasises her tenacity to hold up resistance. She stands out as a "nail household," even when the demolition team cuts the supply of water and electricity and even when she is paralysed in her bed. The point is that Grandma Li's resistance to demolition is far from incidental. Her spirit clearly derives from the engrained socialist working class legacies, which champion egalitarian social relations, as she believes that "labour processes should tell no class distinction." Therefore, her stance on the compensation payment should not be simply attributed to thinking in entrepreneurial terms. Instead, she is strategically waging war on the uneven "class struggle" that places her family in a disadvantaged position. Still, the ways in which the show handles the discontent of the unwelcome spectacular accumulation is notably ironic. In fact, the show gives Grandma Li's clearly left-leaning political position a right-wing spin. Specifically, Song Siming tries to co-opt and neutralise Grandma Li by attributing her spirit to her pre-socialist class identity as part of the landlord class. He discovers that she was born to a wealthy landlord family who once owned the entire neighbourhood. Her uncle was one of the "six gentlemen martyrs" in the One Hundred Days Reform (the Coup of Wu Hsu Year in 1898). Thus, Song concludes that it is her "blue-blooded" class background that leads to her sophisticated skills of resistance. The message is clear: Grandma Li's socialist subjectivity has been denied. Song Siming, the alleged socialist state power holder, sanitises the leftist messages by making her a member of the declined gentry class rather than a potential revolutionary proletariat.

From the above analyses, we see the unity of the spectacle in the case of the urban land reform consisting of the bureaucratic party state power holders, the transnational capitalist class, and the domestic private capitalist class as a newly constituted hegemonic profit-seeking bloc that is antagonistic to the vast majority of the working class. The question remains: how does the white collar or the emerging middle class position themselves in the process of spectacular accumulation? Is the middle class allied with the working class? The answer that *Dwelling Narrowness* reveals is rather disappointing. Not only does Haiping show no sympathy toward the Li family's grievances, she is even self-pitying for having to live in a working class neighbourhood. For that matter, she rants, "I believe that my future must be brighter than theirs. I am not going to stay in this shabby alleyway house and mingle with the laid-off and the hourly-paid workers downstairs, and the clerks and the plain cooks on the second floor." Haiping's lament suggests that today's emerging middle class has consciously forsaken the idea of egalitarianism and is eager to formalise the possession of private property as the prerequisite of their class status. Indeed, the middle class in China is currently obsessed with the ownership of private cars, houses, and consumption goods. Although they have been vocal about the issue of "mortgage slaves" under the repression of the rising property prices, they are apathetic to the plight of the urban poor, who are also suffering from the same market compulsions. The proliferation of private home ownership comes with the homeowners' desires to insulate their property values. In urban areas, there have been collective actions of the right-conscious middle class homeowners to resist the violations of homeowners' rights by the local government or the private developers (Cai 2005). As they are class-based movements, we see no

sign of convergence between the resistance of the dispossessed working class and the activism of the emerging gentrifiers. Despite the lack of class alliance with the working class, the terms and conditions of the class relationship between the middle class and the hegemonic power bloc are mediated by their reified class interests. As prised customers, the middle class sides with the transnational and domestic capitalist classes, as the commodities and services produced by the capitalist class alliance help to consolidate the middle class entitlement based on class distinction and exclusivity. As the class which has identified its own interests with China's neoliberal-oriented reform, the middle class continues to rally their support for broadening economic openness as long as the policies safeguard their class interests, as seen in the enactment of the Property Rights Law.

Conclusion

It is not adequate to view *Dwelling Narrowness* simply as a television drama that unveiled the plight of the aspiring middle class "mortgage slaves" caused by official corruption in the environment of escalating property prices. Instead, it reveals a Smytheian sense of "free lunch" whose chief aim is to, materialistically and ideologically, reproduce the formation of the middle class through the labour performed by the show's targeted viewers as its active "audience commodity." It is precisely the profit-seeking mechanism of the Chinese popular entertainment industry that guarantees the show's class containment function. To nurture and captivate the "class consciousness" of China's seemingly swelling rank of urban middle class, *Dwelling Narrowness* has accentuated the significance of property ownership as class distinction and entitlement. Consequently, the financial predicament of the "mortgage slaves" roils the aspiring homeowners and becomes a vocal issue. Namely, it is a moment when the "class consciousness of the bourgeoisie [or middle class] is geared to economic consciousness," as pointed out by Lukács (1968, 64), and it is precisely in this moment that the middle class truly becomes conscious of themselves as such – that is, it is the formation of the middle class. The members of this class are aspirational class climbers. As China's economy increasingly integrated into neo-liberal global capitalism, the class consciousness of the middle class has been deeply shaped by the commodities, including media and cultural commodities, created by domestic and multinational corporations. It is in this context that Zhao has spoken of the formation of "a newly constituted power bloc – consisting of the bureaucratic capitalists of a reformed Party state, transnational corporate capital, and an emerging urban middle class, whose members are the favoured consumers of both domestic and transnational capital" (2003, 53). In addition, the middle class is not only upwardly mobile but also Western-ward. The important characteristics ascribed to the urban oriented middle class in China tend to be "postcolonial" in nature. To the extent that the West-inspired concept of white collar or middle class has been associated with the current "middle class fetish," and to the extent that the middle class cultural predispositions and the consumption priorities have predominately constructed by Western goods and brands, the issue of the "new imperialism" implicated in the process of the middle class formation and even the transnational class re-composition cannot simply be ignored.

Yet, paradoxically, the grievance of the disenfranchised working class strikes no chord with the middle class "audience commodity." On the one hand, this

demonstrates how successfully the commercial media has worked so closely with monopoly capitalism to reproduce the "right" kind of audiences. On the other hand, this reflects the antagonism and a profound divide between the middle class and the working class. Henry Kissinger also confirmed such a divide, as he felt that the "selfishness of the Chinese yuppies" would bother Mao, who truly believed in egalitarianism (Schama 2011). Indeed, in the broader politics of class discourses, this also indicates the decline of the leftist discourse of class analysis and class struggle (Anagnost 2008; Guo 2009; Zhao 2010). Compared to the flattering media portrayal of the middle class, the working class has been represented as an inferior and burdensome class, a loser of China's miracle economy. The power holders and the capitalist class see the urban poor as a pariah class, the burden of the society and the obstacle of their profit making. Unmasking the logic of the urban renewal is the poverty cleansing game to eliminate the working class from the city centre as their presence mismatches the city's glamorous image.

In light of popular protests, Grandma Li's resistance is remarkably symbolic. However, the working class has taken more radical approaches in the Maoist-inspired real life protests common in China. For instance, the relocation of the East Eight Lots (*Dongba kuai*) in Shanghai caught media attention in 2004. The residents employed tactics, rhetoric and actions that stemmed from the Maoist repertoire to frame their collective resistance to negotiate the better terms of compensation (Shao 2010). They "formed a 'Legal Study Forum' (*xuefu yuandi*) in the fashion of small study groups under Mao, sang 'The *Internationale*' in front of the authorities, flew the red flag on their apartments, and linked the violence in the housing disputes to that of the Cultural Revolution" (Shao 2010, 209). Another case is in Beijing. Song, a local resident whose house is located in a migrant worker neighbourhood along the city's central axis "that has been gutted to beautify the city for the Olympics," hung three red flags and set out Mao's poster on a wicker chair to scare away the officials who had threatened him to move (Hooker 2008). Protests of this kind often serve as critical responses to the problems of glaring inequality and social injustice. It is undeniable that there is an embedded belief of egalitarianism derived from the socialist legacies underpinning the working class resistance. It is troubling to note that under the current liberal (or perhaps neoliberal) economic and political *milieu*, the society of the spectacle (including public discourses and popular media) is reluctant to recognise the left-leaning class struggles. The tendency is the retreat from class, except for the middle class (Guo 2009).

Still, the crux of the problem behind the political economy of the spectacular accumulation is the privatisation of land and property. In the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, Marx warned us that

> *... the landed property, the root of private property, [would] be dragged completely into the movement of private property and that it becomes a commodity … property becoming merely objective, material wealth; … it is essential that in this competition landed property, in the form of capital, manifest its dominion over both the working class and the proprietors themselves who are either ruined or raised by laws governing the movement of capital* (Marx 2000).

This is exactly what has happened in China. Evidently, once the LUR was unleashed from the collective ownership, landed property has become subjected to

competition and speculation. The possession of capital and property stratifies the society into class lines. The political elites, developers and the associated businesses connected through cronyism can deploy their class power over the aspiring middle class "mortgage slaves" and the working class by appropriating public assets and speculating the real estate prices to their own advantage. It is precisely the reified middle class aspiration of being a homeowner that makes the "mortgage slaves" willing to submit themselves to the capitalist system "that is based on class antagonism [and] on the exploitation of the many by few," as proclaimed by Marx and Engels in *The Communist Manifesto* (Marx and Engels 1998, 67). In this sense, the enactment of the Property Rights Law has the effect of deepening the class stratification and intensifying the tendency of "proletarianisation."

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MICRO-BLOG AND THE SPEECH ACT OF CHINA'S MIDDLE CLASS: THE 7.23 TRAIN ACCIDENT CASE

WU CHANGCHANG

Abstract

This article explores the impetus, processes, as well as discursive dispositions through which members of the Chinese middle class mounted a challenge against the state-owned railway system and the entire Chinese political structure in the blogsphere in the aftermath of a devastating train accident on July 23, 2011. The analysis underscored the pivotal "organic intellectual" role of journalists, lawyers, and public intellectuals in helping to construct the "class consciousness" and subjectivity of an anxious, ambivalent and insecure networked middle class in China's rapidly polarising social formation. However, not only this "stand out" collective action of the Chinese middle class was the result of many contingencies but also the apparent uniformity of their speech acts concealed deep fissures. Moreover, the naïve liberalism and anti-statist sloganeering that underpins the dominant micro-blog discourse eventually displaced and blocked any possibility for discussing and advancing the concrete processes of reforming China's state-owned system and democratising Chinese politics.

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Introduction

On 23 July 2011, two bulletin trains collided in a tailgate accident on a viaduct nearby Wenzhou City, Zhejiang Province. Four cars derailed, killing 40 people and injured 192. This is the first fatal accident involving China's CRH series electric multi-units trains, which has been in operation by the Ministry of Railway (MOR) since April 18, 2007 and can reach a top speed of 250 km/h. Within 10 days of the accident, Chinese netizens "have posted an astounding 26 million messages on the tragedy" (Wines and LaFraniere 2011). Most notably, micro-blogging became "a driving force in providing accurate details on the accident that conflict with official accounts" or "a popular platform to search for missing victims" (Jiao 2011), leading scholars to assert that this accident has become "a turning point in Chinese public opinion" (Liu 2011).

Although domestic and international media, scholars, and even the CCP's Central Publicity Department have paid extensive attention to this explosive spread of blog-originated public opinion, few have touched upon a fundamental question: who is the subject of this Internet-based public opinion formation? How does its configuration differ from previous cases of Internet-based controversy? As a few observers have noted, it is the middle class who spoke out vocally through micro-blogging this time. However, at a time when a unitary "class consciousness" cannot be readily attributed to the middle class, what can be the core mechanism that led this social stratum to take such a unitary speech act? Is it possible that there are divergent and countervailing currents underneath this apparent "unity"?

One thing appears immediately obvious. That is, similar to previous cases of online mobilisation, public opinion criticisms not only target exclusively at government officials and its specific institutions, namely, the MOR, but also presuppose an oppositional stand against the state. It is precisely on this basis that many scholars have equated netizens with citizens and concluded that the Internet has nurtured civil society. Based on the analysis of micro-blog texts, this paper explores the impetus and processes through which media professionals, lawyers, public intellectuals (i.e., scholars with a known profile for speaking out on public issues), celebrities in the arts and entertainment circles, as well as ordinary middle class members in various technical fields mounted their challenge against the government, thereby turning themselves from illocutionary to perlocutionary social agents.

Blogging and the "7.23 Accident" as a Turning Point of Middle Class Online Mobilisation

After Twitter was blocked in China in July 2009, Sina.com released the trial version of its Chinese equivalent, Sina Weibo (Sina Microblog), in August 2009. Sina Weibo initially limited itself to social networking functions. In early 2011, anti-regime demonstrations in the Middle East and North Africa began with blogging and tweeting and gained momentum through live webcasts, Facebook and mobile phone (Farmanfarmaian 2011). As a result, Western media started to hail social media such as Twitter and Facebook as powerful organising tools and broadcasting platforms for citizen insurrections in the Third World (Moore 2011). Cognisant of this phenomenon, rights conscious Chinese Twitter users moved en masse to Sina Weibo, constituting themselves as "the vanguard of the twitter

class." In doing so, they turned the previously superficial medium of microblog into an exclusive platform for opposing China's current political authoritarianism. Specifically, Sina Weibo distinguishes itself from the microblog services of China's other Internet portals to become the favoured platform for anti-governmental social mobilisation. The higher level of politicisation by the site's content and users dwarfs its entertainment and bulletin functions for everyday trivia, resulting in what I call the "twitterisation" of Sina Weibo.

My study of Sina Weibo content focuses on the 10 days between July 24 and August 2, 2011. Comments from the first ten pages of microblogs between the periods of 8:00-10:00, 15:00-17:00 and 22:00-24:00 on Sina Weibo's special feature on the "7.23 Accident" were gathered, yielding a total of 7,128 items. These include two categories. About 1/6, or 1,021, consist the blogs of VIP users who register with real names and the original blogs of non-VIP users which attract more than 500 comments and 1,000 forwards. The remaining majority are made up of forwards, which can be further divided into those with or without comments. Special attention is paid to blogs that form a dialogical relationship with previous ones.

An analysis of the identities and social status of the bloggers known either directly by real names or inferred indirectly through blog content reveals the following: 1) the official blogs of certain media outlets, along with the blogs of journalists, lawyers and public intellectuals – scholar with known public profiles for speaking out on public matters – who register with real names are the primary driving force of Internet opinion. Their original blogs are widely retransmitted, constituting an anti-party-state voice that is impossible to ignore. Among these, the official microblogs of print media outlets such as "Finance Net," "New Finance Net," "Nanfang Weekend" and "Nanfang Metropolitan News" ("Nandu" hereafter) – respectively the market-oriented weekend and daily subsidiaries of Guangdong provincial party organ, *Nanfang Daily*, and the personal blogs of reporters and editors were most active. In this way, a selected group of media professionals, who immediately established themselves as the focal point of social attention after the accident, commanded an unprecedented level of public opinion influence. Together with lawyers and public intellectuals, they constitute the "vanguard of the twitter class." Holding dissenting views and using the Internet to oppose the party-state's monopoly of political power and its controlled media, this first-tier bloggers tried to bring the "fourth wave" of global democratisation into China through micro-blogging. 2) Students and the bulk of the middle class are the primary force involved in forwarding and commenting the original blogs of the first group. Without their enthusiastic promotion and amplification, the original blogs of the first group would not have the widespread influence that they commanded. Set aside blogs by students, 3,477 blogs can be attributed to members of the middle class, including white-collar professionals and technical experts, managerial and marketing professionals, as well as audio-visual media producers and cultural celebrities.[1] In the China studies literature, these social groups are considered as constituting a "new" middle class not only because of their distinctive occupational characteristics and social roles, but also because of their relationship with certain types of media. Specifically, their political consciousness and value orientations are mutually constitutive of market-oriented urban newspapers and the Internet, both of which came into being since the late 1990s in China. This relationship is the

starting point for analysing the potentialities of the middle class in transforming itself from a "class-in-itself" to a "class-for-itself," with clear recognition of their common interests in relation to those of other social classes.

Before the "7.23 Accident," members of the middle class had engaged in various form of "not in my backyard" type of protest movements through the new media. However, these movements were rather exclusionary, fragmented, and localised. A wide range of literature on the political orientations of China's middle class have revealed the following: (1) they are consumption vanguards but politically rear-guarded; (2) they act as a social "stabiliser" or "buffer" and espouse a moderate and conservative ideology; (3) they collude with the party-state in a corporatist relationship; in fact, defined officially as a "middle income stratum," they are the party-state's chosen target for incorporation through material benefits; (4) full of anxiety and trepidation, they are unable to serve as the social agents for political democratisation (Pearson 1997; Goodman 1999; Qin 2009; Li 2010). Although the internal configuration of the middle class is complex and multi-faceted, they all intuitively wish to have more pragmatic say in the course of China's ongoing transformation – how far, how fast, and exactly where it goes, and to what ends (Wasserstrom 2009). To the extent that they exist as a "class-for-itself," their common class consciousness lies in their instinctive resistance against radicalism, their inclination for gradualism, as well as their support for the legitimacy of the private property that they have come to possess.

The prior "7.23 Accident" content of the 3,477 blogs clearly attributable to members of the middle class reveal clear manifestations of materialism, hedonism, self-indulgence, as well as a preoccupation with the cultivation of the entrepreneurial "self" in a competitive market society. At the same time, these bloggers opportunistically pay lip service to the presumed universalistic values of freedom, equality, and public interests by occasionally transmitting the comments of online celebrities on various social protest events, including those involving the disadvantaged lower social classes. However, they seldom contribute any comments. At most, they merely register their anger or sadness. In fact, in social protests involving China's lower social class, including farmer land disputes and worker protests, the vocal online voices were limited to those of journalists, public intellectuals and other rights activists. Reflective of their aloofness toward protests by members of the lower social classes, the vast majority of the middle class mostly chose to remain on the sidelines or "doing nothing."

The "7.23 Accident" changed this. Not only well-established online voices, but also the middle class of all walks unprecedentedly participated in challenging the state and politicising themselves as speech-actors. For the first time, they constituted themselves as a speech community, "the Holy with authoritative messages" (Bourdieu 1991, 55). Through the three modes of speech within the micro-blog discourse – @, forward and comment – this provisional speech community of bloggers engaged in two modes of speech acts. First, they ignored and overcame internal differences based on knowledge, information possession and discursive power to constitute themselves as a collective "I," antagonistically addressing a "you" – the MOR and the state ownership system that it represents. Second, by imagining a unitary "we," bloggers constituted themselves as a speech community sharing not only common consumption anxieties, lived experiences and political

insecurities, but also a common objective – to challenge the MOR and the state ownership system that it represents.

As a social stratum born out of China's market reform and integration with the global capitalism system, Western lifestyle and cultural predispositions have played a key role in shaping the social imaginaries and cultural priorities of China's middle class. In a way, they have turned Western modernity as a specific geographical and temporal entity into a universal norm (Nandy 1985, 11). As Chinese imitations of an integral part of Western middle class life, high speed and bulletin trains, with ticket prices beyond the reach of the lower social classes, targeted the middle class as primary consumers. Unlike other accidents that had triggered "not in my backyard" type of middle class protest movements before, the "7.23 Accident" became an "accident" of the entire middle class, which turns the whole country into its "backyard." Underscoring a dramatic class difference in relation to means of transportation and the respective social status and discursive power of their corresponding users, it is revealing that a long distance bus accident on the Beijing to Zhuhai highway that killed 41 people just one day prior to the "7.23 Accident" was almost completely overshadowed in the Chinese media and Internet sphere. Rather than voicing any criticisms against the well-known safety problems of a highly privatised and ill-regulated highway bus sector that primarily serves the migrant workers, the middle class expressed outrage at the MOR's poorly organised rescue efforts and its corruption to oppose state monopoly firms and redefine their relationship with the state from one of tactic complicity to one of total confrontation. Bloggers understood clearly that their perlocutionary ritual was being carried out simultaneously by tens of thousands of others whom they do not know personally, but whose presence are known (Anderson 1991, 34-36). In this way, an imaginary virtual community was formed through the performative writing of individual bloggers on the basis of a shared experience and a common temporarity.

Let me now turn to the actual analysis of the 3,477 blogs. Whose imagination is being projected? Who is exerting influence? How did the middle class as a collective "we" turn Western notions into their norms and construct an antagonistic relationship with the government and the state ownership system? What are the bases for intra-middle class dialogue – political stand, value judgment or the quest for what actually happened?

Three Primary Discursive Groups and Their Dominant Role in the Discursive Hierarchy

The number of public opinion leaders is rather small in the collected micro-blog sample. These opinion leaders consist of the following three categories: leading headlines on the official blogs of specific media outlets, journalists from the Southern Newspaper Group and a few Beijing newspapers, and public intellectuals. These voices, in turn, were amplified by the vast ordinary bloggers through forwards and comments. Bloggers' challenge against the MOR reached a peak in the two days of July 28 and 29. On July 28, the blogs of *Nandu In-Depth*, the *People Weekly* of the *Nanfang Weekend*, and *Finance Net* provoked a wild wave of forwards and comments. For example, Finance Net's blog that "Wenzhou lawyers are not allowed to engage with families of bulletin train victims" garnered 9,720 comments. The blog of *People Weekly* on the "causes of the collision" received 2,667 comments. Furthermore, these

media outlets themselves – especially the presumed professionalism and investigative ethos of the Nanfang Newspaper Group as represented by Nandu – became the subject of admiration. These papers were seen as engaging in revealing the truth. On July 29, Nandu published a special feature entitled "Truth is the Best Memory," and it immediately earned bloggers' praises. One blogger posted the following at 8:23, July 29: "We once again see the professional integrity of Nandu."[2] Below is another stringer of dialogues by various bloggers[3]:

> *A: Its impact on the Chinese media is not limited to the making of the journalist corps, but their directions (2011-2-29, 8:25).*
>
> *B: A paper with ideals, commitments, character, and principles! (2011-7-29, 8:33).*
>
> *C: This is what the media should uphold (2011-2-29, 8:35).*
>
> *D: In a society without truth, truth is best commemoration (2011-2-29, 8:38).*
>
> *E: Solute to Nandu people, the hope and inspiration of China's media people (2011-7-29, 8:39).*
>
> *F @ G: Nandu is the People's Daily in the heart of the people (2011-7-29, 8:42).*
>
> *H: Professional Commitment! Especially admirably under heavy constraints (2011-7-29, 8:46).*
>
> *I @ J: Want truth, want the right to know, want social justice and fairness (2011-7-29, 8:47).*
>
> *K: I will love only Nandu in the future. What is conscience? What is Justice? What is fearless in front of power! What is non-submissiveness to the almighty? What is non-submissiveness to wealth and prestige? This media outlet is it!!!!!!!! Jolly Good!!! See the sparkle of freedom of speech (2011-7-29, 08:48).*
>
> *L: I rarely read papers other than Nandu and other papers belonging to the Nanfang Group. Solute to the Nandu people. History will remember these names [of the Nandu people]: @Cheng Yizhong, @Xiao Shu, @ Chang Ping ... (2011-7-29, 8:48).*
>
> *M: Media should be the conscience of society! //@N: I love Nandu (2011-7-29, 8:49).*
>
> *O: Nandu: a paper that has earned respect during this disaster @P//@Q://@R:I love Nandu (2011-7-29, 8:56).*
>
> *S: Truth is the best commemoration:@T: Go, Nanfang Go! (2011-7-29, 8:56).*

These comments construed an image of Nandu as a rebel against repressive politics, emphasising "only truth, not opinion," thus creating a delicate tension with the official narrative of the accident. After July 27, news about how a CCTV producer was removed from job due to reporting on the "7.23 Accident" and how

the CCP's Central Publicity Department had tightened up control of public opinion began to spread wildly in the micro-blog sphere, leading bloggers to intensify their support of their favoured journalists:

> *A: Speechless!//@B: Where is justice? (2011-8-2, 13:19)*
>
> *C: Is this the Communists' freedom of speech? How sad to be a Chinese. The ordinary people do not even have the right to speak … (2011-8-2, 10:57)*
>
> *D: This is the highest honour of China's media people! //… @E: Not allowing people to speak at all? Why on the earth a price has to be paid for speaking a word of fairness on behalf of the dead? (2011-7-29, 16:47)*
>
> *E: If even media outlets that speak out for the people were shut up, then there is no way for people to see the future (2011-7-29, 16:45).*

Meanwhile, the Hong Kong media became important news sources. In a typical case of borrowing external power to strike at an internal power, many bloggers invoked news by TVB, Mingpo and other Hong Kong news outlets to express their frustration and disappointment with the MOR, as well as their outrage against it. Furthermore, Hong Kong's public servant system and its political institutions became the normative points of reference in criticisms against political corruption and MOR monopoly in favour of privatisation on the mainland. For example, commenting on a previous blog praising the efficiency and public service orientation of the Hong Kong public service system, one blogger wrote, "On the mainland, public servants are masters, the ordinary people are servants. In Hong Kong, public servants are genuine public servants, and they do not have a master mentality" (Anew4, 2011-7-30, deleted by now). Another blogger put it on July 31: "On so many occasions, Hong Kong, because of you, there is warmth and hope. Thank you, Hong Kong!"[4]

The MOR as the Targets of Criticism and the Search for Truth

The focal points of criticisms in the 3,477 blogs includes: concealment of the list of the fatal victims, the reason for burying the wrecked train carts at the accident site, the political motivations for the construction of the bulletin and high speed trains, and finally, the MOR's corruption. A blog by "Citizen Party Member" on July 28 was most eloquent in this regard:

> *Derailed are not bulletin trains, but the system; buried are not train carts, but truth; burned are not bodies, but people's trust; covered up are not mistakes, but crimes! When people are so helpless in front of extreme corruption and the corrupted institutions of this country, we must wake up the people's intelligence, making them more clear-headed, think more independently, and unit them to protect our rights and interests!!!* (forwards 472; comments 113, 2011-7-28, deleted by now).

At 9:20, July 29, another blog offered an inter-textual reinforcement:

> *@A: inaction in political reform and accelerated economic reform lead to further lopsidedness @B@C@Liu Junning: Anti-liberalisation means that the Anti-Rightist Campaign [of 1957] is still ongoing; the rush to build the High*

> *Speed Railway means that the Great Leap Forward [of 1958] is still leaping forward; singing red songs means the Cultural Revolution is still ongoing, and the very existence of the MOR means that the plan economy is still on the go! In short, China still marches on the extended path of the Anti-Rightist Campaign, the Great Leap Forward, the Cultural Revolution, and the Plan Economy! To bid farewell to this line, start with abolishing the MOR! ...*

This blog forwarded well-known liberal political scholar Liu Junning's July 26 original blog on "abolishing the MOR," which attracted 6,948 forwards and 1,541 comments. Here, a number of equivalences were being established: The MOR equals monopoly, state enterprises and plan economy; high-speed and bulletin trains equal the Great Leap Forward; Anti-liberalisation equals the Anti-rightist Campaign; red songs equals the Cultural Revolution; bidding farewell to the plan economy and abolishing the MOR equal privatisation and marketisation. In the end, this was further elevated to an attack on the "China model," which counts China's high-speed railway as one of its most quaint-essential manifestation.

The middle class's overwhelmingly dominant and deictic discursive relationship vis-à-vis the MOR and the state-ownership system in the blog sphere is predicated upon the virtual absence of the latter. In this case, a virtually constituted "we" shouted out aloud across cyberspace at a faceless and static bureaucratic "you" – the MOR. Because of the "organic intellectual" role played by journalists and public intellectuals, members of the middle class equated marketised mainland media and the Hong Kong media with progress, democracy, truth, and juxtaposed them with state-ownership and party media, which are equated with totalitarian control, falsehood, and manufactured opinion. A whole series of naïve dichotomies that had been in circulation in the writings of neoliberal intellectuals and the market-oriented media since the 1990s – society versus government, market versus state, citizen rights versus political control, individual versus collective, democracy versus party-state authoritarianism – were conveniently transplanted to the discursive relationship between the middle class and the MOR. A distinctive middle class belief system was in formation. Calls for abolishing the MOR and privatising railway operations, and for fact-seeking through alternative means, became vocal and thunderous.

It should be noted that there exists left and liberal, and even neo-liberal distinctions in political orientation within middle class opinion leaders. However, liberal and neoliberal public intellectuals and journalists clearly constituted the "mainstream." It appears that their notions of political liberalism and procedural democracy resonated with netizens' frustrations with Chinese political institutions. There were more neutral, even pro-system voices in the print media; however, these voices were clearly in the minority; moreover, they were viciously attacked by bloggers. For example, on July 25, the *People's Daily*'s market-oriented subsidiary *Global Times* published a commentary entitled "High Speed Railway is the Necessary Pain of the Chinese." Shortly afterwards, the Ministry of Civic Affairs affiliated newspaper *Public Interest Times* published an article about how the rescue efforts of the "7.23 Accident" demonstrated the "superiority of socialism." These two articles instantly provoked a wave of outrage in the blogosphere. Verbal abuses were directed personally at Hu Xijing, the editor-in-chief of *Global Times*. In the eyes of these bloggers, Hu, in an attempt to please his political masters, has lost his

sense of humanity, becoming shameless and coldblooded. Moreover, Hu's point that he felt bitterness for the negative consequence of foreign media publicity of the accident on China's high-speed highway export was being rearticulated and subverted: "bitterness is good – this means that we won't shame ourselves abroad because of our corruption" (A-Ivan, 2011-7-27, 11:40).

Rather than identify with Hu, bloggers not only assumed the position of the foreign media, but also took a paternalistic attitude to lecture on and even mocked Hu. Most spectacularly, MOR spokesman Wang Yongping's pathetic and stupidly worded rambling at a news conference that "believe it or not, I believe it anyway" after offering the official explanation for the hurried burial of the head of the wrecked train as a support base for rescue effort so irritated the bloggers that they quickly expropriated it, making it the hottest mime on the Chinese Internet. Bloggers seised this idiotic expression to develop a "high-speed railway style" that relentlessly attacked and mocked official discourses. As Judith Butler puts it, it is precisely the expropriability of the dominant and authorising discourse that constitutes one potential site of its subversive resignification (1997, 157). The three modes of @, forwards and comments in the blog sphere progressively connected up and multiplied the voices of the dispersed bloggers all over the country, emboldening them to believe that they could deliberately deploy their speech acts to challenge and undermine the existing political order. A new and seemingly self-evident political and moral order began to solidify in the hearts and minds of middle class bloggers.

It is on the basis of this assumed order that we can understand why so many members of the middle class so willingly responded to the calls of their intellectual vanguards for dividing up or abolishing the MOR and privatising the railway system. As already mentioned in the previous discussion, despite internal debates, journalists from market-oriented media, public intellectuals and lawyers formed a powerful discursive alliance. Journalists, for their part, tirelessly followed up, probed, reported and exposed all kinds of scandals and inside stories about the MOR. Concurrently, legal scholars and lawyers initiated the "abolishing the MOR" action in the blog sphere. On July 25, independent current affairs observer Chen Jieren posted a blog entitled "repeated accidents prove that the MOR must be abolished" (2011-7-25, 22:57), calling upon the immediate abolishment of the MOR, the transferring of its supervisory functions to the Ministry of Transportation, as well as the corporatisation of its operations. Well-known legal authority He Jinsong forwarded this blog, which was then repeatedly redisplayed, forwarded and commented on, forming a mutually reinforcing meaning producing and value-sharing inter-textual chain of signification.

In doing so, the bloggers also formed an implicit discursive alliance with elite voices within the ruling political class seen to be on their side. On July 28, Premier Wen Jiaobao visited the accident site and held a news conference. In the absence of CCTV live broadcast of the news conference, Sina Weibo provided live webcast. Deviating from the typical anti-government and anti-authority frame, the bloggers viewed Premier Wen as belonging to "our" side in an irreconcilable conflictual relationship with the MOR as "you." Further, they expressed sympathy for Wen's presumed "isolation" and "exclusion" from the ruling Politburo. In this view, although the Premier is blameless both in his attitude and his speech, "the conserva-

tives within the system and the renegades are still firmly in control of the regime" (forwards 1,699; comments 454, 2011-7-28, 13:30). Hong Kong University Professor Qian Gan issued a similar blog: "… please be in the shoes of this sick old man. He is not truly at himself. He suffers from various constraints … what else can you expect from him? …(forwards 10,173; comments 3,223, 2011-7-28 13:44).

This is highly significant. Here, the MOR is seen as more powerful than that of Premier Wen. Portrayed as a lonely and frail old man, Wen is seen as having done his best, despite "the whole platoon of individuals behind him, who were the true pillars of the state" (A, 2011-7-28, 13:41). Another blogger put it: "in this party-state bureaucratic system, if you ask whether a Premier has the power to dismiss a minster, the answer is no. It is beyond imagination to shake up the power of bureaucratic capital" (forwards 630; comments 150, 2011-7-28, deleted by now).

Anti-neoliberal or left-leaning voices are much weaker in comparison. On July 26, anti-liberal public intellectual He Xin posted two consecutive blogs to link with his blog essay, "money worship and marketisation ruined the railway and ruined China." However, there were few followers and responses (forwards 81; comments 45). Of left-leaning voices, only Beijing University Professor Kong Qingdong's call for the firing of the MOR's main responsible persons was widely forwarded and commented on between July 26 and 27. Thus, neoliberal and anti-neoliberal scholars formed an apparent unity on the standpoints of critiquing the MOR's cover-up of the accident and its perceived negligence during the rescue efforts. However, this unity broke down on solutions. There are profound differences between these two camps on whether to dismantle the MOR and privatise railway operations. Moreover, a number of journalists and public intellectuals took a more nuanced view of the MOR. They also made distinctions between the MOR as a state-owned system, its high-level officials, and its rank and file workers. For example, a July 31 "front page" blog by the *Huaxi Metro News* cited Deputy MOR Minister Lu Dongfu as saying that accusations against the MOR for failing to prioritise rescuing the victims deeply hurt the more than 2,000 railway workers and many others on the rescue frontline (forwards 1,755; comments 722, 2011-7-31, 11:48). In the responses, bloggers belittled MOR officials and acknowledged rescuing workers as "heroes" in a typical "officials versus the people" framework. Nevertheless, this willingness to accept the positive role of MOR workers did not extend to any willingness to acknowledge the positive social function of the MOR. Thus, when *Global Times* editor-in-chief Hu Xijing posted a blog on August 2 to say that the MOR had ensured the cheap mobility of the Chinese population and goods, he was immediately being accused for defending a state-ownership system that has become the hotbed for corruption and selfish profiteering. Furthermore, bloggers typically conflated bulletin trains with high speed trains. Exactly how this happened was hard to trace. However, many foreign media outlets explicitly referred this bulletin train accident as a "high speed train accident." Although bulletin trains (dongche) are high speed trains in the generic sense, high-speed train (gaotie) designates a more specific category of trains that uses different technology and runs on separate tracks in China. Clear distinctions are made in both official and everyday usages. However, this distinction became blurred for the first time in Chinese public discourse in the blog sphere over the "7.23 Accident." Because domestic bloggers often cited foreign media as sources, it is possible that foreign media have ended up playing

a primary defining role in shaping not only the naming of the accident, but also partly setting the agenda of the discussion by making China's High Speed Railway the target of criticisms in the blog sphere.

Bloggers' Appeals to Civil Society and Their Liberal Democratic Imaginations

Bloggers deployed various rhetoric strategies and mobilised variegated symbolic resources to convey their outrage against the MOR, to show their sympathy for the victims, as well as to project their understanding of current Chinese political reality and their alternative political visions. Of most significant here is their overwhelming embrace of an either/or dichotomy between China and the West/U.S. An August 1 blog is rather typical in this regard:

> *In the U.S., anybody can operate a television station except the government. In the U.S., you can find all kinds of newspapers and journals except "party papers and party journals"; in the U.S., anybody can have a "little-third" (extramarital lover) except government officials. In the U.S., anybody can keep their income confidential except government officials. In the U.S., people can live, breathe and express their discontent freely except that the government has no freedom and is locked in a cage* (forwards 877; comments 253, 2011-8-1, 6:43).

Implicit in this blog is a series of political assumptions and a whole discursive framework about China and the United States. First, many bloggers hold a particular notion about the legitimacy of modern government. A July 27 blog by a user named "Anger of the Grassroots" wrote the following in respond to another blogger:

> *Because your truth resonates with me, I have paid attention to you! Carry on!//@ Chinese Liberal Fraction 2: the Definition of Modern Legitimate Government: obtain majority approval through universal poll and the power to govern. That which came out of the barrel of gun is called a regime – it can be a bandit regime, a hooligan regime, but it is not a government //@A: all those governments that have not passed an open election, without a Constitution or with only an illegitimate Constitution, are all illegal!*
>
> *@B: "Revolution": The purpose of revolution is emancipation from serfdom, leading to freedom. Revolution first means to revolutionise old notions, further leading to revolutionise minds and institutions. All these, however, must start from truth-seeking. In a society that is full of absurdities and lies, to speak truth is revolutionary! The revolution of speaking truth is the lowest-cost revolution. A society that forbids people from speaking the truth can expect a revolution of blood and fire that will destroy everything! The first truth: the party-state is an illegal regime!* (forwards 59; comments 27, 2011-7-27, deleted by now).

The above is a typical intertextual dialogue in the blog sphere. After several rounds of forwards, the various blogs connect up with each other to form a consistent and mutually reinforcing meaning production chain. Here, netizens' Schumpeterian understanding of democracy as a means to produce government has become the basis for the complete negation of the current Chinese political

system. Procedural democracy has replaced the revolutionary party-building and state-making theory that Mao derived from practical struggles; liberal constitutionalism has replaced the party-state's own claim to political legitimacy. Let's look at another chain of blogs:

> *@A: //@B://@C://@D:we live in such a country.*
>
> *@E:@F: a strong and powerful state won't be subverted even if it allows open gun ownership; a weak regime requires real name registration even for a kitchen knife; under a humanistic government, the President will read out the name of every victims, under an ice-cold government, the number of victims are high secrets to be concealed; in a free country, a reporter can grill a cabinet minister to sweating; in a restrictive system, an official can tell reporters, believe it or not?!* (forwards 116; comments 32, 2011-7-26, deleted by now).

Without even the need of spelling out the contrasting sides, an imaginary Western paradigm serves as the internalised normative framework in the middle class collective speech action.

Second, the middle class called forth a citizen identity and demanded the transition from "the people" to "modern citizen." On July 30, Chen Yan at the Editorial Office of Qilu Television issued the following blog:

> *Please do not call us the people, please uniformly call us citizens! The people exist under government officials; they are the weaker group in a hierarchy, and the enslaved group! However, all under the heaven are citizens with equal rights and responsibilities, with their own basic ethical standards. They respect rights but also seek freedoms. They have compassionate hearts and fulfil citizenship responsibilities!* (forwards 268; comments 73, 2011-7-30, 23:15).

On July 31, "comments on China" issued a blog in the form of a quasi-public opinion survey: "China has a huge population, but few Chinese; China has a huge number of people, but few citizens," what do you think? (forwards 173; comments 61, 2011-7-31 23:08)

The forwards and comments of the above two bloggers more or less agree with their basic premise, stressing citizenship and civil society as not only "the means of resisting tyranny and authoritarian domination," but also as a "self-evident end" (Deng 2006, 6), a universal norm beyond the constraints of time and space. On July 30, a long blog issued by "Trash Teng" entitled "Ten Suggestions for Each Ordinary but Persistent Citizen to Be" garnered 19,308 forwards and 4,181 comments. Nothing demonstrates more evidently the middle class bloggers' embracing of citizenship identity and their admiration for the virtues, institutions, and objectives of citizenship:

> *What can we do? Below are 10 suggestions for contemporaries:*
>
> *1.Do all one can to participate or organise your trusted environmental or educational NGO – NGO is the hope of civil society.*
>
> *2.Learn and spread the most basic citizenship knowledge … a modern democratic society cannot be rooted in a country permeated with lackey consciousness.*

3. Encourage friends to use new communication tools … the free transmission of information is the basis for promoting change.

4. Express the necessary anger on public events …

5. Learn about true history beyond official propaganda.

6. During the outbreak of a public event, do you best to spread the truth you have learned, including using the low-risk "forward" function.

7. Support and encourage those sharing your common cause.

8. Do not buttress tyranny … institutions can change individuals, individuals can also change institutions.

9.… Never give up hope, patiently wait for the opportune moment for change …

10. If you agree with above, please forward; if not, offer criticism or suggestions (2011-7-30, 21:32).

This inspirational embrace for liberal citizenship is not unrelated to the lived experience of the middle class born out of the post-1992 era. This was the group that has been able to mobilise their technical expertise as "soft capital" to participate in the market competition and secure their "comparative advantage" in the post-1992 period of rapid social stratification and class polarisation. At the same time, this group has been deeply influenced by the Western ethos of professionalism. They have a very strong rights and legal consciousness, as well as a strong desire for sharing political power, trying to appropriate the West's historical experience to make themselves society's "mainstream"(Gene Louis Roca 2008).

It is precisely on the above basis that journalists, lawyers and public intellectuals have been able to tap into this middle class' instinctive frustration and their fractured relationship with the government in the aftermath of the bulletin train accident to turn their naïve and dichotomous intelligence about civil society, free speech, democracy, and political rights into highly inflammatory "performative writing" symbols. The effectiveness of their "perlocutionary" acts manifests not only in their uproarious critique against the government, but also in their successful addressing of the political and economic vulnerabilities of a middle class that has quickly denigrated into the "lower-middle class" shortly after its rise. It is precisely on the above basis that we can understand why the middle class dramatised the antagonistic relationship between state and society. In doing so, they adopted a rhetorical strategy that conflates corrupted MOR officials with the MOR itself and advocates its thoroughgoing privatisation and marketisation. Moreover, they took this strong neoliberal-oriented option as the only path of salvation for China's railway without paying any attention to the dire consequences of railway privatisation in the U.K. and other countries. It is also precisely on the above basis that we can understand why online left-leaning voices have been persistently restricted and contained, and why liberal and neoliberal voices have been so boisterous in labelling online leftist voices as the party of "fifty cents" – i.e. the government's mercenary propagandists. It is also on this basis that we can appreciate the legitimacy and more importantly, exclusivity in middle class fixation and anger over the bulletin train accident without concurrently extending any concern over the bus crash the

day before. Evidently, the civil society and constitutional governance ideals that the middle class adhere to are not inclusive notions that cover all social strata. At most, it seems that they are the "public" means by which the liberal and neoliberal elites and their middle class followers mobilise themselves to oppose China's existing political system in the pursuit of elite rule.

Not surprisingly, it is also precisely on this basis that a number of middle class bloggers have been self-reflective of their individual role and collective actions, their own selfishness, their cynicism, as well as their complicity in being incorporated by the existing order. On July 28, "New Fortune Magazine" posted the following blog:

> *We hate corrupt officials, but we rash to take the public service entrance exam; we curse [state] monopoly, but we try all means to take positions in highly paid [state] monopoly firms; we abhor unfairness, but we busy ourselves with finding guanxi in moving ahead. In short, we are indignant … not because we want to eliminate unfairness, but because we want to place ourselves in advantageous positions in unfair situations. This deeply rooted selfishness is what needs to be reflected upon most profoundly* (forwards 4719; comments 996, 2011-7-28, 0:22)

On the same day, the executive editor of a lifestyle magazine posted a similar blog:

> *The high-speed railway event should wake up the middle stratum: a social stratum that should have played the role of being the social conscience, moral defender and freedom promoter have so far willingly avoided and kept silent on social problems and political reform in China. Taking holidays in small islands and shopping for brand name goods have become the middle class label, as if we ourselves can secure a little paradise in a brutal society. Yes, the victims of high-speed railway all have good incomes. So what? Their humble status means that they are not much dignified than the vendors who are being beaten up by urban order enforcers* (forwards 2406; comments 410, 2011-7-28, 12:10).

Both blogs were concerned with the social function of the middle class as a stabiliser and a buffer. They both called upon members of the middle class to overcome their aloofness in public life. However, it is clear that cynicism still prevails and the economic calculations of the middle class make the belief in freedom, citizenship responsibility, and public action hollow. The following blog is most revealing:

> *I myself am angry, But I have a house and a car and a job and I'd be worried that if I protested I would lose all this and not be able to protect my family. Under those circumstances, would you confront a tank?* (Moore 2011).

Rumour Mongering and Counter-Rumour Mongering, Rumour-Busting and Anti-Rumour Busting as the Radicalisation of Past Left-Right Debates

The "7.23 Accident" raised questions regarding the rationale for the construction of High-Speed Railway system, the MOR's decision to bury the wrecked train engine on the spot, the number of death, as well as the performance of high-level

MOR officials at the rescue spot. The apparently oppositional positions among party-organs, marketised media, reporters, as well as netizens on these issues led to the rise of rumours in the blog-sphere. All of a sudden, factual reports, grapevine news, and rumours all mixed together, rendering it impossible to distinguish truth from falsehood. Consequently, some bloggers set up a voluntary "rumour busting alliance" account in the blog sphere; later on, Sina Weibo opened up a special "blog rumour busting" account. These accounts, online leftists, and liberal and neoliberal elites ended up engaging in many rounds of debates on rumour and counter-rumour, rumour-busting and anti-rumour busting. In doing so, these debates extended previous controversies between the left and the right and displaced the search for truth.

On June 26, a quarrel broke out between An Chongmin, Deputy Director of the Press Office of Deyang City, Sichuan province, and Zhao Chu, a military affairs expert. This resulted from An's following blog on the same day: "Finally, one sentence to those who maliciously manufacture rumours and relentlessly try to borrow external force to realise their objectives: the Chinese people, Chinese citizens, including a Communist Party that tries to reform itself, will not let you get your way" (An Chongmin, 2011-7-26 23:39). This provoked 378 comments, all targeting at An for propping up the government and willingly serving as its hired gun. Below is the dialogue between Zhao Chu and An Chongmin:

> *Zhao Chu: Don't presume that you are living in Alice's Wonderland just because you are a ranked, though lowly, official. You are ridiculous and laughable. The forces that maliciously try to bring down your Party are not where you say they are; rather, perhaps they are at your next door. I believe you know better who is bringing down this state. If you indeed do not know, then this demonstrates that the god you try to support deserves to fall* (2011-7-26, 23:52).
>
> *An Chongmin: Reply@Zhao Chu: I don't know how did you acquire your credentials as an expert? Don't you collect a salary from this state? Aren't you being made an expert by the media of this system? I may have a humble life, but I should still be able to speak freely. Perhaps you have manufactured malicious rumours? Or else?* (2011-7-26, 23:58)
>
> *Zhao Chu reply @ An Chongmin: My work is worthy my salary, and worthy my country. If you would rather continue to play your role as a hero, I won't block. But be careful of being busted* (2011-7-27, 0:02).

Clearly, both sides are aware of each other's positions. An Chongmin's "politically correct" position incited netizens' fanatic attacks, questioning whether the CCP as a governing party still represents the general interests of the people and whether it has been denigrated into a state bureaucratic apparatus for the perpetuation of its self-interest. Debates of this nature were everywhere in the blog sphere. Interestingly, Wu Jiaxiang, a domestic liberal intellectual, had made the following remarks on Sina's "Blog Rumour Busting":

> *Wu Jiaxiang: I suggest Sina Weibo to remove its so-called "rumour busting" official blog. The premise of this blog is wrong, as it assumes that there are those who intentionally make rumours. In fact, even if there are, they are the*

> *fifty-cent party, and how do you dare to bust them? Ordinary bloggers, in an attempt to attract eyeballs, may exaggerate some events or comments, but these cannot be viewed as rumour-mongering. So long as the space for free speech is opened up, the exaggerated parts will bust themselves as a blown-up bubble …* (forwards 1488; comments 998, 2011-7-13, 10:52).

Here, rumour mongering is being attributed to the "fifty-cent party." Moreover, the definition of rumour is being narrowed to exclude exaggeration. Following a same logic, liberal media elites such as Cheng Yizhong and Lan Gongzi posted blogs that promote the significance of rumour-mongering for free speech:

> *Cheng Yizhong: In a country where there is no guarantee for speech freedom and where the media are seriously restrained, rumour is actually the truth inside people's hearts, a means of expressing popular will, as well as a powerful weapon of the masses against official propaganda and lies. It is not factual, but it is more truthful than facts; it cannot withhold scrutiny, but it is always more convincing than the truth; it has all kinds of loopholes, but it cannot resist the mass's deep belief in it. At the present, it is not that the rumour stops to the wise. It will only stop to free speech* (forwards 2775; comments 919, deleted and updated on 2011-9-2).

> *Lan Gongzi: Making and spreading rumour is a basic citizenship right. The precondition for this is that there is no way to find the truth. Under such a circumstance, rumour itself is the weapon that compels the emergence of truth. Each round of transmission propels a step closer to truth, until the truth appears. This is a full ecological system. Do not make harsh demands on the Internet and micro-blogs. To punish rumour transmission by closing [Internet] accounts is a form of terror. It brutally takes away people's right to question … rumour dies at openness and transparency* (forwards 953; comments 248, 2011-7-23, 2:07).

It is worthwhile to note that middle class netizens do not one-sidedly embrace these elite liberal positions. Below are some example of debates between "Lan Gongzi" and netizens:

> *Blogger A: No, rumour making and rumour spreading are not a basic right. Nor is it the same as questioning. To question is no doubt a good thing. But one cannot rely upon irresponsible remarks and rumours to compel truth. Making either glorifying or demonising rumours are both reflective of Gobbels' mode of thinking, not the essence of news* (2011-7-23, 2:14).

> *Blogger B: reply@Blogger A: What do you think is rumour? When rulers call you rumour making you are rumour making* (2011-7-23, 2:16).

> *Blogger A: reply@Lan Gongzi: Whether it is rumour or not depends on the truth. There is no other criterion other than this … neither glorifying rumours nor demonising rumours are constructive* (2011-7-23, 2:20).

In the eyes of "Lang Gongzi" and Cheng Yizhong, rumours can and should lead to the positive and cumulative effect of undermining political authoritarianism. In this sense, it is a "counter-power," "the first free broadcasting station" (Jean-Noel Kapferer 1997, 14-20). Here, because "the system" equals a rumour machine, rumours become the means of resistance. There is a causal relationship between the

two. Rumour mongering, in the name of "free speech," is a "basic" citizenship, propelling and compelling the system to open up and become transparent. Opponents acknowledged the government's malfunction and inaction, but emphasised that individuals such as Cheng Yizhong had conflated the system's lack of transparency with rumour itself. They asserted that it is necessary to differentiate rumour from queries and criticisms, and that rumour-mongering should not be the "routinised" form of criticising the government, because it is not conducive for truth-finding.

This debate over rumours resulting from the "7.23 Accident" both amplifies and deepens the divisions between the left and right camps which have emerged in China's intellectual and media spheres since the mid-1990s. On the one hand, liberal elites used the system's failure to defend the legitimacy of rumours. Moreover, they deliberately dramatised rumour-mongering as a collective action. There is a clear populist tendency in their insistence that rumour-mongering has a positive social function in a country with press censorship and during the times of public crisis. On the other hand, left-leaning online voices such as Wu Fatian, Sima Nan, Liu Yang, and Wang Xiaodong debunked the basic formulations of "freedom for rumour-mongering = freedom of speech," "rumour>truth, rumour>facts." They challenge the legitimacy of rumours from the perspective of its potentially unpredictable effects on democratic system building, ethical construction, and social stability. In short, one can conclude that debates over whether "rumour-mongering is good or bad" took the ongoing public debates between the left and right intellectual camps to a new height. Middle class bloggers took sides on the debate. At the same time, it is clear that liberal elite's "a marketplace of free opinion" model toward rumours – that is, the belief that truth will emerge by itself – proves to be utopian. In fact, the fact that the eight major rumours about the "7.23 Accident" went viral proves otherwise. Moreover, instead of getting closer to truth, rumours led to collective polarisation. Given this, Hu Yanping's July 26 blog, which still defends rumours, is particularly worthwhile pondering:

> *Hu Yanping: Iron rules regarding truth of blogs:*
>
> *1. Blog is the grinder machine of rumours, not its originating site.*
>
> *2. The biggest rumour does not come from the people.*
>
> *3. Blogs that have been proven false cannot easily rise again.*
>
> *4. Real name registration is not most crucial. Speaking truth is.*
>
> *5. Blogs are neither amplifier nor catalyst, they only restore to the original state of affairs.*
>
> *6. One blog alone may not be comprehensive, but forwards and comments will lead to comprehensiveness.*
>
> *7. Collective wisdom is closer to truth than individual information.*
>
> *8. Reality is dirty; do not expect blog to be pure* (forwards 47,473; comments 8381, 2011-7-26, 23:02)

As the large number of forwards of the above blog demonstrates, the aroused emotions of the middle class and MOR led them to be more willing to forward and comment information and rumour that resonates with their feelings, judg-

ments, and understanding, so as to further reinforce their pre-existing views and positions. While left-leaning online scholars and some ordinary bloggers willingly participated in rumour busting, liberal elites took the opposition direction – countering rumour-busting: they either mocked it or even promoted the originating, development, and flourishing of rumours.

Conclusion: Naïve Liberalism and the Outburst of Middle Class Consciousness

In the Internet debate and even rumour-mongering over the "7.23 Accident," China's middle class embarked on a collective speech-act for the first time by making use of the politically relative safe micro-blog. Through blogging, they challenged officials and the state-owned system and flashed their imaginaries about civil society and liberalism. An accident that involves a public service catering almost exclusively to the middle class naturally led to their "not in my backyard" type of concern for their own safety and economic interests. The interconnected nature of the train turns the whole nation into the backyard of the middle class. Moreover, this was precisely the moment when micro-blog just emerged as a social networking platform for the middle class to make their distinctions from the lower social classes in consumption and lifestyle patterns. Under the guidance of journalists, lawyers, and public intellectuals as the "vanguard of the twittering class," the middle class engaged in performative writing that absorbs and internalises prevailing ideological predispositions and shares their common anxieties, frustrations, and value orientations. In this way, they constituted a provisional and mutually supportive social network. In the end, the middle class made micro-blog their de facto means of communicating with the government. However, this "stand out" collective action was the result of many contingencies or a consternation of various fragile, unstable and unpredictable factors. Moreover, the apparent uniformity conceals deep fissures.

First, this micro-blog-based speech action does not register the internal economic stratification of the middle class in real life. To begin with, the cumulative speech-act power and networked social capital of the journalists, lawyers and public intellectuals prior to the "7.23 Accident" allowed them to become discursive leaders in the micro-blog sphere. Other members of the middle class, meanwhile, constituted a secondary dialogic relationship with them through forwards and comments. This is a dependency relationship in both the emotive and conceptual senses. Then, a further dominant/marginal relationship exists within the discursive leader stratum's speech-acts. This is a division of different political perspectives. However, it is significant that the first layer dialogical relationship between the middle class as a whole and their questioning and blaming of the MOR overshadowed and concealed the complex and overlapping internal discursive power relations and differences both within the opinion leaders and the broader middle class as a whole.

Second, it is clear that the dominant ideas, concepts, values and intelligence that the middle class displayed and took pleasure to share through the "7.23 Accident" fall into the track of "liberalism" or even "neoliberalism." They not only elated their anti-MOR position to anti-government, anti-party and anti-existing political system positions, but also enthusiastically embraced liberal elites' call for dismantling the MOR and privatising its operations. Furthermore, they firmly

believed that gradual reform is no longer enough in solving the problems of the state-ownership system, and they assumed that only privatisation and complete marketisation will rescue and emancipate middle class life from repressive political tyranny. Following the Lockean three way civil-society-economy-state model, they believed in the existence of a self-regulating and autonomous economy outside state and government. In this view, such an economy serves as the only basis for nurturing a free, autonomous and self-deciding citizenry. Such a citizenry, in turn, will question the primacy of the political structure in accordance with its own social position. In all these imaginings, Western-style electoral democracy and free speech emanated an indisputable aura, serving as the core of middle class intelligence and moral destination, as well as an effective weapon in the discursive politics of self-empowerment vis-à-vis the Chinese state.

Third, it is clear that a majority of the middle class desire legal means to restrain and limit the party state's control over market/marketisation and civil society. However, internal economic stratification and differential access to political power, especially the downward mobility of the middle class in the past decade due to the contraction of economic opportunities, inflation, and rising housing prices have posed a profound challenge for a "middle-class agenda whose top priority is striving for institutionalisation and ideological (or constitutional) justification for capitalism" (Chen 2002) so as to politically secure their everyday life and commercial activities. At the same time, through their fetish of the Western urban middle class lifestyle, they help to sustain existing social stratification through taste and culture, while selectively, tactically, and calculatedly maintaining an ambivalent relationship with the bottom strata of society. On the one hand, their elitism serves to suppress any possibility for populist politics. On the other hand, they occasionally slide into the populist trap themselves both in their opportunistic resistance against political authoritarianism and official corruption and their demands for political reform. It is precisely under such a circumstance that journalists, lawyers, and public intellectuals, by appealing to a caricaturised language of liberalism, civil society, and political rights, have been able to successfully cast themselves in the role of "organic intellectuals" of this anxious and insecure networked middle class. Through micro-blogs, they helped to construct the "class consciousness" and subjectivity of this ambivalent social group. However, such "class consciousness" eventually degenerated into an abstract and hallow democratic principle wrapped in the form of an universalising "intelligence," thereby displacing and blocking any possibility for discussing and advancing the concrete processes of reforming China's state-owned system and democratising governance. This renders the first collective performance of China's middle class through micro-blogs brilliant, but ephemeral.

In the final analysis, this first collective action does not entirely challenge the political cynicism and selfishness of the middle class. As Pearson has observed, when it comes to actual behaviour on political issues, China's "new middle class" tend to "sit back" (1997, 101). To the extent that micro-blogging, under the condition of anonymity, allows members of China's "new" middle class to "stand out" and participating in an extraordinary national ritual by merely sitting in front of the computer, there remains a deep fissure between their speech acts and their political acts.

(Rewritten from Chinese by Yuezhi Zhao.)

Notes:

1. A further 1,298 blogs may also be attributed to this class, as the mode of speech, style, personal information or "label" provide enough clues to show that they are not likely to be members of the lower social classes.

2. By April 6, 2012, the blog had garnered 121,586 forwards and 21,123 comments.

3. The names of the bloggers have been replaced with simple alphabetical codes. Exceptions were made in cases when the blogger is the real name of a well-known individual or when the name contributes to understand the content of the blog.

4. This blog has been deleted by early April, 2012.

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ONLINE ACTIVISM AND COUNTER-PUBLIC SPHERES

A CASE STUDY OF MIGRANT LABOUR RESISTANCE

GUOXIN XING

Abstract

China's state-controlled and commercialised media and Internet ecology has inherent limitations in representing the interests of workers as industrial citizens. Drawing upon Western scholars' theoretical critiques of "the public sphere" and historical literature on workers' struggle for autonomous communication in post-revolutionary China, this paper uses an extended case study to establish a two-pronged analysis that demonstrates the progressively exclusionary and pro-capitalist nature of China's existing public sphere on the one hand and workers' appropriation of available technological means for autonomous communicative practice on the other. It points to the potential constitution of Chinese labour as counter-publics in China's deeply divided class society.

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Chinese workers have been denied popular participation and the right to communication when the Party-state engineers neo-liberal economic reforms and systematically deploys symbolic violence against labour in the post-Mao era (Zhao 2008, 19-21). The central and provincial party organs, which constitute the official "mainstream" media outlets in China's market-Leninist polity, have neglected, even suppressed, the interests and voices of Chinese workers, whom the Party-state claims to represent. As the commercialisation of China's media system since the market reforms in 1978 has given rise to the prosperous growth of commercial media outlets and conglomerates (Zhao 1998; 2000), many Western observers begun to assume that it would contribute to the formation of civil society and "public sphere," through which citizenship rights, freedom of expression and democracy are promoted.

However, it is problematic to make sense of China's media transformation from a linear logic linking commercialisation with the expansion of freedom of expression. As Zhao (2008, 82) argues, "[C]ommercialisation created new patterns of inclusion and exclusion in accessing the media as a source of political, economic, social, and symbolic power and led to a substantive reconfiguration of social relations within and around the Chinese media." Therefore, such questions arise: Can Chinese workers as individualised industrial citizens find their own voices in the emerging "public sphere" constituted by the commercial media, urban intellectuals and the internet community's crusade for civil rights and legal justice? What are the possible venues for Chinese workers to exercise their citizenship rights and struggle for social justice in the process of China's market reforms and reintegration with global capitalism?

This paper examines the potentials and limitations of China's burgeoning "public sphere" which takes shape in the process of media commercialisation, in representing Chinese workers and articulating their rights and interests. It then moves beyond negative critique to examine the historical and contemporary manifestations of workers' autonomous communication in their struggles for social justice and inclusive socio-economic transformation. The research centres on a case study of a rural migrant worker who killed two Taiwanese bosses in a conflict over compensation for an industrial injury in the Pearl River Delta, one of the biggest production and exporting regions of China.

Questioning the Chinese Public Sphere: Multiplicity and Counter-publics

In Habermas's original formulation, the public sphere is an arena that exists outside the institutions of the state and mediates between society and the state, in which a range of views and opinions can form in relation to matters of public concern. Habermas's ideal-typical conception of the public sphere is both an institutional mechanism for rationalising political domination by rendering the state accountable to the citizenry and an ideal of unrestricted rational discussion of public matters through guaranteed access by all citizens (Calhoun 1992, 437). Current scholarship on China has drawn much on this Habermasian conception of the public sphere to identify signs of a nascent civil society and its attendant public sphere in rights-conscious movements and institutions involving students, journalists, lawyers, professionals, elite intellectuals, the urban middle class and environmental activists (Gu and Goldman 2004; Kelly 2006, 183-204; Largerkvist

2006; Yang and Calhoun 2007, 21, 211; Davis 2007, 61-85). Within this literature, a dichotomous opposition between state and society and the "bourgeoisie" nature of the "public sphere" are both taken for granted.

In her cogent overview of the Habermasian conception, Fraser (1992, 109-142) points to the exclusionary nature of Habermasian "public sphere" at three levels: (1) the "private persons" who assembled to constitute the public and discuss matters of "public concern" or "common interests" were from "bourgeois society"; (2) interests other than "bourgeois society" would be considered as "private" and should be inaccessible to this domain; (3) non-bourgeois strata's access to the public sphere is assumed to erode the clear separation of society and state and make it impossible to achieve reasoned public debate about the common good. For Fraser (1992, 114), Habermas' account "idealised the liberal public sphere" even though "the official public sphere rested on, indeed was importantly constituted by, a number of significant exclusions," such as race, gender, property ownership. The exclusionary nature was concealed as "[A] discourse of publicity touting accessibility, rationality, and the suspension of status hierarchies is itself deployed as a strategy of distinction," and eventually, the norms of the public sphere become "hegemonic, sometimes imposed on, sometimes embraced by, broader segments of society" (Fraser 1992, 114-115).

In critiquing the rationalist and cognitivist theorising of the Habermasian public sphere concept, Schlesinger (1999, 270, cited in Zhao 2009, 187) argues that it is important to "recognise the likely importance of the affective dimensions of collective belongings and social cohesion." For Schlesinger (1997, 387), what "makes collectives coherent" cannot be convincingly understood from a Habermasian rationalist framework, because the latter overlooks non-rational elements, such as political and national culture, which "confers a wider, non-deliberative sense of solidarity and belonging." The less rationalist and "more abstract" understanding of the public sphere enables us to understand it as a form of life in such a way as to "focus on the moral and cultural dimensions of contemporary social transformation' rather than solely on economic and political dimensions" (Madsen 1993, 184, cited in Zhao 2009, 187).

Emphasising the affective dimensions of publicity, Negt and Kluge reformulated the "public sphere" as the central category which organises human experience, mediating between the changing forms of capitalist production on the one hand, and the cultural organisation of human experience on the other (Knodler-Bunte 1975, 51-75). As the transformation of the capitalist production process has its far reaching impact on concrete human experience, Negt and Kluge suggested the consideration of social relationship go beyond historically institutionalised manifestations. By juxtaposing the concepts "public sphere" and "experience," Negt and Kluge (1993, 163) coined "the proletarian public sphere" as a historical counterpart to the bourgeois public sphere. This conception designated a fundamentally new structure in the public organisation of experience, which could potentially oppose the organised interests of the bourgeois public sphere through organising human needs and interests among the working masses into politically relevant forms of consciousness and activity. By reformulating the public sphere as organising human experience, Negt and Kluge's conception opens the possibility for imagining what Fraser (1990, 58) calls a "post-bourgeois" public sphere, i.e. "the subaltern

counter-publics" including the nationalist public, the popular peasant public, the elite women's public, and the working-class public.

The theoretical reflections on the Habermasian framework have expanded our knowledge of the public sphere beyond rationalist, cognitive and institutional focus towards more abstract dimensions, such as the affective, cultural and moral. The rethinking of the public sphere concept enables us to not only recognise "the exclusionary and class-dominated nature of the actually existing 'bourgeois public sphere' and its antagonistic relationship with subaltern publics" (Zhao 2008, 13), but also to imagine the potential of counter-bourgeois public spheres.

Market reforms have polarised Chinese society in which "a capitalist class, an old middle class, and a new middle class have emerged side by side with poor peasantry and urban workers" (So 2003, 374). While most scholars have given much attention to the expansion of the private sector and growth of a cosmopolitan middle class and civil organisations for the potential of democratic change, their conceptual framework either neglects or fails to account for the working masses and their conflicts with both arbitrary state power and the seemingly liberating, but exploitative, power of capital. In China's class-divided society, therefore, it is insufficient to gauge the Chinese "public sphere" against some idealised form without analyzing the processes of state transformation, the reconstitution of class and other forms of social relations (Zhao 2009, 181).

In applying radical critiques of "the public sphere" to the Chinese context, Zhao (2008, 262-280) has demonstrated the limits of media and Internet discourses on civil rights legal justice in guaranteeing Chinese workers' economic rights and demands for social justice through two comparative case studies. The first case involves Sun Zhigang, a young college graduate. The second case concerns Wang Binyu, a rural migrant worker. Zhao compares the coverage of the two cases by the *Nanfang Metropolitan News* (*NMN*), one of the most liberal and influential market-oriented urban dailies (Zhao and Xing 2012). In exposing Sun's story, the newspaper appeared to have displayed professional journalism, citizen consciousness, as well as the social reform ethos of Chinese journalists at its best. It framed the story first and foremost as a citizenship rights case, in which Sun as a university graduate was detained and beaten to death under China's detention system, which was designed to deal with the vagrant people in cities. By framing "citizen Sun" as a victim of the arbitrary state power, the paper caused a national sensation in the civic-minded media outlets and Internet-based communities. Eventually, urban citizens, liberal intellectuals and lawyers mobilised a crusade for civil rights, personal freedom and security against arbitrary state and administrative power. It is noteworthy that before Sun's tragedy, many rural migrant workers have been considered as vagabonds to be tortured, forced to labour and beaten to death under the same detention system. However, their sufferings had gained no sensational attention. In the *NMN* coverage, Sun's tragedy, framed as an urban citizen's death under the arbitrary state power, horrified the urban society and echoed their concerns about individual rights under threat by state and administrative power. As Zhao (2008, 264) argues, "[t]heir crusade on behalf of Sun Zhigang was a crusade for the civil rights of urban citizens."

Eventually, as the national party organs intervened, the provincial and local authorities seriously investigated the case and arrested thirteen suspects blamed for

Sun's death. Under the public pressure for respecting the rule of law and citizens' civil rights, the State Council decided to abolish the retention and repatriation regulation.

Wang Binyu was a 27-year-old rural migrant worker from Gansu province. He migrated to work at a power plant in Shizuishan city of Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region. Like millions of rural migrant workers floating in urban China, Wang suffered a lot from low pay, wage arrears, lack of medical insurance, minimal safety protection, poor living conditions, and urbanites' discrimination. Among them, no more unbearable is wage arrears. In the factory, Wang worked for Wu Xinguo, a subcontractor who often withheld the workers' wages. The employer owed Wang more than 5,000 Yuan ($616) in arrear wage. Wang urgently need money to pay his father's medical operation and asked Wu for the owed wages. Wu rejected the demand and Wang took the case to the local labour arbitration administration. In the end, the official venues failed Wang in collecting his unpaid wages. One day, Wang went to his boss' home one more time to collect the salary and the two sides quarrelled. The argument quickly escalated into a scuffle, during which Wang killed four people at his boss's side (Xinhua News Agency, September 4, 2005). Wang turned himself in and was sentenced to death in the first trial in June 2005. His case invoked heated and widespread public debate in the Chinese media and internet forums (*New York Times*, December 31, 2005).

Internet opinion overwhelmingly expressed its sympathy with Wang and understood his brutal action as an unbearable reaction to the social injustice that Wang and millions of rural migrant workers were suffering. This sympathetic opinion developed into a large-scale campaign to challenge China's legal justice and rescue Wang from the death penalty. As Zhao (2008, 272) points, Wang symbolised more than 100 million migrant workers, who are suffering from social injustice.

The Internet-based populist opinion, however, was eventually suppressed by the state and refuted by the liberal, civic-minded media and internet communities in the name of criminal justice and the rule of law. The *NMN* condemned the sympathetic public opinion and media of violating the principle of "journalistic professionalism." In an editorial, titled "Pathos Cannot Cover up True Facts, Sympathy Should Return to Professional Principles," the *NMN* criticised the sympathetic media of distracting from Wang's murderous actions *per se*. The liberal newspaper blamed Xinhua News Agency, China's official media outlet which first reported the Wang Binyu case, for triggering the furious public opinion and provoking a potential class conflict.

In its criticism, the *NMN* stressed objectivity and factuality as the principles of the media. However, as Zhao's analysis underscores, the newspaper took a double standard in dealing with the two cases. In reporting Sun's story, it was not only committed to gathering facts, but also reflecting on the broad context of the detention system to gain the favourable public opinion. By contrast, the same newspaper dismissed any journalistic attempt to dig out a broader social context of the Wang Binyu case as "unprofessional." This stark contrast illustrates that the *NMN* argued for the rule of law favourable of China's rising propertied class and elites, and intended to be the institutional vehicle for popular containment.

In short, Zhao's comparative case studies reveal the exclusionary and class-natured Chinese public sphere, nurtured through commercialised media and

economic liberalisation. Although it is historically progressive in containing abusive state power and protecting individual-based civil rights, it has an inherent antagonistic relationship with subaltern publics and has played the role of "an agent of social control and class containment" (Zhao 2008, 274).

My own study of the Liu Hanhuang case corroborates Zhao's preliminary findings on the re-engendering of what she calls "the Chinese bourgeoisie public sphere" under the shadow of the Party state and its exclusionary, class-biased nature in its outcry for constitutional governance, civil rights and legal system by neglecting and even suppressing the subaltern publics' interests, for example, rural migrant workers' economic and social rights.

Liu Hanhuang is a 26-year-old migrant worker from rural Guizhou province. Among the hundreds of millions of China's "floating population," Liu migrated to the booming Pearl River Delta. On September 22, 2008, he found a job in the Taiwanese-run Zhan Ming Hardware Products Co, Ltd in Dongguan City, Guangdong province. Without any training on occupational safety and health, and insurance protection, the factory assigned the unskilled Liu to work on a punch press machine, the most dangerous job in the factory. Six days later, the malfunctioning and unguarded machine tool suddenly came down and severely injured Liu's right hand. The accident caused the amputation of Liu's wounded hand. The factory stopped paying wages to Liu, let alone medical and living costs. With a crippled body, Liu lost the ability to work, while his family had urgent financial needs back in a remote and poor village. Liu sued the company over compensation.

The labour arbitration authority negotiated 110,000 Yuan (around 20,000 dollars) as compensation. Liu accepted the agreement but the company refused to pay that much. The two sides went to court. In May 2009, Dongguan No. 2 People's Court ruled 160,000 Yuan (30,000 dollars) as a once-and-for-all compensation. Liu agreed with the verdict, but the company still did not accept it and bargained for offering 70,000 Yuan (12,000 dollars) instead. During the prolonged negotiations, the court ordered the Taiwanese boss to accommodate disabled Liu inside the factory compound. However, Liu did not get proper care and treatment. His bosses often threatened to kick him out of the factory forever. On June 13, 2009, Liu protested by attempting to jump from a high building inside the factory. But he was persuaded by the police to give up. The boss and his managers tried to prevent Liu from meeting his lawyer. They limited Liu's personal freedom to go outside the compound. On June 15, 2009, Liu planned to go outside to meet his lawyer. The factory guards blocked him at the compound gate. Liu was arguing with the security guards, when three managers drove a car to the gate. The managers tried to drag Liu back to the factory compound by force. Quarrelling took place and Liu was then under physical attacks. Liu pulled out a knife, fatally stabbed two Taiwanese managers and critically injured the third one.

If the case of Wang, which happened four years earlier, reveals the severity of migrant workers' suffering from wage arrears, Liu's case highlights China's bloody GDP and the inhumane working conditions, under which the vast majority of migrant workers are living. In the Pearl River Delta, industrial injuries, caused by the punch press machine tools, lead to more than 40,000 fingers or hands cut off every year.[1] In dealing with compensation, local authorities and factory owners quite often colluded with each other to prolong the legal procedure. It usually

takes more than three years to go through the whole legal procedure and reach a final settlement. Injured rural migrant workers, who have no time and income to sustain the prolonged legal procedure, often choose to give up the lawsuits and accept whatever compensation offered by the greedy factories. Most disabled migrant workers accepted the meagre compensation and returned to their home in the countryside. Unlike most injured migrant workers, Liu chose to resist and struggle for social justice. However, like Wang Binyu, Liu ended up killing others, and would possibly be sentenced to death under the Chinese criminal law.

Learning lessons from the case of Wang to avoid a national sensation amidst China's intensive social conflicts, the Chinese media coldly treated Liu's case until the *NMN* took the lead in covering the event, which happened in its geographic location. According to the *NMN* account, Liu, upon encountering the Taiwanese managers on June 15, 2009, argued with them for immediate compensation. Although the managers refused to solve the dispute immediately, they agreed to discuss the issue with him later. However, Liu angrily drew out his knife and stabbed them to death. Then Liu ran away from the scene (*Nanfang Metropolitan News* 2009).

The Xinhua News Agency, China's most authoritative Party state organ, only reported the event with two news items in English. Without its own interview and investigation, Xinhua's reporting was actually based on the *NMN* account, although it did not specify its news sources. The first Xinhua story wrote, "Liu came to the general office of the factory Monday morning to discuss compensation with the three administrators. They agreed to continue their discussions in the afternoon, but shortly after midday, Liu attacked the three with a knife. Liu fled the scene but was apprehended not far from the factory later Monday" (Xinhua News Agency 2009). Updating "fatal stabbing of factory managers" in the first news item, Xinhua issued another news item the next day, describing the incident as "a mainland worker's murder of two factory employers from Taiwan." The Xinhua correspondent clearly understood the severity of the term "murder." As the first Xinhua (June 17, 2009) story wrote, "[O]fficials haven't yet specified what charges they will bring against Liu. Under Chinese law, the maximum penalty for intentional injury could be death with a two-year stay. For maximum penalty, a murderer could be sentenced to death with immediate execution." If the prosecutor has yet to decide how to charge Liu, how could Xinhua rush to determine the incident as "a murder?"

The *NMN* reportage, on which the Xinhua coverage was based, proved to be untruthful, compared to the factual investigation by the Intermediate People's Court of Dongguan. Without its own interview and investigation, Xinhua just followed the *NMN* to report the story. Its coverage was biased in favour of the Taiwan businessmen, without reporting the unfair treatment of Liu and the context under which the incident happened. If Liu really "fled" the scene after killing people as Xinhua reported, the chances of giving Liu a lenient sentence by the Chinese legal custom would be greatly reduced. In the case of Wang Binyu, Xinhua had highlighted the economic rights of the migrant workers and the necessity of securing these rights through the legal system (Zhao 2008, 280). However, in the case of Liu, Xinhua, which speaks on behalf of the official position, has swung back to capital. Because the incident involved the deaths of two Taiwanese capitalists and might complicate the relationship between the Taiwan Straits, which is vital to the re-unification of China, the Party-state has chosen to prioritise national interests over class interests.

The untruthful reportage by the *NMN* and Xinhua had led to unfavourable opinion on Liu before he stood for trial. Rejecting popular sympathy to Liu in the internet communities, the *Oriental Morning Post* (Dongfang Zaobao), another commercial media outlet in Shanghai that brands itself as "elite-oriented," published an article titled "Killing the Evil Capitalists? How Come Did Liu Hanhuang Become Another Internet Hero?" The author Yang Gengshen, claiming himself to be "a senior media professional," made comments on the sympathetic and favourable public opinion toward Liu as "irrational" and "cold blooded" over the deaths of the Taiwanese managers. Citing the *NMN* narrative of the Liu Hanhuang case, Yang argues that it is Liu who should be blamed for the tragedy as he had been unreasonable, reckless and impatient in the prolonged negotiation for compensation. Ignoring the fact that it was the restrictions on Liu's personal freedom to meet his lawyer that directly triggered the quarrel and bloodshed, Yang deplores that China has entered an era of "greenwood hero," in which the uncivilised people at the grass-roots level often cheer up the hatred against the wealthy people (*Oriental Morning Post* 2009).

Echoing Yang's comments, Dong Baohua, a professor of labour law with the East China University of Political Science and Law in Shanghai, also condemns the popular sympathy with Liu Hanhuang. In his influential blog site on the leading Chinese internet portal Sina.com, Dong also based his arguments on the *NMN* account. Dong insists that the compensation will ultimately be settled through the rule of law. But he ignores the fact that Liu had been seeking a legal solution and the fact it was when Liu was prevented from going outside to meet his lawyer that the quarrel happened and ended up in physical attack and fatal counter-attack. Disregarding the context and details, Dong argues,

> *The whole society is shocked by Liu's killings. But, what is more shocking is that Liu Hanhuang has become an internet hero. It is terrible to see that a killer is considered as a hero in a society. … If carefully examining the whole incident, the company has done nothing illegal. It is Liu Hanhuang who broke the law by his intentional murder. He deserves a criminal penalty* (Blog.sina.com.cn, June 20, 2009).

In the case of Wang Binyu, the *NMN* accused the sympathetic media of violating the principle of "journalistic professionalism." However, it was the *NMN* itself that had reported the case of Liu Hanhuang by twisting the truth. The *NMN* emphasised "objective reporting" as much as "social context" in the Sun Zhigang case in its crusade for civil rights. However, it dismissed other media's foregrounding of "the broader social context" of the Wang Binyu case as "unprofessional." In the case of Liu Hanhuang, it is worse to see that the newspaper even conducted reportage in a biased and untruthful way. The official Xinhua news agency followed suit by basing its report on the *NMN* stories. Together, these two major powerful media outlets in China – Xinhua as the traditional mainstream and the *NMN* as "new mainstream" of the commercial media, have misled public opinion toward a position that was unfavourable to Liu.

The comparative analyses illustrate that the Chinese bourgeois and the "party-state media sphere" have common grounds in class and popular containment (Zhao 2008, 14, 328-329). The market-oriented media and liberal intellectuals, leading components of the emergent Chinese "bourgeois public sphere," tend to selectively

interpret their beliefs, such as "journalistic professionalism," "personal freedom," "rule of law," "the right of life" and "human rights" in the Chinese context.

Autonomous Communication, Counter-publics and Chinese Workers' Resistance

The Chinese "bourgeois public sphere" takes shape in market reforms and excludes disgruntled workers' economic and social rights from its popular mobilisation and civil rights' crusade. However, neither the official party state media sphere nor the market-based public sphere exhausts the existence of a multiplicity of "public spheres" in China's post-Mao political and economic transformation. Zhao's (2008, 328) research illustrates the co-existence of "these public spheres, each with their own media outlets, constitute an unevenly structured complex of sometimes overlapping, sometimes antagonistic, discursive fields." Drawing on the critiques of the Habermasian notion of public sphere, I (Xing 2011) look into urban Chinese working-class leisure culture through a case study of the transformed Workers' Cultural Palace in Zhengzhou in central Henan province. The research investigates Zhengzhou workers' cultural and communicative activities, including songs, dramas and political discussions in an urban space. The case study provides hints of a re-politicised space which constitutes a public sphere, attended by the working class to discuss freely on social inequalities and related issues, suggesting contested public spheres in China's increasingly class-divided society.

Next I provide a historical overview of the working class's autonomous communicative practice since the Mao era. This historical perspective is helpful to understand my case study of workers' online mobilisation on behalf of Liu. It highlights the continuity of Chinese workers' struggle for autonomous communication and the right to communication in labour politics.

Grassroots Communication and Labour Politics in Post-revolutionary China

The Chinese media system, which has its origins in revolutionary struggles involving the mobilisation of China's exploited social classes, had operated during the Mao era based upon the "Party principle" and the "Mass Line." Following the Leninist model, the Party historically designated the role of the Chinese media as its mouthpiece. It is obligatory for the Chinese media to promote Party policies, campaigns and directives (Zhao 1998). To counter elite-orientation and bureaucratic deficiencies, Mao developed the "Mass Line" to govern the operation of the Chinese media. Under this model, the media should collect the opinions, needs and ideas of ordinary people and communicate them up the Party structure to the central level, where policies are formulated on behalf of the people's interests (Latham 2007, 35-43).

However, in practice, the Party-state media structure had tended to deviate from the "Mass Line" and represent the elite and the bureaucracy at the expense of the masses. During the Cultural Revolution, Mao mobilised the Red Guards and other "organisations of the revolutionary masses" to assault what he saw as the spectre of "revisionism" and the "bourgeois rightists" or "capitalist roaders" within the Party-state apparatuses. As the latter had controlled the Party-state media system, Mao and his popular followers sought alternative communication for achieving their objectives. As such, the various organisations of "the revolutionary masses"

had established their own communication channels with varying degrees of autonomy from the Party-state media structure (Zhao 2008; Schoenhals 2010). From tabloids, *dazibao* (big-character posters) and newsletters sponsored by Red Guards and "revolutionary workers' organisations," the alternative communication networks attempted to independently collect, produce, disseminate and exchange information and commentaries with regard to the campaigns of the Cultural Revolution.

Because the Red Guard and workers' media and communication were used by Mao in the intra-party confrontations to purge "capitalist roaders," some scholars suspect its autonomy. However, as Zhao (2008) argues, the fact that Mao called upon these social forces to initiate the Cultural Revolution is not sufficient to claim that they were completely manipulated. Instead, Zhao (2008, 197) makes analogous Red Guards and Chinese workers' brief experience of anarchical "freedom" and communicative empowerment during the Cultural Revolution to the "press freedom" which liberal intellectuals and party-state journalists enjoyed during May 1989 in reporting student demonstrations when the party's infighting weakened the reins over the Party-state media system. Zhao (2008, 197-198) endorses well-known China scholar Michael Schoenhals' analysis that Red Guards publications in the early days of the Cultural Revolution constituted "non-state-controlled current information networks" and represented an important case of state-enabled grassroots "information empowerment."[2] In short, the relationship between the party-state, party-state media and Red Guards tabloids was too complicated to be characterised as "a simple one-way street of top-down manipulation" (Zhao 2008, 199).

While scholars have primarily examined the tabloids of Red Guards, who were mostly students and other young people mobilised by Mao, here I highlight autonomous communication initiated by workers as "the revolutionary masses" during the Cultural Revolution. Under the slogan of "To Rebel Is Justified" and "The Working Class Must Exercise Leadership in Everything," the working mass movements took off. Using printing machines, mimeograph machines, loudspeakers, and portable microphones, which were the common media technologies of the 1960s, like other mass organisations, Chinese workers' organisations published tabloids, put up big-character posters, disseminated media materials, printed leaflets, and organised public debates and "mass struggle meetings" (Yang and Calhoun 2008). Among proliferating workers' publications, the Shanghai-based *Workers' Rebelling* was the most influential press outlet. Shanghai was the only city in which leaders of workers' mass organisations actually took power during the Cultural Revolution. The newspaper was published in 1966 by the "Headquarters of the Revolutionary Revolt of Shanghai Workers," an alliance of many different worker-based groups in Shanghai's factories. It printed around 30,000 copies per issue at the beginning and increased to 410,000 in 1969. It had even reached 6400,000 in early 1970s, exceeding the Shanghai party organ.[3] If the working masses, as Jackie Sheehan (1998, 103) argues, "were by then prepared and equipped to act autonomously and collectively in pursuit of their own interests and in opposition to party-state authorities in the enterprise and beyond," workers' media had contributed to the upgrading of workers' status and influence. Workers' publications had substantiated "the Mass Line," proposed by Mao to counter and prevent bureaucracy and elitism. To be sure, empowerment and autonomy had a long distance from reality and the majority of ordinary workers had not improved their conditions a lot under Mao

(Perry and Li 1997; Schoenhals 2010). Nevertheless, as Sheehan (1998, 103) argues, Chinese workers' experience of large-scale collective action outside normal party control channels during the Cultural Revolution has left an important legacy for labour politics in post-Mao China.

The Beijing Spring or the Chinese Democracy Movement in 1978-1979 began as a *dazibao* campaign in Beijing in November 1978. The movement was distinctive in using *dazibao* and printing non-officially approved journals to call for basic economic rights, civil liberties, more freedom from the Party-state and to fight corruption, official misconduct and cadre privilege (Brodsgaard 1981; Sheehan 1998, 158-160; Goldman 1999). Unregistered journals, which were poorly printed with mimeograph machines and sold openly on the street, sprang up across the whole country, "numbering at least 55 in Beijing and 127 in other cities by one account (comparable to the number of official newspapers at that time)" (Zhao 2008, 199). It is noteworthy that activists of the Democracy Movement of 1978-1979 as a whole included not only workers, but also clerks, young teachers, children of high ranking cadres and those who were active in the Cultural Revolution as Red Guards (Brodsgaard 1981). To be sure, not all the underground journals were published by workers. However, it is certain that worker activists had contributed greatly to the movement and the large numbers of unofficial journals in Beijing and other major cities, including Guangzhou, Changsha, Wuhan, Taiyuan, Tianjin, Qingdao, Harbin, Shanghai, Nanjing, Guiyang and Kunming (Brodsgaard 1981; Chen 1982). For example, the April Fifth Forum, one of the leading organisations and publications in the Democracy Movement, was mainly staffed by workers and young teachers ranging in age from 22 to 36 (Brodsgaard 1981, 764). Members of Chinese established intellectual stratum, including authors, professors and researchers, were almost absent in the Democracy Movement of 1978-1979, probably because they had not yet overcome the shocks of the Anti-Rightist Movement in 1957 and the Cultural Revolution, or because they assumed that Deng Xiaoping would co-opt them into his committed economic development blueprint (Brodsgaard 1981, 763). For Brodsgaard, the working class constituted the active members during the *dazibao* campaign and the Democracy Movement of 1978-1979, posing a serious dissent to the Party state. Worker activists and other democratic groups formed a loose coalition in the movement, demanding for democracy. Wei Jingsheng, who was a worker in Beijing and became one of the prominent figures in the Democracy Movement, argued that China need to achieve "the Fifth Modernisation" which was referred to as a democratic polity. In general, the democratic movement was not to abolish the socialist foundation of China, but oppose the party state's bureaucratic and authoritarian power, the rule of a "new bureaucratic-technocratic class rooted in the party" in China's non-democratic socialism (Brodsgaard 198, 774). Deng Xiaoping took advantage of the Democracy Wall Movement to regain power and purge his "ultra-leftist" opponents. However, Deng relentlessly ordered to crackdown the movement when he thought it had gone too far. Not only were activists arrested and the fledgling independent press banned, but also were deleted the "four great freedoms" (*sida ziyou*), i.e. the right of the people to "speak out freely, air views freely, hold great debates, and write big-character posters" (*daming, dafang, da bianlun, dazibao*) from the Chinese Constitution in 1980. The "Four Greats" were once enshrined by Mao into the Chinese Constitution in 1975. During his trial in

1979, Wei Jingsheng invoked them in his self-defence. What was also removed was a constitutional clause granting workers the right to strike (Zhao 2008, 19).

The pro-democracy movement in 1989 provided the working class with the third historical moment in their struggle for autonomous organisations and communication. The Western media usually described the Tiananmen Incident in 1989 as a student movement for democracy, capitalism and market reforms. This perspective has greatly neglected Chinese workers' involvement and their influences on the direction of the movement. Just a few days after university students in Beijing demonstrated in memorial to the former party chief Hu Yaobang who died on April 15, 1989, a small group of workers founded the Beijing Workers Autonomous Federation (WAF). On April 22, 100,000 people assembled in Tiananmen Square and one million took to the streets for Hu's funeral. Most of them were workers. On that day, the WAF distributed leaflets, condemning the wealth of Deng Xiaoping's family, cadre privileges and the flaws of Deng's market reforms. The WAF emerged as the organising centre of the workers' movement by mid-May. They urged the government to drop prices and make public the personal wealth of the top Chinese leaders. Not only in Beijing, but also in other cities workers began to take action. For example, many workers in Shanxin quite often gathered together before the provincial Communist office to discuss the political situation, prices, wages and housing. Thousands of workers, not only in Beijing but also in other Chinese cities, joined the WAF. Eighteen provinces reported large-scale protests. Workers joined the students' hunger strike and occupation of Tiananmen Square. The WAF was publicised and had chances to recruit new members, visit factories and agitate more workers. Worker activists also demanded the official recognition of the WAF. The authority had to hold dialogues with workers' representatives because it worried about workers' massive unrest, particularly in Capital Iron and Steel in Beijing with almost 200,000 workers.[4]

Workers' activism dramatically changed the direction of the pro-democracy and pro-capitalist movement initiated by students. Radical students shouted new slogans of "No victory can be achieved without the support of the working class."[5] Students and workers gathered together and sang the Internationale, in front of the world media. The WAF issued a declaration, calling for workers' takeover of their factories in all peaceful means, including strikes, and asserting that "With our blood we will reconstruct the walls of the Paris Commune."[6] While the liberalised Party-state sector and the emergent liberal intellectual elites in the official media had promoted the 1989 movement through the party organs, workers still used handbills, wall posters and old technologies, including mimeograph machines, portable loudspeakers, and handheld megaphones, to express their opinions and demands, and to mobilise the masses (Yang and Calhoun 2008). Unlike the liberal intelligentsia advocating democracy and capitalism, the workers expressed hostility to the CCP's betrayal of its revolutionary and socialist promises. A leaflet issued a WAF statement on May 26, declaring:

> *We [the working class] are the rightful masters of this nation. We must have our voices heard on national affairs. We absolutely must not allow this small band of degenerate scum of the nation and the working class [the Stalinist leadership] to usurp our name and suppress the students, murder democracy and trample human rights* (Walder and Gong 1993, 12).

One of the WAF's leaflets stated, "[W]e have conscientiously documented the exploitation of workers. The methods of analysis given in Marx's *Das Kapital* provided a basis of the method of understanding exploitation ... We were astonished to find that the 'people's public servants' have devoured all surplus value created by the people's blood and sweat" (cited in Meisner 1996, 446). In a wall poster expressing workers' hatred of Deng's market reforms, the WAF proclaimed, "[W]e must unite to sweep Deng Xiaoping from the historical stage."[7]

Workers' resistance and struggle for autonomous communication in post-1989 market reforms have resurged against the backdrop of China's neo-liberal economic agenda. Since the 1990s, the party state's regime of censorship has incorporated and worked hand in hand with the regulatory role of the market in suppressing working class voices when it started off commercialisation, commodification and conglomeration of Chinese media and cultural industries (Zhao 2008, 19-64). The space for unofficial publications, which proliferated in the various movements until 1989, has become precarious under harsh state repression. Though enormous numbers of urban workers have been laid-off and the cadre-capitalists have stolen state assets in the process of neo-liberal privatisation, workers' dissatisfaction are muffled in the party organs and the flourishing commercial media. As revealed by Zhao (2008, 202), when workers resorted to unregistered publications, such as working class newsletters, to disclose official corruption and demand social justice and protection, the party strictly suppressed the workers' protests. For example, several laid off workers in Northwest China were put into jail in 1999 because they published a newsletter Chinese Workers' Monitor (Zhongguo gongren guancha) unearthing the official corruption and misconduct in managing the SOEs. By the early 2000s, the party-state had even suspended registered leftist political and literary periodicals, including *The Pursuit of Truth* (zhenli de zhuiqiu) and *Midstream* (zhongliu), for their criticisms of its neo-liberal agenda and its official incorporation of capitalists into its rankings (Zhao 2008, 52).

Next, I will continue my case study of Liu Hanhuang to illustrate how migrant workers and worker intellectuals at the grass roots level appropriate the internet to construct their communities and safeguard their rights and interests. The communicative practices, however limited and precarious, are nevertheless autonomous of both state regimentation and the Chinese "bourgeois public sphere."

Workers` Internet Community and Crusade for Social Justice

The first hearing of Liu's case was held on September 7, 2009. Soon after the first hearing, a Chinese website called honghuacao.com in Shenzhen, Guangdong, initiated an internet mobilisation for rescuing Liu Hanhuang. Honghuacao is a medicinal herb with pretty flowers, which means Chinese milk vetch. The grassroots internet community uses the metaphor to express its dedication to serving Chinese workers. All the worker activists are educated migrant workers. The website includes two virtual communities, Honghuacao Rights Protection Mutual Aid Network and Honghuacao Workers" Rights - Protection Consultation Network. It provides consultation free of charge to migrant workers via face to face, phone call or internet-based service. Worker activists attempt to encourage solidarity among worker fellows. As the website clearly states,

> *The objectives of setting up Honghuacao Network are to engage ourselves with the working class indefinitely, grow up with them, become members of them and dedicate ourselves to promoting the progressive cause and self-awareness of the working class. We primarily discuss with workers the way out of their plights, in other words, the issue of future. Through our work, we will do our best to raise our class-consciousness, integrate ourselves with the working class and increase worker fellows" understanding of the future of the working masses as a class.*[8]

The grassroots labour community organises reading groups among workers and provides a library, sports and entertainment facilities for workers to spend their leisure time. It invites scholars and lawyers to inform migrant workers of "rights-protection" (weiquan) and China's labour law. In its petition letter, the workers' internet community called for donations to pay the families of the killed Taiwanese businesspeople. During the first trial, the immediate family members of the killed Taiwanese managers asked for a big sum of money for each victim as civic compensation, in addition to Liu's criminal penalty. According to the ongoing death penalty system reforms in China, a satisfactory civic compensation may increase the chances of a little bit lenient penalty. To strive for exempting Liu Hanhuang from death penalty, the workers' internet community urged ordinary worker fellows and sympathetic social groups to reach out for donating money to compensate the victims. Through this campaign, Honghuacao also hopes to promote mutual aid, generate workers' solidarity and raise class-consciousness.

A workers' internet community, called Workers' Portal (*gongren menhu*) with chuisi.net as the URL of the main site, echoed Honghuacao's initiative for collecting donations. The name of the site *chuisi* means hammer. The homepage of chuisi.net has several sub-sections in addition to separate sections listed alongside it, some leading to sections of chuisi.net, some other sections to other websites. The confusing layout indicates that worker activists are fighting an internet-based "guerrilla warfare" against the Party state's blockage and shutting down of their virtual communities. The main sections listed on the homepage are: Workers' News, Workers' Forum, Workers' Rights-Protection (honghuacao.com), Workers' Photos, Workers' Blogs, Mutual Aid Q and A, Workers' Web (maopai.net – this means "Maoist" and the site is also called "Mao Portal") and Special Section for Liu Hanhuang, the latest sub-section for the case of Liu. Worker activists established the Workers' Portal in 2006. It is a non-profit website created by a group of "youth in society" (*shehui qingnian*) and "independent scholars" (*minjian xuezhe*). A few volunteers maintain the website with the mission to "serve workers and promote the workers' spirit of solidarity, mutual aid and perseverance."[9] As a sub-section of the chuisi.net, the Workers' Forum functions as "an internet-based platform of garnering information with regard to the Chinese working class." Its fundamental tasks are to "promote the working class understanding of the socialist system, advocate understanding of theories by linking to practices, and emphasise class position."[10] This workers' internet community also published blogs and posts, expressing their protests against the *NMN*'s reportage of Liu Hanhuang.

The sub-section of Workers' News primarily reports workers' ongoing struggles in foreign countries, including South Korea and Western countries. It also briefly updates domestic workers' struggles. The Workers' Forum provides the place to

discuss Chinese workers' worsening working and living conditions, greedy bosses and corrupt officials. Through a Bulletin Board System (BBS), the workers' portal website has set up 36 sub-sections for workers in different provinces and cities across China (by when?). The BBS primarily reports and discusses local workers' ongoing struggles and conditions. Labour activists think they are worker intellectuals hailing from workers. Their jobs are to facilitate mutual aid and raise class-consciousness among worker fellows. They perceive the interests of the working class from a worker's position other than partisan doctrines. The Workers' Portal prescribes the ideal objectives of liberating Chinese workers in terms of economic and social rights as "Five Major Guarantees"– secure employment, affordable medical care, accessible housing for labourers, children's education, and decent life after retirement.[11]

Shiqiu is a worker intellectual activist in Chuisi.net. Shi argues that the "five major guarantees" represent Chinese workers' down-to-earth, immediate material demands. Although the future of the Chinese working class lies in socialism, Shiqiu warns against empty talking about political ideology and elitism in labour politics.[12]

The third internet-based worker community, which actively responded to the Honghuacao campaign for saving Liu Hanhuang, is the Workers' Poetry Alliance (*gongren shige lianmeng*), a worker intellectuals' forum. This worker cyberspace is to collect and compile written materials with regard to working class literature and art, and classical works in labour movements in China and the rest of the world. The website also collects poetry, literature and articles written by migrant workers who narrate their plights in Pearl River Delta. Through the literature collecting campaign, worker activists believe that they are striving to mobilise and organise Chinese workers and prepare themselves for what they anticipate explosive labour unrest in China. As the forum claims, it is forming "an alliance of labour through collecting workers' literature and art works. Our strongholds are in the workshops, in the construction sites and wherever workers are."[13]

This workers' forum attempts to inform migrant Chinese workers of labour laws and support them in safeguarding their rights via legal means. However, worker intellectuals argue that it is naïve to believe that the "rule of law" and the civil rights movement in China would fundamentally improve Chinese working class conditions as much as what the market-oriented media and liberal intellectuals promise. For them, the legal means is no more than an instrument which can be used to safeguard workers' rights. They argue that the self-organisation of the Chinese working class is vital to its future. As an activist argues:

> *In order to maintain their regime, the ruling class will possibly make reforms to alleviate the suffering of the exploited. For our part, we should inspire the workers themselves to struggle for their emancipation by self organisations. From now on, as advanced elements among Chinese workers, we hope to raise the awareness of the exploited: all of the ruling classes are parasites; therefore, their bestowed benevolence is undependable. Above all, there has been little space for reforms in China, because Chinese capitalists believe that any reduction of the survival pressure upon workers and peasants would mean lower efficiency and less profit for them. The current capital-labour tensions have anticipated the intensity of forthcoming class conflicts.*[14]

The worker activist believes what he calls "the Chinese bourgeois and capitalists" are unwilling to give up even tiny concessions to meet workers' meagre demands, let alone major concessions to pacify workers' struggles. For him, the case of Liu Hanhuang has revealed the greedy nature of Chinese capitalists and their unwillingness to make compromise. In my interview, the worker activist predicts that China will see fierce and implacable class conflicts, in his words, "you die and I live." Being pessimistic about harmonious capital-labour relations in China's post-socialist transition, he argues,

> *It is inevitable to see the development of class conflicts and the working class struggle. This would begin with reformist struggles. However, the reforms by the ruling class will never address the worsening working class conditions. If Chinese workers expect the ruling class to give concessions, they will end up benumbing themselves and causing calamities for themselves. There would be explosive labour unrest in China in the future. Unless the ruling class decapitates millions of workers, the labour movements will not be suppressed or begin to ebb in China.*[15]

On November 2, 2009, the Intermediate People's Court of Dongguan made a primary verdict on Liu's case. The court acknowledged that it was the Taiwanese bosses that had treated Liu unjustly in the first place. Liu did not take the initiative in killing them nor escaped the scene. The court decided to give Liu "death sentence with two years' probation," instead of "an immediate death sentence." The "suspended" death sentence is generally reduced to life imprisonment after two years. This meant that Liu's life was saved. However, the penalty was still more severe than Liu and his supporters had anticipated. Liu said in the court after hearing the sentence, "this is excessive, I will appeal."[16] On November 8, 2009, Liu's former co-workers, workers' internet communities, sympathetic netizens and labour activists from China and overseas launched a second petition to call for an immediate release of Liu Hanhuang. However, on April 23, 2010, the Guangdong Provincial Higher People's Court made a final verdict, maintaining the primary verdict of giving Liu "death sentence with two years' probation."

Workers' internet community and worker activists failed to collect enough donations and generate popular pressure for reducing Liu's sentence. However, the rescuing campaigns indicate that disgruntled workers are conscious of social injustice inflicted on them. Hearing the primary verdict, even Liu Hanhuang protested in the court by saying that "this verdict is not just upon me, but upon the entire socially marginalised stratum!"[17] Most importantly, workers' online activism on Liu's case suggests their political agency in safeguarding labourers' legitimate rights through taking initiatives in their own communicative practice. This case study illustrates the existence of workers' counter-bourgeois public sphere through the formation of internet-based communities.

Concluding Remarks

While still under the shadow of the state, China's market-oriented media and liberal intellectuals have given rise to an equivalent of the bourgeois public sphere, which can be understood in a Habermasian formation of a democratic alternative to authoritarian state power. Nevertheless, just as the Party-state media sphere has

failed to promote workers' interests, it is clear that this quasi-independent bourgeois public sphere cannot be counted to represent Chinese workers' economic and social rights. The case studies of Sun Zhigang, Wang Binyu and Liu Hanhuang indicate the exclusionary and class nature of the this Chinese bourgeois public sphere. Still, in however limited ways, Chinese workers have developed autonomous communicative practices to constitute a counter-bourgeois public sphere, which operates outside the usual parameters of the institutions of legitimation by the Chinese political, economic and intellectual and media elites. The existence of these officially unrecognised public spheres, which respond to the contingent needs of the marginalised and disenfranchised Chinese working class, highlights what Mosco (2009, 95-96) calls "resistance, opposition, and efforts to create counter hegemonic alternatives."

As Internet and digital technologies become affordable and accessible, they are closely integrated with everyday work and life of workers' communities, providing a critical seedbed for the potential rise of "working-class network society" (Qiu 2009). However, my case study is neither to celebrate technological empowerment nor to understand Chinese politics from a technological determinist perspective. As my historical overview indicates, Chinese workers have been struggling for their rights and interests and the formation of their own class-based subjectivity. From the Cultural Revolution, the Democracy Movement in 1978-1979, and the Tiananmen incident in 1989 to workers' counter -hegemonic struggles in opposition to China's neo-liberal reform agenda in post-1989 labour politics, we can see their opposition to the dominant bureaucratic establishment, the ruling Chinese elites and the capitalists. Workers' online activism on behalf of Liu is one of the latest forms and patterns in their struggles. It indicates the continuity of Chinese workers' struggles for the right to communication and the interests of the working class through the appropriation of available technological means. Although the Internet is structured in favour of the dominant hegemonic bloc of state officials, capitalists, and the middle class strata, it has also become an instrument of Chinese workers in constituting themselves as counter-publics in China's deeply class-divided society.

Notes:

1. See "Zai Shijie Gongchang Shenchu: Zhusanjiao Mingong Shengcun Zhuangkuang Tiaocha" (Deep into the "World Factory": The Investigative Reporting of Migrant Workers' Conditions in the Pearl River Delta), *China Youth News*, August 22, 2007.

2. This is recited from Yuezhi Zhao, *Communication in China,* who made the citation based on Michael Schoenhals' lecture at the Institute for Asian Research, UBC, on September 13, 2005. Also see Elizabeth Perry and Li Xun, *Proletarian Power: Shanghai in the Cultural Revolution*. Boulder, Co: Westview Press, 1997.

3. See Chen Donglin, "wenge qunzhong zuzhi baokan yanjiu" (Studying Newspapers and Journals Published by the Masses during the Cultural Revolution), *China Elections and Governance*, http://www.iccs.cn/detail_cg.aspx?sid=36.

4. This passage is primarily based on John Chan's observations. See John Chan, "Origins and Consequences of the 1989 Tiananmen Square Massacre," *World Socialist Web Site*, 4 June 2009, http://www.wsws.org/articles/2009/jun2009/tien-j04.shtml.

5. Ibid.

6. See Rob Lyon, "15th Anniversary of Tiananmen Square Massacre, " *In Defense of Marxism,* 4 June

2004, http://www.hartford-hwp.com/archives/55/855.html.

7. Beijing gongren zizhi lianhe hui [the WAF], "Renmin de haoling" [Command of the People], wall poster dated 29 May 1989. It is reprinted in Zhongguo minyun yuan ziliao [China Democracy Movement Data], No. 2, 48.

8. See "About Us," Honghuacao organisation, http://honghuacao.com/thread-56-1-1.html.

9. This is from honghuacao organisation website, link to http://bbs.chuizi.net/thread-2905-1-1.html.

10. This is from honghuacao website, http://bbs.chuizi.net/thread-3620-1-1.html.

11. See honghuacao website, "Guanyu wuda baozhang de shixian" (On How to Achieve the "Five Guarantees"), http://bbs.chuizi.net/thread-2679-1-1.html.

12. See Qiushi's blog at the Workers' Portal, http://chuizi.net/space.php?uid=23&op=bbs.

13. See the Workers' Poetry Alliance website, http://tw.netsh.com/eden/bbs/713969/html/tree_27336715.html

14. This is from my interview with a worker intellectual from the Workers" Poetry Alliance by email.

15. This is from my interview with a worker activist from Workers' Poetry Alliance in 2009 by email.

16. See China Labour Bulletin, "Migrant Worker Appeals Death Sentence for Murder of Factory Managers," http://www.clb.org.hk/en/node/100590.

17. See husunzi's blogs on Liu Hanhuang at China Study Group, http://chinastudygroup.net/2010/02/liu-hanhuang-update-new-petition.

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SUBALTERNITY WITH CHINESE CHARACTERISTICS

RURAL MIGRANTS, CULTURAL ACTIVISM, AND DIGITAL VIDEO FILMMAKING

WANNING SUN

Abstract

Like the indigenous media activists elsewhere, rural migrant individuals in China are now using digital DV camera to produce work to document the lives and work of rural migrants in the Chinese city. In doing so, rural migrant filmmakers provide perspectives which may be alternative to, and critical of, dominant culture. So what kind of political and cultural socialisation is necessary in turning a rural migrant into a cultural activist? What kind of activist imaginary has emerged from this kind of cultural activism? What is the role of NGOs and cultural elites in the development of this cultural phenomenon, and, finally, what challenges and possibility lie ahead for this development? This paper seeks to address these broad questions through two extended case studies of activist initiatives: a rural migrant's journey of becoming an activist filmmaker, and the aspiration and frustrations of a domestic worker film project.

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Introduction

The 2010 Census in China indicates that there are 214 million internal migrants in China, constituting a quarter of the world's mobile population. Most of these migrants are of rural origin. Despite the steady and impressive growth of China's economy in terms of GDP, rural migrants, whose cheap labour has made such growth possible in the first place, have failed to prosper alongside their urban middle-class fellow citizens. In fact, despite this staggering size of the rural migrant population, and despite their contribution to the economic growth, rural migrant workers have well and truly become the subaltern in Chinese society in political, social, economic, and cultural terms (Zhao Y. Z. 2010). Workers and peasants, who were the political backbone of socialist China, have now been categorised as members of "weak and disadvantaged communities." Management of the social conflicts and discontent that result from this growing inequality and stratification has become a top priority in the state's efforts to maintain stability (*weiwen*). Since the mid-2000s, the discursive regime of "social harmony" has become the "main melody" in Chinese politics, forming an integral part of the co-ordinated and orchestrated machinery of stability-maintenance. In this discursive regime, rural migrant workers, regarded as one of the most destabilising factors, have become a perennial object of representation.

At the same time, in response to a systematic lack of political will as well as effective implementation of labour laws on the part of the Chinese government, labour NGOs have started to appear in various Chinese cities, with many of them concentrated in Beijing and Shenzhen. Many of them exist in the form of informal grassroots organisations, mostly funded by international donors who want to promote human rights in China. Official statistics on the scale of NGOs operation in China are hard to obtain, since while some register as companies, others are not even registered. Despite this, one estimate put the number of labour NGOs in the Pearl River Delta to be around a "few dozens," possibly around 50, with about 200 people working in them (Long 2007). Another estimation puts the number of registered labour NGOs to be around 30 to 50 in China, with usually three or four activists on average working for each of them (Franceschini 2012). Though not the focus of this paper, it suffices to mention that the relationship between the government and NGOs varies widely, with some receiving patronage – if not funding – from and working closely with government organisations, as in the case of the Rural Migrant Women's Home (Jacka 2006; Fu 2009; Franceschini 2012), to independent organisations which operate under the radar of state scrutiny. Dedicated to the defence of workers' rights, these grassroots organisations promote knowledge of labour law to workers, assist in their claims for wages, compensation, and organise activities, training, and cultural recreations for workers. However, despite their best intentions, it has been observed that NGOs' positions are not always consistent with that of workers, and that moreover, there exists a wide-spread lack of trust in the NGOs due to their lack of "official," out of the state status (Franceschini 2012).

Therefore, it is clear that as a social identity that is increasingly subject to myriad discursively and visually mediated configurations, the migrant worker exists in the contested and fraught space between the government's propaganda, market-driven urban tales inundating the popular culture sector, the so-called independent,

alternative, or underground documentaries on the transnational art circuits, and various forms of cultural activism engaged in by NGO workers and their intellectual allies. Needless to say, the imagining of China's rural migrant working-class identities takes place within the context of the political economy of production and consumption. In other words, the Party-state, media, and capital, with their respective roles, actions, and activities, all come into play in the final outcome of such identity construction. For this reason, the configuration and imagination of *nong min gong* (rural migrant worker) must be understood in the nexus of a range of factors, including ownership of the means of cultural production; patterns of marketing and the distribution of media products; media practitioners' understanding of professionalism; the regulation and control of media and cultural content; and funding and sponsorship arrangements. This is particularly the case in the post-Mao Chinese symbolic system, whose modes of production have proliferated (state, market, independent, and many others that blur the distinction); whose consumption has become increasingly stratified (upmarket versus tabloid tastes and sensibilities); and whose media and cultural forms and practices (journalism, film, television drama, cinema, photography, and literature, all of which have some kind of online presence) have proliferated, while remaining highly sensitive to both the vagaries of state control and regulation and the drive for profitability. In other words, the rural migrant moves across the increasingly "polysemic and hybrid" discursive universe in post-Mao China, where "official propaganda, middle-class social reformist sensibilities, and popular concerns for hot social issues all jostle to be heard" (Zhao 2008).

At the risk of over-simplification (which may be justified for reasons of space here), it may be useful to mention that while there is varying level of sympathy for the plight of migrant workers across the urban Chinese population, this group is mostly portrayed in popular representations as sources of urban anxiety, fascination, and fear. An underlying discourse of these representations is that rural migrants are a source of social instability and are therefore in need of control (Zhao 2002; Sun 2004, 2009). Similarly, over recent years a state-initiated policy has been promoting media coverage of rural themes and issues in news and current affairs, as part of the latest doctrine of promoting social harmony. As part of this ideological imperative, state media have consciously promoted positive stories featuring model migrant workers and endorsing their contribution to China's modernisation process. However, while state media and cultural expressions have readily given recognition to the enormous contribution made by rural migrants to China's economy, the dominant discourse, framing rural migrants as the raw material for civilising, education and self-development efforts, remains largely unchallenged (Dutton 1998; Jacka 1998; Sun 2004; Yan 2008; Fu 2009). For instance, the discourse of quality (*suzhi*), which still dominates state media's representations, functions to code the difference between rural migrants and the urban middle class, but also suggests strategies for social mobility for each. Furthermore, *suzhi* "works ideologically as a regime of representation through which subjects recognise their positions within the larger social order" (Anagnost 2004). A direct consequence of this is that most state-run and commercial media outlets targeting migrant population are caught in the space of ambivalence, ranging from top-down indoctrination in government-sponsored publications (Sun, 2004) to moral education and guidance in magazines which are published for, not by, migrant workers (Florence, 2009).

In their consumption of and engagement with mainstream cultural content, rural migrants assume differentiated positions vis-à-vis the grand narrative of urbanisation, industrialisation, and modernisation. Migrants construct their identities and understand their experience in reaction to and within the framework of state and popular discourses (Jacka 2006; Yan 2008, Sun 2009), and the experience of migrants and the formation of migrants' subject positions must be understood within the context of their differentiated levels of acceptance of and identification with "elite modernist technologies" (Jacka 2006, 56), which have inevitably cast the rural migrant as being in need of *suzhi* development (Yan 2008). For instance, research shows that migrants are reluctant to accept all aspects of the migrant subject positions assembled by the Migrant Women's Club (under the auspices of All China's Women's Federation and funded by the Ford Foundation) and the collective that publishes *Nongjianu Baishitong* (Jacka 1998).

Rural migrant workers have mostly been imagined as the targeted audiences for state propaganda, avid consumers of popular cultural products, and enthusiastic takers of low-end information and communication technologies. Although the migrant labouring body is useful to the market for its capacity to produce surplus value, and although the construction of social identity of *nong min gong* has become a field of intense symbolic struggle between various class positions, the question remains as to the actual level of input and participation of *nong min gong* individuals in these processes. To be sure, rural migrant population is a heterogeneous group, with diverse practices and patterns of cultural consumption. While a small percentage of them engage in self-expressive practices such as writing poetry and publishing online novels, as well as cultural activist experiments in photography and filmmaking for the purpose of documenting *dagong* (labouring) experience, a great majority of them engaged in daily practices which do not *prima facie* present themselves as active acts of resistance, such as the compulsive habits of buying "scratchies" (a form of gambling), playing computer games, or reading fantasy novels or "how to succeed" self-help books.

The figure of the *nong min gong* has also become a favourite subject matter in documentary films across a wide range of discursive spaces, including special topic programs on state television, transnational cinema, Chinese independent documentaries, and short films and videos made by NGO-supported rural migrant activists. However, since the arrival of digital media technologies, especially the increasingly widespread affordability of mini digital video (DV) camera, it has become increasingly possible for rural migrant individuals to become a "one-person filmmaker," thus opening up "new public spaces for discussion of social problems and dilemmas in post-socialist era" (Berry and Rofel 2010, 10). This new technological development in the late 1990s has to some extent enabled some rural migrant individuals to engage in what Faye Ginsburg calls "cultural activism," a process by which marginal social groups take up a range of media in order to "talk back to structures of power that have erased or distorted their interests and realities"(Ginsburg, Abu-Lughod, and Larkin 2002, 7). Central to this form of cultural activism is an "activist imaginary," a term used by George Marcus (1996, 6) to describe both the objectives and politics of subaltern groups. The proliferation – online or otherwise – of poetry, fiction, blogs, photography, and other forms of creative practices engaged in by China's rural migrant workers themselves is

testimony to this kind of subaltern politics. Like the indigenous media activists elsewhere, rural migrant individuals in China use digital DV camera to produce work which is akin to what Ginsburg describes as "indigenous media ethnography," which documents the lives and work of rural migrants in the Chinese city. Similarly, rural migrant filmmakers also see it their role to provide perspectives which are alternative to, and critical of, dominant culture (Ginsburg 2002, 212). Assisted by various social interests groups, such as NGOs, urban middle-class intelligentsia, and transnational labour support organisations, a small but growing number of migrant cultural activists are exploring effective ways to make creative use of digital media to participate in cultural politics of representation as well as in debates on social inequality and citizenship.

But dealing with subalternity with "Chinese characteristics" means being confronted with a number of questions. What kind of political and cultural socialisation is necessary in turning a rural migrant into a cultural activist? What kind of activist imaginary has emerged from this kind of cultural activism? What is the role of NGOs and cultural elites in the development of this cultural phenomenon, and, finally, what challenges and possibility lie ahead for this development? This paper seeks to address these broad questions but it does so through two extended case studies of two activist initiatives: a rural migrant's journey of becoming an activist filmmaker, and the aspiration and frustrations of a domestic worker film project. The material which make up this ethnographic account was gathered in several fieldwork trips to Beijing, Suzhou, and Shenzhen from 2010 to 2012, during which I conducted extensive interviews and interactions with rural migrant activists, labour NGOs, and scholars who advocate for rural migrants, and of course, rural migrant individuals. Adopting a "multisited method" (Marcus 1998) approach and following an approach which is often used by anthropologists of media and visual culture (e.g. Ginsburg, Abu-Lughod and Larkin 2002), I treat a wide range of "ephemeral encounters" with "mobile" people, video producers and images (Schein 2002, 231) as valid empirical fieldwork data. For instance, Wang Dezhi, the central figure in my account, is a rural migrant turned cultural activist, and knowing how he came to adopt his class position and activist sensibility may be instructive in our understanding of the political socialisation process experienced by cultural activists. In contrast to Wang, for another instance, rural migrant women domestic workers in the second case demonstrate a different level of digital-political literacy, and the film project they participated embodied a somewhat less oppositional relation to the state and dominant culture, and the NGO which instigated this project also assumed a more ambivalent relationship to state discourses. The two cases are presented in juxtaposition with a view of providing a nuanced, though not systematic or taxonomic, outline of the socialisation process of activists, the role of NGOs, and the variegation of rural migrant activist imaginary.

Class Position and Activist Imaginary: The Journey of a Worker-filmmaker

As a young man, Wang came to Beijing from rural Inner Mongolia, with dreams of becoming a cross-talk show star on television – cross-talk had been his passion, and he was inspired to see that performances of cross-talk featured prominently on CCTV's annual Spring Festival Gala. But he soon realised upon arriving in Beijing

that despite his passion, he was just another rural migrant worker in the nation's capital. With no social and cultural resources and capital to speak of, performing cross-talks on Chinese TV was a mere pipe dream. Having "bummed around" in Beijing for many years, doing innumerable and sundry off jobs, Wang eventually met Sun Heng, a like-minded singer who felt just as strongly about giving voice to rural migrant workers. In May 2002, motivated by a desire to "give voice through songs, to defend rights through law," Sun Heng and Wang Dezhi set up the first *dagong* amateur art and performance troupe in China, and gave more than 100 concerts for migrant workers, free of charges. In the same year, they established Rural Migrants' Home in Picun (Pi Village), Chaoyang District, 40 kilometers outside Beijing, a community cultural centre with a mission to provide cultural facilities, organise art and performances, and run educational and professional training for rural migrant workers. Later, in consequent years, subsidised by funding from Hong Kong Oxfam and a number of other sources, and with the sustained support, assistance and consultancy from academics and translational intellectuals, the Centre has grown in both reputation and scale of activity. In August, 2005, the Centre set up an experimental school for the children of rural migrants in Picun, aiming to address the serious issue of inadequate care and education for the children of rural migrants. Now housing a permanent museum of the history of *dagong* community, the Centre is equipped with a cinema, a theatre, and number of cultural and recreational facilities, and is the hub of *dagong* cultural activities in Beijing. In conjunction with a number of scholars, university student volunteers, and migrant worker activists, the Centre hosts annual conferences on various aspects of dagong culture, and runs workshops and training courses for migrant worker volunteers. Picun Village, home to more than 10,000 rural migrants from elsewhere plus 1000 local residents, now host a hub of rural migrant community cultural activism, and is a hotbed for the politicisation and radicalisation of rural migrant workers. Although much of the Centre's activities are motivated by a mission to empower migrant worker by providing an alternative discursive space to the mainstream culture, it is not overtly oppositional to the government, and in fact sees the government's endorsement of the Centre – through its media reporting and accolades conferred on Sun Heng its main progenitor – as evidence of its achievement. Perhaps the considerable distance from the city and the peripheral location of the village ensures that the Centre can exist relatively under the radar of political scrutiny. Or perhaps the government does not see sufficient evidence to feel threatened or perturbed by a collective which seems to see its core activity as bringing culture to *dagong* community, in a relatively isolated location. As a result, a *dagong* cultural activist culture, described by some as "Picun culture" (Huang 2011), has flourished.

Wang Dezhi attributes his growth from a rural migrant youth to a filmmaker to exposure to cultural elites, academics, and film-makers in his capacity as an activist at the centre. He also mentioned that he had had opportunities to see many documentaries and documentary filmmakers in Songzhuang, a village on the outskirt of Beijing, now home to the Li Xianting Film Fund, a China-based NPO institution which supports independent filmmaking. Introduced to the techniques, style and aesthetics of the so-called independent documentary filmmakers, Wang intuited that the camera could be a viable weapon in the cultural resistance work

he wanted to do. Having cited Zhao Liang's film *Petition* (*Shangfang*) and Cong Feng's film *Dr Ma's Country Clinic* (*Ma daifu de zhensuo*) – both documentaries about the injustices and sufferings of disenfranchised individuals – as inspiring works, Wang nevertheless emphasised that he did not set out to imitate the style of any particular filmmaker. "I figured that I'd simply adopt whichever approach which seemed that would work for me."

In 2007, using a DV camera, Wang went around Picun, asking residents – shop owners, garbage collectors, construction workers, and local residents – about their memories of what the village looked like, the changes in the village they had witnessed since the arrival of rural migrants, and their own current lives in the village. Wang was a quick-witted interviewer who improvised questions as he went along, and the film was mostly in the form of questions by Wang holding a camera, and answers given by the person he interviewed. "I did not ask if I could film them, nor what I was filming them for. I simply went up and started chatting with them with a camera on. I lived in the village so some people had seen me before." Viewers learned from these conversations that a young lad on the construction work site had been trying to get the money owed to him from his boss, the owner of a shop selling second-hand clothes finds it difficult to cope with living separately from his wife, children and aging parents back at home, and a garbage collector who finds it increasingly difficult to find a place to store his stuff. Since he is "out the system," he does not have to worry about the ethical and legal aspects of media production including rights to privacy of his interviewees or seeking permission to film real people in public places.

Picun is one of the hundreds of the so-called "rural-urban interface zones" (*chengxiang jiehe bu*) between the fifth and the sixth ring road in Beijing, which, while now home to thousands of rural migrants from all over the country, are destined to disappear from the map due to the unstoppable tide of urban development. As a hungry, expansionist urban planning regime quickens its step, devours rural land, and pushes urban space progressively outwards, the unique cultural habitat the rural-urban interface zones engender are doomed to vanish, perhaps much to the pride of the forward-looking, future-oriented city planners and real-estate developers, to whom the residual rural was little more than an eyesore to the imaginary modern sublime. Not surprisingly, nobody wants to fund his filming project, and in fact few of the rural migrant residents interviewed in the film seem to share his acute sense of urgency and historical sense of mission to rescue this transient moment in history from disappearing. Yet Wang believed that it was his duty to document the things and people in these transient places. The sure fact that they were going to disappear sooner or later made this self-appointed task all the more urgent. For this reason, Wang is not perturbed by the fact that his films did not enjoy wide circulation nor did it engage the interest of rural migrants, including those he had filmed. "My objective is to leave a legacy for future generations. Unless I capture these places and people before they disappear with a camera, people in the future have no ways of finding out."

Apart from documenting places and things which have no place of pride in a modernist and urban narrative, Wang sees another task of films as to narrate workers' experience from an explicitly and unambiguously workers' point of view, and in doing so, raising the class consciousness of the marginal social groups. Unencumbered by the constraints deriving from considerations of funding, censorship,

ratings, and distribution network, Wang is free to employ his own aesthetic, style, mode of story-telling, pace of filming, and means of publishing his work. For him, making a film is part of his work as an activist; along with making films, he does a range of other things on daily basis, including training rural migrants for purposes of self-representation, assisting workers in their compensation claims, and promoting knowledge of rights and entitlements among migrant workers. "Film is part of my work, but it does not take priority over others. I do it when I get time and chances to do it." When I asked him in October 2011 about his current film project, he told me that he had quite a few projects running in parallel, and one of them involved filming a couple who ran a small business selling breakfast food.[1] "I saw this couple on my way to work every day; they were always busily making food, and never seemed to have missed a single day's work. I am interested in finding out what motivate them, and what keeps them going." He said that it was the ordinariness yet the resilience of people that intrigued him.

> *Unlike some so-called independent films, I don't go out of my way to capture the dark and grey side of life. I prefer to focus on the optimistic and positive side of human nature. Of course, this positive and optimistic focus is fundamentally different from that in the official discourse. The point of departure for my story-telling is that we live in an unjust and unequal society, and as a consequence of that, ordinary people's lives are down and out.*

Although Wang acknowledged affinity with independent documentary filmmakers, and acknowledged that he shared with them a desire to critique and depart from the perspectives and aesthetics of the mainstream documentary films, he was careful in delineating the difference between himself and them. Much as he likes and understands Jia Zhangke's work, he thinks that Jia's portrayal of rural migrants is motivated by a general universal humanism, whereas his was driven by an agenda to raise workers' class consciousness. For this reason, he is somewhat impatient with certain aspects of the trademark techniques of independent documentary filmmaking. For instance, he found the excessively long-take of "fly-on-the-wall," cinema verite style of certain scenes in the films pretentious and irritating, and he thought that they tended to dwell on the dark side for the sake of doing so.

I suspect that these perspectives and techniques are considered to be associated with independent films in certain international circles. But if you are truly independent, you shouldn't just focus on marking yourself as different from dominant Chinese culture. You should also resist the pressure to cater to the taste of international film festival judges.

Following *Picun*, Wang made *A Fate-Determined Life* (minti rensheng), a fictionalised account of the true experience of two young rural migrants. One idealistic and the other one realistic, the lives of two migrants take a dramatic turn when one of them loses a mobile phone, gets into dispute, and ends up being badly beaten by the boss, and ends up in a hospital, unable to pay for his treatment. Despite the unflinching exposure of the injustices of the system, and the cruelty and hypocrisy of the wealthy people, Wang is more interested in showing the resilience of the small people. One thing leads to another, and the story, full of twists and turns, ends with one saying to another, "Our lives are not pre-determined by fate. We should be able to change it." To which the other says, "That's right. We *gemen* (brothers) should act now. There is no better time to change our destiny."

A Fate-Determined Life is not a typical documentary. Instead, it is described as a "quasi-documentary" (Vivanni 2011), and uses actors (played by rural migrant workers including Wang himself) to play fictional characters. Although the story and characters come from real life, Wang felt that the feature film (gushi pian) format would be more vivid in enacting the incident, and in capturing the drama and conflict between characters. At the same time, he felt that the film, intended for his gemen – rural migrant worker brothers – needed to be explicit with the messages it wanted to push, even those they may come across as being didactic. "We can't wait for workers to awaken themselves from the state of political unconsciousness. We need to initiate them." For this reason, the film is well furnished with advice for rural migrant viewers. One migrant youth says to his gemen,

> *We love to watch martial arts movies, and Hollywood blockbusters, but has it ever occurred to you that characters in these stories are always busy saving the world, and they never have to worry about where their next meal comes from. We, on the other hand, need to eat. That's the reality we must not forget. We work very hard, become really tired, and get some relaxation from watching these films, and we identify ourselves with these heroes. You can read all these self-help books if you like, Carneige, Thick Black Theory, and The Wealth of Nations.*[2] *But these are all fictions, and serve to create illusions. Gemen, we must start reflecting on our lives, and think about why there are so many injustices!*

Similarly, another film made by Wang in the following year, Shunli Goes to the City (Shunli Jingcheng 2009) is also about the experience of the first encounter with Beijing. Getting off the train, Shunli – whose name means "smooth-sailing" – soon finds that life in Beijing is anything but smooth-sailing. He, together with some other new arrivals, is first lured into an illegal hotel on false pretence, then conned by bogus job agencies, and ripped off by crooks selling counterfeit mobile phones. Young, inexperienced, and trustworthy, these rural youths soon learned that the city is filled of false promises and dangerous traps. It is clear that Wang wanted to invoke indignation among his viewers, and force them to ponder over the causes of injustices. Again, unable to make the real ruthless city con artists and crooks to act themselves, Wang took creative licence by getting rural migrants to "play" them, ostensibly untroubled by the principle of recording only real events and people in documentaries.

Having gone through a process of radicalisation himself, Wang firmly believes that class consciousness cannot be formed without external influences. For this reason, he is convinced that any attempt to empower workers through media must take a conscious effort of "guiding" (*ying dao*) and "initiating" (*qi fa*) them to a working-class sensibility, ethos and strategy. This is because, according to Wang, the mainstream culture's influence is so strong and so successful in constructing a sense of false reality that the first task of cultural activist must be to do whatever it can to "drag"[3] them from the mainstream ideological thought and style, and learn a new style of telling their own story, from their own point of view, in their own language. As a strategy, Wang and his colleagues at the Centre believe that they must, like Mao Zedong in the early years of his political career, form alliance with various social forces, including intellectual elites. In a tone which is reminiscent of Mao's position on the same issue, Wang said more than once that "intellectuals may have their shortcomings, but they are useful alliances."

Wang sees himself more as a cultural activist than a full-time filmmaker. He shoots footage wherever material presented itself to him, or whenever he could find time among other things. He has no prior plans in terms of the length, style, format, and plot development. The only principle of organising his material is how effectively it constructs an alternative account of rural migrants' experience, and in doing so, forcing viewers to reflect about the injustices. After he finishes a film, he would usually file it, or upload it online, and share it with trusted friends "in the circle."[4] Wang is aware that his views may be typical of that of the proletariat vanguard rather than an ordinary rural migrant, and his interest in documenting social reality may not be shared by the greater *nong min gong* community. This, he says, is only understandable given that a structural inequality subjects rural migrants to an existence which can be described more accurately as surviving rather than living. "Cultural consumption has many levels. Most workers are still at the basic level of survival, so they prefer pornography, fantasies, and martial arts. If they have more energy left after work, and have more leisure time, they may want to go up to the next levels and engage with more serious stuff." Having gone through the process of induction and initiation, Wang now spends much time passing on his own skills and perspectives to other migrants, encouraging them to take up cam recorders and narrate their own lives. This perceived need to provide leadership in the production and consumption of culture, as articulated by Wang Dezhi, is widely resonant with many rural migrant advocacy NGO workers I have talked to in Beijing, Shenzhen, Suzhou.

The Absence of the Significant Other: The Unintended Consequence of a Domestic Worker Film Project

Among all types of labour taken up by rural migrants, domestic service represents a distinctive line of employment and attracts mostly rural, and to a less extent, urban unemployed women. Among all migrant groups, life and work of the domestic worker, or *baomu* (maid) is most intimately intertwined with the employer. The domestic worker can be live-in, part-time, or casual. She cooks, cleans and looks after children. In recent years, domestic work has undergone a profound process of specialisation in response to the market demand, including now, for instance, *yuesao,* who cares for the mother in her first month after childbirth, *hugong,* who nurses hospitalised patients, and maids whose sole responsibility is looking after household pets. Although there are some single young women domestic workers, many domestic workers are married, some with young children (most of whom left behind in the countryside). Domestic workers are recruited in a variety of ways, including through agency, or personal introduction through words of mouth. What sets the domestic worker apart from other migrant employment types is the intrinsic absence of boundary between work time-space and personal space-time, and between paid work and unpaid work. The domestic worker is an "intimate stranger," performing emotional as well as physical labour, and has to negotiate a very complex set of paradoxical relationship with her employer. Although the maid is expected to perform domestic duties of the most personal nature – taking care of the bodily needs of her charge and cooking the favourite food for the employer – the relationship is marked by a lack of trust and respect (Yan 2008; Sun 2009).

Despite the fact that domestic worker take up only a small percentage of the entire migrant workforce, the relationship between her and her employer has provided staple material in television narratives, including both television drama series and television documentaries about urban life. The intimate stranger is a central figure in many of these television narratives, which either promote the "main melody" of social harmony or help shaping new modes of sociality in the transformed social order following the logic of neoliberalism (Sun 2009; 2010). As previous studies (Yan 2008; Sun 2009) make clear, rural migrant women individuals have little, or no input, in the way in which they are constructed, and these popular narratives about the "humble" maid are mostly produced by the middle-class media professionals or cultural elites.

How to give visibility and voice to this marginalised social group has been a question which perennially concerns the staff at a number of NGOs including the Rural Migrant Women's Home and Village Outside the City (*chengbiancun*). Always on the look out for opportunities to engage media, these organisations utilise, whenever they can, resources from a variety of partners, including All China Women's Federation, feminist scholars, lawyers, and activists, in order to (1) give voice to rural migrant domestic workers; (2) raise public awareness of a range of serious issues regarding their rights, working conditions, and (3) cater to their cultural needs. A most often heard complaint from them, is, not surprisingly, that media representations of the rural migrant domestic workers are too often associated with criminality or sexuality, or having a didactic tendency towards rural migrants, expecting them to improve *suzhi* (personal quality) and self-reliance.

In recent years, a number of rural migrant advocacy NGOs have become increasingly cognisant of the potential usefulness of visual media to achieve their goals. A host of factors contribute to this new awareness, including the relatively easy access to technologies of visual production such as the camera, digital video (DV) recorder, and Internet, the expanded time-space of visual material as part of migrant (especially new generation) workers' everyday cultural consumption, and finally but not the least importantly, the emergence of a few transnational scholarly and cultural elite bodies who play a pivotal leadership role in organising cultural activism, introducing the concept, politics, and the technical know-how, as well as practical support and resources, and working with NGOs.[5]

In 2011, funded by the Hong Kong Oxfam, and initiated and administered by CBC, the NGO also resourced by Hong Kong Oxfam, Rural Migrant Women's Home undertook a media production project aiming to empower migrant women. The project leaders at the Rural Migrant Women's Home floated the idea to some migrant women domestics who regularly visited the Home. Although it was usually difficult to access domestic workers, especially live-in, full-time domestic workers, and involve them in groups activities outside the employers household (Sun 2009), the Home, over the years, had managed to connect with and gained the trust of a dozen migrant women. These women came to the Home in their spare time, where they could freely exchange their experiences and enjoy a reprieve from the gaze of employers. After an initial workshop teaching a group of domestic workers, mostly middle-aged rural migrants, how to operate a DV camera, the Home handed three DV cameras over to three groups of women (each with three to four people), asking them to record their work and lives as a domestic worker in whatever way they like. The purposes of the project, as stated in the project

summary provided by Village Outside the City, are many-fold. Its objectives are firstly, to encourage domestic workers to tell their own stories, and express their own thoughts and feelings; secondly, produce visual material which would interest a wider audience, therefore raising public awareness of the domestic workers as a marginal social group; thirdly, to produce some first-hand material and data which may be useful for the efforts of NGOs in advocating and defending the rights of rural migrant workers.

The result, however, was rather "disappointing." Two months later, migrant domestic workers came back to the Home having shot very little footage. Some women said that they had forgotten how to operate the cam recorder, and did not want to touch it for fear of damaging such an expensive piece of equipment. Others said that they did not know what to film, as their work consisted of little else than looking after employers' children. Apart from a little footage showing a happy domestic worker cooking dishes, and another one playing happily with a child, there was little material which could be considered to be "in depth" and give an "intimate" account of a domestic worker's sense of loneliness, isolation, and feeling of depression which were brought upon them by endless work, lack of boundary between personal and work space, between their own time and work time, and finally, by the relentless scrutiny, and often hectoring of employers, not to mention the uncommon incidents of sexual harassment. While domestic workers felt that they could freely express these feelings when they came to the Home, and meet other women in their spontaneous conversations, they did not know how to effectively convey the sense of depression, loneliness and isolation on the camera.

In other words, the employer, a significant player in the dynamic of the fraught power relations, is conspicuously absent. The use of camera in the management of employer-employees relationship has always been to the advantage of the employer, as evidenced in the growing use of surveillance camera at home. However, few employers would take it kindly if they realise that their employee, hired to perform household chores, is taking on additional role as a chronicler of her own work and life. Even more threateningly, she could potentially put the employers' behaviour and words "on the record," rendering it public, official testimonials which could, at best, put them in unflattering light, or at worst, incriminating. The "significant other" is bound to be absent in this project, and the original intention to capture the true feelings of domestic workers is inherently untenable. It is here we see the difficulty, if not the impossibility, of producing ethnography of work and life from the point of view of the subjugated class. Self-ethnography of class experience is limited to recording the self, but not so much how the self is living with and negotiating the tension with the other. The dominant class refused to be subject to the gaze, and has the power to act out this refusal. In other words, the production of self-ethnography through grassroots media production, be it videos, films, and documentaries, may have proved to be effective in empowering the racial and ethnical minority groups and indigenous peoples in their "struggles for self-determination" and in their "documentation of conflicts" with the dominant culture (Turner 2002, 76), and to preservation of their own cultural traditions, but its effectiveness in documenting the class experience seems more limited.

Somewhat surprised with the initial outcome, the Project collective decided to take a more prescriptive approach. It was suggested to these women that they could,

first, write a short script for a play, such as a fictionalised account of a nevertheless true event or incident. Then, they could perform in these plays as actors, and their performance would be filmed. To the project leaders' delight, this intervention worked to a certain extent. One group shot a short play (about 2 minutes) enacting a fight between a couple. In the play, a domestic woman has discovered that her husband (played by a woman) has slept with another woman in her absence, and she confronts him about his sexual misdemeanour. In another play, also lasting a couple of minutes, the domestic worker fronts up in the home of her ex-employer, demanding to receive payment owed to her. Though self-consciously gauche and less than convincing in the theatrical sense, the workers learn to operate the machine to tell a story of their own, in their own voice, which represents a significant step forward from the initial sense of inhibition in the presence of a machine.

In a stock-taking discussion of the project at Village Outside the City in October 2011, the question on the minds of project collective was whether its original goals have been achieved. To be sure, the project had succeeded in helping a few women overcome their initial fear and unfamiliarity with a DV, but the extent to which migrant individuals can be empowered by this visual and technological means of expressing oneself is unclear. Sitting at a post-production discussion, I felt that the project also raised some questions regarding the cultural politics of voice. It is obvious that migrant women domestic workers had numerous grievances to air, and they freely verbalised these grievances on camera during the training session, or when they talked to me during my ethnographic interaction with them.[6] In fact, most of their grievances are caused by the fact that their employers feel free to behave and treat their employee in certain ways in the private and personal space of home, and the injustice and indignity suffered by the domestic worker are often experienced in isolation, without witness or means of being documented. Even if the employers allowed the domestic worker to bring a camera to his or her home, and even if they agree to appear on camera – none of them did in the footage produced by the Project – the presence of the camera would take away the private dimension of the interaction, thus defeating the original purpose of reflecting the real dynamics between the employer and the employee, thus uncovering the true circumstances of the domestic worker. On the other hand, fictionalised genres, such as television drama, comedy skits, reality TV, literary fiction or personal diaries, may be more effective. This seems to fly in the face of the truth-claim made on behalf of documentary as a genre which has a natural advantage of becoming more "true."

A key participant of the film project is Liu Xianhua, a middle-aged domestic worker from northern China. Despite her all confident, and articulate demeanour, Liu was a victim of domestic violence prior escaping to Beijing to become a domestic worker. Through her association with the Rural Migrant Women's Home, Liu learned to express herself in creative ways, including writing poems. One of her poems, entitled "Purple Flowers" (*di ding hua*), with its short and simple lyrics, and the clear message of promoting self-respect, resilience, and dignity, was enthusiastically endorsed by the Home. Set to music by a NGO musician, the song came to be associated with humble domestic workers who nevertheless find value and dignity in labour. "You are strong and determined, though small and insignificant; you chase hope even though you are so common and ordinary. You are everywhere, by the road, and between rocks, in the wilderness, and in spring."

When Liu was assigned a camera, she shot footage of many pretty purple and violent-coloured flowers. Accompanied by the song she had previously written, she effectively produced a visual/musical poem much akin to the genre of video clips one associates with community advertisement or motivational material. The short film is a happy fit with the message consistently promoted by the Rural Migrant Women's Home, and may have effectively articulated Liu's new-found sense of self-worth, dignity, and self-respect through her association with the Home as a volunteer. However, as has been discussed elsewhere (Jacka 1998; 2006; Yan 2008; Fu 2009), some subject positions offered by the Home, while aiming to empower women, sometimes reproduce, to some extent, the discourse of self-development often promoted by the state agencies, some of which rural migrant women do not easily identify with.

In the context of Liu's personal experience, her poem and film, though heartfelt, can be read as evidence of, as Yan Hairong (2008, 213) puts it, the migrant women's inability to "cohere as individual subjects of Development or as subjects of resistance." Since the fate of being a "common" and "ordinary," "small" and "insignificant" seems pre-destined, then one should do one's best to adapt and survive, and find dignity and meaning in doing menial work. In the case of Liu Xianhua, the Project's intention to produce alternative expression to mainstream discourse seems waylaid. Though the process of writing poems and producing a musical video may have been an edifying and self-affirming experience to Liu as an individual, Liu's self-expression seems to have the potential to reinforce rather than question the representation made on behalf of them. Here we are reminded of the often unintended consequence of cultural activism. While it is often motivated by the aim of giving support to self-representation of the marginalised, it may not have anticipated that not all acts of self-representation can take place independently of mainstream cultural expressions. Rural migrant domestic workers like Liu may seek meanings of dignity and self-worth from diverse, and often contradictory, sources, including those which cultural activism seeks to critique. Similarly, they may rely on a wide range of – again often contradictory – ways to express themselves, including using the language and signifying practices of the official idiom, which have become familiar and even natural to them.

Discussion and Conclusion

The theory of subalternity, developed most prominently in the Indian and Latin American contexts, has been mostly concerned with questions of voice, agency, power, and construction of racial and ethnic identities. Similarly, studies of various forms of cultural activism have mostly focused on how indigenous media activists in various national contexts – Australia and North America – use media for purposes of cultural preservation as well as to engage in contestation with hegemonic mainstream culture (Ginsburg 2002). By focusing on the subaltern position of the rural migrant workers and media, this paper draws on a wide range of perspectives from subaltern studies scholarship to inform critical media analysis. In doing so, it contributes to the development of a broader theoretical argument about the continued and expanded purchase of subalternity as an analytic perspective. However, by bringing subaltern studies perspectives to bear on the contemporary Chinese society, we must also take into account a number of complicating factors.

To start with, China's social polity is marked by a tension between "socialist legacies and neoliberal strategies" (Zhao 2008a), a tension created as well as mediated by the presence of a very strong party-state. Also, the growing inequalities and socio-economic stratification in China have given rise to a deepening subjugation which is class rather than racially and ethnically based.[7]

Understanding the "Chinese characteristics" of subalternity entails asking a number of questions regarding the political socialisation, the role of NGOs as they are wedged between a powerful state on the one hand and market forces on the other, and the ways in which this dynamics shape an activist sensibility. The increasingly widespread use of phone camera, social media like QQ, and digital video recorder camera, is being embraced by rural migrant activists keen to produce an alternative narrative of labour, migration and urbanisation, and their practice is sometimes cited as evidence of the formation of a distinct working class culture (Qiu 2009). On the other hand, there is also a popular view, particularly among political sciences, that political consciousness can only emerge from political socialisation, and shaped only by socio-economic structures. Consistent with this view is a tendency to see the embrace of digital technologies in everyday life as further evidence of the fragmentation of consumerist, post-ideological subjectivity. This discussion demonstrates that the level of rural migrants' class consciousness is not determined by the digital literacy per se. Nor is class consciousness formed solely through one's class experience as a socially marginalised and economically exploited individual. Instead, it shows that the level of consciousness of China's rural migrant workers is inextricably linked with the extent to which they are inducted and initiated into the technology-enabled process of politicisation and socialisation. In other words, the forging of a collective migrant working class identity is contingent on the acquisition of a techno-political literacy on the part of both individual workers and the worker advocacy groups.

The role of labour NGOs, often assisted by urban, middle-class and transnational cultural elites, is pivotal in this process. However, as this discussion shows, their work lies in initiating, instilling, and informing working-class activist practices and sensibility, but the outcomes of their initiatives are unpredictable and uncertain. This discussion reveals that within the labour NGO cohort, there exists a diverse range of perspectives and positions, a variety of modus operandi in its organisation of cultural activism, and varying level of digital-political literacy, and most importantly, a differentiated position in relation to the party-state. However, despite these internal difference, labour activists share an epistemological challenge: a strong sense of their historical mission to record and document social change from the perspective of the working-class experience, and the difficulty of making the camera an effective tool of capturing and witnessing social conflicts and class struggle as they unfold. Other genres, such as fiction, television dramas, and feature films would be more effective, but political economy and cultural politics of production rule them out as viable tools available to activism.

In his critique of the film-making practices of some independent documentary filmmakers in China, Yingjie Zhang observes that the relationship between rural migrants and the filmmakers is marked by various types of "subject exploitation." Raising troubling questions regarding whose agency, truth claims, and aesthetics are privileged in these works' proclaimed goal of bringing about democratisation

and equality, Zhang cautions us against the truth claims made on behalf of migrant workers. He argues that although these films may assume a disruptive role in relation to the mainstream media by dealing with "troubling" subject matter, they do not automatically validate the truth claims often made in them (Zhang 2007).

The aspirations and frustrations of the domestic worker film project collective, as well as the activist ethos and imaginary evidenced in migrant filmmaker Wang Dezhi's practices, point to an equally strong faith in the capacity to record and document social change from the marginalised groups' point of view, and to create an alternative space and perspective to contest dominant culture, and in doing so, giving voice, legitimacy, and authenticity to the narratives of class inequality from the point of view of the disenfranchised individuals. At the same time, however, the experience in both cases point to the difficulty, if not the impossibility, of representing the complete truth of conflicts, injustices and discrimination from the point of view of the rural migrants class experience, due to the refusal of the dominant class to act in front of the camera. The prospects of China's working classes' efforts at self-representation and self-empowerment remain unclear, unless we fully appreciate both the possibilities and challenges that lie ahead.

Notes:

1. I first met Wang in a conference in Picun in 2009. In October 2011, I spent a day with Wang in Beijing, talking about his films, documentary filmmaking, and his work of cultural activism.

2. These are best-selling books which purport to contain recipes for success. They are popular among rural migrant workers. Most migrant factory workers I talked to have either heard of the books, or know someone who mentions these books.

3. The actual word Wang used is *pao*, which means "unearth something from the ground."

4. For instance, Wang gave me a password, with which I could access the material he uploads online.

5. One notable example is the Media and Empowerment of Rural Migrant Project funded by the Ford Foundation, which supports the cultural activism and research of a number of media scholars and postgraduate students. This collective has done considerable work in teaching skills, introducing political perspectives, as well as bringing a cultural activist sensibility to the NGO workers.

6. I conducted ethnographic work domestic workers in China from 2004-6. See Sun (2009).

7. This is not to diminish the struggles of ethnic minorities in China for cultural and political autonomy, nor is it to elide the fact that class, ethnicity, gender, and place often intersect rather than exclude one another to produce relations of domination and subjugation.

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YOUR SHOW'S BEEN CUT:

THE POLITICS OF INTELLECTUAL PUBLICITY IN CHINA'S BRAVE NEW MEDIA WORLD

YUEZHI ZHAO

Abstract

This paper examines the increasingly important communication politics between the media and intellectual fields in China's brave new media world. It starts by outlining key factors that have shaped the evolving post-1989 politics of intellectual publicity in China. It then describes a deep "liberal versus new left" division within the Chinese intellectual field and the ascending power of the *Nanfang Weekend* and liberal intellectual alliance within China's CCP-controlled media system. In a subsequent case study, I analyse how the destructive logics of media sensationalism, academic corruption, ideological polarisation, and "liberal media instrumentalism" have intersected to spectacularise intellectual in-fights and distract both the media and the academy from engaging the public around the urgent political economic and social issues of the day.

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Introduction

Chinese media and intellectuals have been extensively studied in their respective relationships vis-à-vis the Chinese state, and more recently, in terms of how they each have been caught "between state and market" or "the party line and the bottom line" (Zhao 1998). There are also studies of prominent Chinese intellectuals working in the media during the Mao era, most notably Deng Tuo, who served as an editor-in-chief of the People's Daily during the Mao era (Cheek 1997). However, there has been less analysis of the dynamics of interaction between media and intellectuals and its implications for Chinese polity and society. As Bourdieu put it, the political, social science, and journalistic fields "have in common the fact that they all lay claim to the imposition of the legitimate vision of the social world," and "that they are the site of internal struggles for the imposition of the dominant principle of vision and division" (Bourdieu 2005, 36). The Chinese equivalents of Bourdieu's highly theorised concept of the "field" – "circle" (jie) or "sphere" (ling yu) – are more descriptive than analytical. The degree of relative autonomy and the dynamics of interaction among the three fields in contemporary China are also quite different from those of Bourdieu's France. Nevertheless, Bourdieu's observation of how, "for a number of years now," and with regard to "symbolic production," "the journalistic field has exerted an increasingly powerful hold … on the field of the social sciences and the political field," is increasingly pertinent to contemporary China. As the spring-summer 2010 *Nanfang Weekend*-initiated accusations of plagiarism against leading "new left" scholar Wang Hui underscores, there is an imperative to critically examine the evolving politics of intellectual publicity in China and assess its implications for the struggles over the "vision and division" in relation to China's transformation. This inevitably involves case studies of individual intellectuals and media outlets. However, in line with Bourdieu's (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 96-97) definition of a field as "a network, or a configuration of objective relations between positions," I foreground a dynamic relationship between structure and agency both within and between the media and intellectual fields. Lurking in the background are their evolving positions within China's state-society nexus and their imbrications in Chinese social power relations.

I begin with a discussion of post-1989 developments in Chinese intellectual and media fields that have intersected to shape the new politics of intellectual publicity, including the commercialisation and fragmentation of the Chinese media field, the rise of the expert discourse and the ascendency of neoliberal market economics as the most powerful intellectual discourse in the media, the selective re-incorporation of elite intellectuals in the post-1989 market authoritarian social order on the one hand and the ideological polarisation of the Chinese intellectual field along the "liberal versus new left" fissure on the other. The explosion of the Internet and the resultant incorporation of a wider educated stratum in the new politics of intellectual publicity and the intensification of global intellectual flows are two further developments that I will discuss as well in this regard. I then describe the ascending discursive alliance between *Nanfang Weekend* – China's most influential intellectual oriented post-Mao print media outlet – and liberal intellectuals since the late 1990s. Finally, I place the intertwined struggles for journalistic and academic norms and for the "imposition of the dominant principle of vision and division"

in China in the post 2008-2009 global political economic and intellectual contexts and analyse the *Nanfang Weekend*-led plagiarism accusation against Wang Hui in March 2010 as part of these struggles.

I do not assume *a priori* definitions of intellectuals. Rather, I specify which group or what type of intellectuals has access to what kind of media in historically specific discursive settings. My categories of the intellectuals range from the broadest Chinese understanding of those having high-school or above education to the narrower one of the "college intellectual," i.e. those with positions in the academy. Thus, contrary to the prevailing tendency in the Western media and academy to associate Chinese intellectuals with writers and those working in the humanities, especially those who speak the language of the dominant Western liberal democratic discourse – the 2010 Nobel Peace Prize winner Liu Xiaobo epitomises a narrow and highly politicised notion of the Chinese intellectual – I aim to provide a broader analysis of intellectual publicity. For this reason, economists – an important category of college and establishment intellectuals in China's reform era, assume a pivotal role in my mapping of the intersections of what Bourdieu described as the "social science" and "journalistic" fields. Similarly, I extend Bourdieu's "journalistic field" to include not only the print and broadcast media, but also the Internet. I argue that the core issue in the politics of intellectual publicity is precisely about who assumes the status of intellectual authority to define the visions and divisions of the world and who has access to what kind of medium in the hierarchy of accessibility and credibility within the realm of mediated representation.

Media Commercialisation, Neoliberal Economics, and the Rise of *Nanfang Weekend* as a Liberal Intellectual Organ in Post-1989 China

Post-1989 developments in the Chinese media and intellectual fields have significantly redefined both the form and substance of Chinese intellectual publicity. With the purge of "bourgeoisie liberalisation" elements in the official party organs and the closure and reorganisation of intellectual-oriented media outlets deemed to have "bourgeoisie liberalisation" tendencies, the media were brought back under the closer control of the CCP's propaganda department after the relative openness of the immediate pre-1989 period (Zhao 1998, 46). However, although "old leftists" briefly regained their discursive space in the official media in the immediate post-1989 period (Brady 2008; Zhao 2008), waves of commercialisation soon engulfed the Chinese media field after 1992. The implications for intellectual publicity are multifaceted and paradoxical. On the one hand, commercialisation marginalised humanistic intellectuals in general and a rising capitalist consumer culture quickly brought the demise of the "high culture fever" of the 1980s (Jing Wang 1996, 116). This discursive marginalisation, along with the relative decline in the income of "college intellectuals" vis-à-vis the newly enriched business strata, led Xu Jilin to comment on the "second marginalisation" of intellectuals in the PRC, that is, after their "first marginalisation" during the Cultural Revolution: "During the early and mid-1990s, intellectuals suddenly dropped to the status of the ordinary folks. This is their most painful period" (Xu 2010). The key difference, Xu Jilin (2005, 4) pointed out, is that this time it was not the state, but society, more precisely, a market society, which crushed the intellectuals' "dream of returning to society's centre."

However, this "second marginalisation" is not only temporary, but also partial – unless one defines intellectuals narrowly as humanistic intellectuals critical of the state, as opposed to, say, pro-market economists who have not only been able to secure powerful positions within the state's economic reform apparatuses, but also have been able to translate their media celebrity status to hefty speech fees and even cash or stock compensation for company board positions. Moreover, to the extent that the state continues to enforce explicit media bans on outspoken intellectuals ranging from dissidents of the 1989 era such as Liu Xiaobo and Dai Qing to whomever it deems to have gone beyond its permissible ideological boundaries, the state's role in "burying" certain intellectuals remains important. Nor did the economic status of "college intellectuals" as a whole dropped to that of the "ordinary folks," even if we define the "ordinary folks" in relation to the urban populace (forget about the peasants!) and even if this might be the case for a few short years in the early 1990s. Indeed, if one of the key appeals of intellectual publicity in the 1980s was to empower the intellectual strata and to improve their social economic status, especially those working in the education system, many eventually got it in the post-1989 Chinese political economy. By the late 1990s, not only the state had recognised the importance of "college intellectuals" in legitimating its power and the broader strata of "knowledge workers" in promoting economic development in the "knowledge economy," but also it had recentralised its extractive power and thus repossessed the economic resources to "buy off" "college intellectuals." While the salaries of front line workers remained stagnant and even declined throughout the 1990s, the salaries of teachers and "college intellectuals" increased significantly in the late 1990s. At the same time, the state began to enrich "college intellectuals" by either directly injecting research funds to higher education (especially to elite universities and scholars) in the name of boosting China's national power through science and education or indirectly by allowing the drastic marketisation of high education, that is, by empowering the college intellectual strata to extract directly from society. Consequently, in a movement that is oppositional to the late Qing period or the immediate post-1989 period, when intellectuals sought fulfilment outside the orbit of the state, "a large number of intellectuals began to return to the system to seek rent, and to return to 'feed on the emperor's grain'" (Xu 2010). In the context of a state-administered "feeding frenzy" and a highly bureaucratised, marketised, and competitive academic culture, the "intellectual opportunism" of the pre-1989 period that Dingxin Zhao (2001) wrote about evolved into widespread corruption, fraud, corner-cutting, and a "getting fame/rich quick" mentality.

In the discursive realm, although humanist intellectuals and writers lost their dominant position in the official media, a commercialised media system, under the state's watchful eyes, provided expanded space for intellectual expression of certain kinds. On the one hand, the state continues to contain radical liberal intellectuals who openly advocate "bourgeoisie liberalisation," especially multi-party democracy and the wholesale privatisation of the economy. On the other hand, continuing an ideological tendency already set in motion in the 1980s, left-leaning critical perspectives further lost out in the struggle for intellectual publicity in the post-1992 media political economy. On the political plane, Deng's instruction of "guarding against the right but primarily against the left," together with his "no debate" decree – that is, there should be no debate over the capitalist or socialist

nature of the economic reforms, continued to silence the party's "old leftists" in the post-1992 march toward accelerated marketisation. At the same time, media commercialisation resulted in a structural bias against left-leaning perspectives, as advertising-supported media outlets cater to the economic interests of advertisers and the neoliberal political and social sensibilities of middle class consumers.

Along with the selected re-incorporation of the intellectual strata into the post-1992 political economy and the state's growing reliance on experts to legitimate and administrate its market-oriented reform and global reintegration projects, the experts assumed a prominent discursive position in the media. Market-oriented media outlets, specifically, mass appeal urban dailies which have emerged since the late 1990s and a rapidly expanding business press, have consistently provided spaces for the expert perspective on economic, social, and cultural issues since the 1990s. By the early 2000s, these newly established market-oriented media outlets, typically urban subsidiaries of provincial party organs and broadcast stations, have become the most influential and dynamic segment of the Chinese media system, or, in their self-promotional slogan, the Chinese media system's "new mainstream." Most notably, in a significant development in journalistic writing in the 1990s, Chinese news reports, inspired by Western style of professionalism, began to incorporate a limited range of "expert opinion." The expert interview – in the form of newspaper features and television forums, became a popular genre. However, the Western journalistic convention of "balance" – that is, citing experts who hold opposing views on a controversial issue, is rarely practiced.

The result was the entrenchment of the neo-liberal perspective on economic and social issues as the universalising and rationalising intellectual discourse in the media. If the iconic figurers of intellectual publicity in the 1980s were writers and humanistic scholars such as Liu Binyan and Li Zehuo, economists, most specifically, neoliberal economists who try to model the Chinese economy in the idealised image of a Western-style free market capitalist economy, become the new heroes of media publicity throughout the 1990s. Market Wu (Wu Jinglian), Shareholding Li (Yining), and Bankruptcy Cao (Siyuan) – economists who advocate market reforms through various market mechanisms, became household names. The depoliticised and capitalised "human" (ren) in the "new Enlightenment" humanistic discourse of the 1980s – then a critical discourse vis-à-vis the class struggle discourse of the Mao era – had been implicitly reconstituted as the "economic man" of market economics, while the market had come to be celebrated as the best mechanism for individual self-realisation (He 2010, 80-81). Democracy, in a triumphant post-1989 neoliberal globalisation discourse that not only echoed Francis Fukuyama's (1992) "end of history" thesis but also resonated with the human rights discourse of Western governments, follows the market economy. In media coverage of China's WTO accession agreement with the U.S. in 1999, for example, a whole army of pro-market and pro-WTO economists in elite universities and government research institutions served as the chief interpreters and elaborators of the Chinese state's attempt to reintegrate itself with the global market through WTO accession (for a detailed analysis, see Zhao 2003, 42-43). Liberal intellectuals outside the economic field, meanwhile, lent their support of China's WTO entry by noting how further global economic integration and the rule-based WTO will bring democracy to Chinese politics, or in the words of Beijing University historian Gao Yin in a *Nan-*

fang Weekend article, "WTO entry will further broaden the avenue to democracy in China" (Gao 2001). In this way, neo-liberal economists and liberal intellectuals in other fields formed a powerful ideological alliance in the media.

At the centre of this ideological alliance was the rise of the *Nanfang Weekend* as the *de facto* organ of post-1989 liberal intellectual publicity. Although liberal intellectuals suffered a huge blow in 1989 and lost much of the media space they had gained in the pre-1989 period, they have gradually regained new space in the post-1989 commercialised media system. This space centres on the *Nanfang Weekend,* a market-oriented subsidiary of the CCP Guangdong provincial party organ, the *Nanfang Daily*. Perhaps symbolic of the institutional and intellectual continuities between the 1980s and 1990s, the *Nanfang Weekend,* found in 1984, is a product of the first wave of media commercialisation in post-Mao China – the "weekend edition fever" in the early 1980s, a process in which party organs published market-oriented weekend supplements to boost revenues. Compared to the *Nanfang Daily*, which has an official mandate to fulfill its political propaganda function, the *Nanfang Weekend*, while continuing to be regulated by various forms of party control, assumed more editorial autonomy and experimented with the provision of "journalism for the market" (Zhao 1998, 134). Initially, its officially prescribed status as the *Nanfang Daily*'s weekend supplement had confined its subject matter to cultural and economic issues, as well as sensational stories of human interest dealing with crime and corruption scandals. This formula not only brought it immediate commercial success in Guangdong, but also made it one of the most widely read newspapers in China in the early 1990s. However, rather than appealing to the lowest common denominator, it started to cultivate an elite national intellectual readership and solicit intellectual-contributors of national status to its special feature columns. As prominent writers such as Wang Meng and Jiang Zilong started to guest-edit its "Weekend Tea Forum" in the immediate post-1989 period of 1991-1992, and as leading liberal scholars such as Zhu Xueqin, Xu Youyu, Liu Junning, Qin Hui, Wang Xiaobo, and He Weifang became regular contributors from the mid-1990s onwards, the paper successfully established itself as a forum for the country's liberal intellectuals and the educated urban strata (Hong 2005).

By the mid to late 1990s, the *Nanfang Weekend* and liberal intellectuals had forged a strong alliance to speak out on matters related to China (Hong 2005; Zhao and Xing forthcoming). While the paper gains political and intellectual influence by providing a space for liberal intellectuals, liberal intellectuals gain their prominence in the public realm through the paper. By this time, the "highly unified historical and cultural consciousness" that had existed in the Chinese intellectual field in the 1980s had become fractured as Chinese intellectuals tried to understand the drastic social changes since the early 1990s and related themselves to a once again "fractured" (Sun 2003) Chinese society. Specifically, Wang Hui's 1997 essay, "Contemporary Chinese Thoughts and the Question of Modernity" (English version, Wang Hui, 1998), which first appeared in the intellectual journal *Tianyan*, challenged the validity of the "new Enlightenment" discourse of the 1980s in analysing contemporary Chinese problems. This marked the beginning of the "liberal versus new left" debate in the intellectual field (for one of the early accounts of this debate in English, see Fewsmith 2001). While there are nuances and internal divisions within this debate, in broad stroke, this debate pits a "liberal" perspective that

rejects China's revolutionary legacies and embraces liberal capitalist democracy and the values of free market, private property, and human rights as "the end of history" against a "new left" perspective that refuses to bury China's revolutionary past and calls for institutional innovations to renew a radical democratic socialist vision based on a critique and transcendence of capitalist modernity (Zhang 1998, 135). At stake are different notions of democracy, different perceptions of Chinese reality, and different visions of China's future (Zheng 2004).

Contrary to the pre-1989 era when a higher degree of integration between the political, intellectual and media fields had meant that the highest level CCP leaders and the most authoritative party organs were involved in major media debates – exemplified both by the 1978 "Truth Criteria" debate initiated by the central party organ *Guangming Daily* and involved then CCP Organisational Department Director Hu Yaobang and by CCTV's highly controversial 1988 documentary *River Elegy,* which popularised hot intellectual ideas of the day and had the backing of then CCP General Secretary Zhao Ziyang – official media outlets such as the *Guangming Daily* and CCTV were not the sites of this post-1989 intellectual debate. This underscored the relative autonomy both the media and intellectual fields have gained vis-à-vis the political field on the one hand and the separation between the media and intellectual fields on the other. Much of the "liberal versus new left" debate occurred in specialised domestic academic journals such as *Reading*, *Tianya* or overseas publications. The *Nanfang Weekend*, however, emerged as the only mass circulation newspaper that was directly implicated in this debate by serving as a platform for the "liberal" side in this debate. On November 28, 1997, the paper published a special page commemorating the death of liberal theorist Isaiah Berlin, whose endorsement of "negative freedom" over "positive freedom" resonated with Chinese liberal intellectuals. This special page, which was put together with the networking effort of liberal scholar Zhu Xueqin, marked the first attempt in which liberal scholars tried to promote liberalism in a mass media outlet (Hong 2005). In his contribution to the special issue, Zhu Xueqin acknowledged the *Nanfang Weekend* for having accomplished a task that "specialised academic newspapers and journals did not or were unwilling to do" (Zhu 1999, 362). On December 25, 1998, in a direct response to a September 1998 *Tianya* article by "new left" scholar Han Yuhai entitled "Behind the Posture of Liberalism," the *Nanfang Weekend* published Zhu Xueqin's famous essay, "Speaking of Liberalism in 1998" (collected in Zhu, 1999), in an explicit attempt to stake out the liberal position in the debate. In his article, Han Yuhai argued that not only "liberalism" had become the "ideology of contemporary mainstream intellectuals" in China, but also the kind of "liberalism" that its Chinese supporters espoused is an "essentialist" discourse that de-contextualises the market. For his part, Zhu depicted liberalism as a suppressed intellectual discourse in China after 1957. Although it regained ground in China in the 1980s, it had to "borrow other theoretical symbols" at the time. It was only in the late 1990s, with the fragmentation of the Chinese intellectual field, that liberalism emerged as an explicitly articulated discourse. Specifically, Zhu asserted that 1998 marked the year in which liberalism finally braved itself to break a crack in the door to become a manifest discourse. For Zhu, this constituted "the most noteworthy scene in the intellectual and academic circle in 1998." Most famously and contrary to the "new left" argument that China's problems must be understood

in the context of global capitalism, especially a neoliberal global capitalist order in which state power has been mobilised to open up markets and sustain capitalistic social relations, Zhu constructed a binary dichotomy between state and market and made the famous assertion that, in China, the problem is that the "visible foot" of the state had stampeded the "invisible hand" of the market.

Most significantly, the *Nanfang Weekend*'s involvement in the debate became a subject of contention between Han Yuhai and Zhu Xueqin. Specifically, in an interview with the more specialised intellectual weekly, the *Book Review Weekly*, Han (collected in Zhu 1999) argued that if the mass media has one "intrinsic character," it is a tendency to sensationalise or dramatise. In his view, as a newspaper with a large circulation, it is necessary for the *Nanfang Weekend* to be self-reflective and vigilant against such a tendency. By presenting Zhu's article under the banner of "Reading '98," Han asserted, the paper had not only represented a "misreading" of the "real problems" and "real knowledge" of the Chinese intellectual field in 1998, but also contributed to the "concealment of the true state of the Chinese intellectual circle in 1998" and the "burial of truly significant knowledge and thoughts." Han then moved on to cite how in 1998, discussions on "ownership reform" and "property rights" had been deepened to involve discussions of "economic democracy" and social justice in the economic field, and how research in foreign trade and financial crisis had brought the problems of globalisation and financial liberalisation to the fore, thus once again clearly underscored the point – a point that has been persistently maintained by the "new left" position – that discussion of contemporary Chinese problems can no longer be separated from the problems of globalisation (Han, collected in Zhu 1999, 409).

Notwithstanding Han's misgivings about the *Nanfang Weekend*'s slant, the paper's clear ideological stand only helped it to rally more liberal intellectuals under its flag. Between 1999 and 2003, Qin Hui, the top intellectual contributor, wrote nearly 50 column articles for the *Nanfang Weekend*. Liberal legal scholar He Weifang published approximately 40 articles between early 1998 and 2003, ranking second in the number of columns published by a single author in the paper (Hong 2005). That the *Nanfang Weekend* played a pivotal role in rallying Chinese liberal intellectuals is well captured in the following conclusion by Hong Bing, a Fudan University journalism scholar:

> *The* Nanfang Weekend, *a popular weekly outside the domain of scholarly publications, has been able to accomplish the task of aggregating writers and scholars upholding the position of public intellectuals. This is a truly unique scene in the Chinese journalism and intellectual circles of the 1990s. Not a single non-specialised newspaper has been able to accomplish this in the view of this writer. The mutual reception of the Nanfang Weekend and its intellectual contributors is a complicated process of interaction, based on the highly consistent value positions of both sides* (Hong 2005).

Other market oriented subsidiary papers of the Nanfang Daily group, most notably the *Nanfang Metropolitan News*, and the *Nanfang People Weekly*, serve as additional forums for liberal intellectuals, making the *Nanfang Daily* group a bastion of liberalism in the Chinese media system. To be sure, these papers have run into troubles with the CCP central propaganda department; however, the Guangdong provincial political authorities have provided them with the necessary

political protection vis-a-vis the central authorities. In any case, and exemplifying the profound contradictions of the Chinese media political economy, the *Nanfang Daily* Group, with the *Nanfang Weekend* as its crown jewel, is one of the CCP's most successful flagship media conglomerates. Indeed, some left-leaning intellectuals, recognising the *Nanfang Daily* group's system of ideological inclusion and exclusion, its rigidly enforced editorial guidelines with regard to the selection of news sources and columnists, as well as its growing national discursive power, have called it "the underground central propaganda department"(*dixia zhongxuanbu*).[1]

Conflicting Visions, Professional Norms, and an Ugly Turn in the Politics of Chinese Intellectual Publicity in 2010

Although China's political, intellectual and media fields are no longer as tightly integrated as the pre-1989 days, the intellectual and media fields have intertwined in new ways during the period of China's accelerated marketisation and global integration after 1992. To manage the explosive social tensions the post-1992 reforms have engendered and to consolidate its power, the Hu Jintao leadership, which came to power in late 2002, and had to face a wave of popular critiques of the elitist orientation of the reforms since 2004 in the aftermath of the so-called "Lang Xianping Storm" (Zhao 2008), redefined China's developmental model from "high speed to high quality" (Naughton 2010). It also adopted a series of social policies aiming at promoting social justice and equality under the ideological rubric of building a "socialist harmonious society." While it passed a highly controversial Property Right Law in March 2007 and thus further entrenched capitalistic social relations, it continues to frustrate liberal intellectuals' demands for political liberalisation. In response, the *Nanfang Weekend* and its allied liberal intellectuals have escalated their pursuit of the liberal democratic vision by rearticulating it as a universal vision. On May 22, 2008, ten days after the devastating May 12 Wenchuan earthquake, the *Nanfang Weekend*, in an editorial that ostensibly praised the government's swift rescue efforts, set out to redefine the political nature of the PRC state by proclaiming the birth of a [new] "new China" out of the earthquake pains. Making an implicit contradistinction with the state's self-definition of "socialism with Chinese characteristics," the paper defines this "new China" as one in which the state honours "its commitments to its own people and to the whole world with respect to universal values" [of human rights, rule of law and democracy]. In the paper's framing, through its behaviours, the Chinese state has taken a historical turn in renewing its "ruling ideas" and integrating itself with "modern civilisation" (News.ifeng.com 2005). This editorial quickly set off a debate on "universal values," and by September 2008, the *People's Daily* had published a signed editorial to accuse supporters of "universal values" of trying to westernise China and undermine "socialism with Chinese characteristics" (*The Economist* 2010).

On December 10, 2008, the media and intellectual debate over "universal values" took a more dramatic political turn, when hundreds of liberal intellectuals and dissidents signed Charter '08, a political manifesto calling for the end of one-party rule. Proclaiming "freedom, equality and human rights" as "universal common values," the document posits an unavoidable choice for China: to continue authoritarian rule or "recognise universal values, assimilate into the mainstream civilisation,

and build a democratic system" (Charter '08 for Reform and Democracy in China, *December 10, 2008).* Not only *River Elegy*'s "azure civilisation" (i.e. Western liberal democratic capitalism) has returned as "mainstream civilisation," but also once again, a large group of intellectuals appealed to the state to implement their vision of society. The Chinese state responded by jailing Charter '08 leader Liu Xiaobo and banning domestic media interviews of any individual who signed the document (Anderlini 2009).

Concurrently, however, new developments in the global political economy, most significantly, the U.S. originated global financial crisis of 2008-2009, have not only challenged the supremacy of neoliberalism and shaken the economic pillars of the "azure civilisation," but also further exposed the interconnected nature between China and global capitalism. This has further boosted the "new left" critique's basic starting point, that is, China's problems need to be understood within the framework of global capitalism and China's pivotal position within it. The "new left" critique, however, has a complicated relationship with the CCP's official ideology. To the extent that "new left" intellectuals do not negate the Communist Revolution and have a critique of global capitalism and the unequal power relations it has engendered both inside and outside China, they share common ideological grounds with the Party's socialist pretensions. This critique, however, went beyond the CCP's historical critique of capitalism by questioning the modernising project not only of the liberal intelligentsia and technocracy but also of the CCP itself (*Barmé* 2001, 249). In fact, "new left" criticisms of capitalist modernity and their vision of radical democratic politics are fundamentally at odds with the CCP's paternalist official ideology – even the Hu Jintao leadership's most "people-centred" version. Moreover, contrary to the CCP's official nationalism, as He Guimei has asserted, the primary project of these critical Chinese intellectuals since the 1990s has been to explore "critical thoughts of the global capitalist era" which extends the critical Third World tradition of the 1950-1970 period while transcending its economic determinism and single nation-state centric perspective (He Guimei 2010, 366). To pursue this new mode of critical intellectual perspective, "new left" intellectuals have struggled for the relative autonomy of the academic field in the post-1989 period. Gan Yang and Wang Hui, both of whom later became well known as "new left" scholars, for example, were among the founders of the academic journal *Scholar* (*Xueren*) in 1991. Through this journal, they aimed to redress the academic field's overt politicisation in the 1980s and its deviation from "the academic norms," and to emphasise the distinction between the academic and political fields. That is, they tried to retreat from "the square" to "the study" and to redefine their own subjectivity from "intellectuals" to "scholars." As He Guimei argues, in the context of the immediate post-1989 period, this choice of "scholarship" is a gesture of protest against collaboration with the post-1989 power regime and a "highly politicised symbolic action" (He Guimei 2010, 324).

Thus, a fundamental difference exists in terms of intellectual perspective and political strategy. For liberal intellectuals, especially those who were taking the strategy of issuing Charter '08, because liberal capitalist democracy and its legitimating values are "universal," the "transcendence" of the "China/West" dichotomy ends with China's assimilation into "mainstream civilisation." For left-leaning intellectuals who resist "the end of history" thesis, "genuine self-reflective critical

thoughts" in the era of globalised capitalism requires a "broader historical and world perspective" that rests on the possibility of a social formation beyond, or "outside" global capitalism (He Guimei 2010, 324). From this perspective, transcending the China/West dichotomy does not necessarily end with China's assimilation into an (imagined) planetary liberal democratic capitalist order, but rests on the possibility of transcending global capitalism. In this sense, I propose that "new left" intellectuals would agree with sociologist Richard Madsen's position "that there may be different concrete forms of democracy," and "far from presuming that a society like China must become like the West, it assumes that the West itself need to search for new ways to revitalise its public spheres. The search for new ways to institutionalise a public sphere under modern (or postmodern) circumstances brings China and the West together in a common quest" (Madsen 1993, 107). From a global "new left" perspective, an argument can be made that this common search for new forms of public life has not only assumed a new urgency in the post-2008 crisis era, but also entailed a search for new modes of organising the economy and new modes of development. Indeed, for world system theorist Immanuel Wallerstein, the conjunction of three elements in the 2008-2009 crisis – the magnitude of the "normal" crash, the rise in costs of production, and "the extra pressure on the system of Chinese (and Asian) growth," "means that we have entered a structural crisis" (Wallerstein 2010, 140). Thus, the question for Wallerstein (2010) is no longer one of how the capitalist system will mend itself but rather, "what will replace the system? What order will emerge from this chaos?"(140). Toward this end, Wallerstein (2010) called forth serious and open intellectual debate about the "parameters of the kind of world-system we want, and the strategy of transition." As Wallerstein (2010, 140) goes on to say, "[T]his requires a willingness to hear those we deem of good will, even if they do not share our views. Open debate will surely build greater camaraderie, and will perhaps keep us from falling into the sectarianism that has always defeated anti-systemic movements."

Rather than busy themselves with debating future visions on a planet scale, the Chinese media and intellectual fields were involved in the production of a publicity spectacle centred on several footnotes in two editions of a book published between 1988 and 1991 by Wang Hui precisely at the moment when Wallerstein issued his call on the pages of the *New Left Review*. By this time, as a member of the Chinese intellectual stratum engaging in exactly what *River Elegy* had envisioned, that is, to "conduct a direct dialogue with maritime civilisation," Wang Hui had achieved his international academic prominence by sticking to what he and his fellows set out to do in the early 1990s, that is, to maintain relative academic autonomy by focusing on scholarly work. However, precisely because of China's global re-integration, the politics of Chinese intellectual publicity has not only become global, but also the "direct dialogue" that *River Elegy* had envisioned turned out to be multi-faceted. That is, China's intellectuals, no longer sharing the unified "New Enlightenment" historical consciousness of the 1980s, are not carrying out this "direct dialogue" in the kind of singularity that *River Elegy* had imagined. Moreover, the complicated intersections among the political, intellectual and media fields at the global and national levels have produced intriguing dynamics. On the one hand, the Western political field and the transnational media field embrace China's highly politicised liberal intellectuals and liberal media outlets. Former U.S. President George W. Bush

welcomed Yu Jie, Wang Yi and Li Boguang, radical Chinese liberal intellectuals who have entrusted their own souls to Western culture by converting to Christianity, to the White House in May 2006. Current U.S. President Obama granted an exclusive interview to the *Nanfang Weekend* during his November 2009 official visit to China with the explicit aim at rewarding this paper and making a point about China's lack of press freedom (for details on this interview, see Zhao and Xing forthcoming). For its part, the Western intellectual field, while giving liberal intellectuals and human rights activists ample institutional and symbolic supports, has also given "new left" scholar Wang Hui prominent academic recognition.

On March 28, 2010, Wang Hui was to reflect upon "Chinese modernity" in his keynote address to the Asian Studies Association Annual Conference in Philadelphia. This was the first time a China-based scholar was invited to address an audience of predominantly Western-based scholars. By then, however, as far as the Chinese world of intellectual publicity was concerned, the issue was not whether Wang Hui had brought prestige to the Chinese academic field, let alone what Wang Hui had to say in this "direct dialogue," but whether he had committed the academic crime of plagiarism: Wang Hui's professional ethics and his very credentials as a scholar was put on the line, by none other than an alliance between *Nanfang Weekend*, and one of its liberal intellectual columnists, Nanjing University literature professor Wang Binbin. Simply, Wang Hui's intellectual show at the global stage was cut by an unfolding domestic media and Internet show.

The accusation was launched in a coordinated, sensational and highly unethical form. Wang Binbin's "bombshell" article accusing Wang Hui of plagiarism in his 1988 dissertation-based book *Against Despair* (*fankang juewang*) was first published in the March 10, 2010 issue of the small circulation academic literary journal *Literature and Art Research* (*Wenyi yanjiu*), and then in the March 25, 2010 edition of the *Nanfang Weekend*. While *Wenyi yanjiu* established the article's academic legitimacy, the *Nanfang Weekend* ensured the article's mass circulation and sensational effect, a tendency that Han Yuhai had warned against at the onset of the paper's partisan involvement in the "liberal versus new left" debate. To dramatise the impact of the article, the *Nanfang Weekend* resorted to a CCP party journalism convention by forwarding Wang Binbin's article with an editorial commentary that not only presumes Wang Hui guilty, but also claims the necessity of outside intervention to overcome the failure of academic self-discipline. Immediately, the media and Internet exploded with news reports, commentaries, as well as forensic attempts to support/refute the accusation, contributing to the making of a media and Internet spectacle that lasted several months in spring and summer 2010. By July 2010, the controversy had led two opposing groupings of domestic and international scholars to issue their respective open appeals to relevant academic authorities. One group, made up of mostly liberal intellectuals, called upon Wang Hui's employer Tsinghua University and his doctoral degree granter, the Chinese Academic of Social Sciences, to take up the *Nanfang Weekend*'s allegations and launched an investigation; another group, made up of mostly left-leaning international scholars, defended Wang Hui's academic integrity against a malicious media attack (Ou Qinping 2010). Furthermore, the media and Internet spectacle over Wang Hui provoked netizen "Isaiah" – an anonymous doctoral student – to launch a plagiarism case against leading liberal scholar Zhu Xueqin's doctoral dissertation based book on the Internet

(Shi Jiefeng 2010). The "liberal versus new left" intellectual debate over the future of China evolved into the so-called "Wang-Zhu incident" over academic norms, centring on the academic integrity of this debate's two leading scholars.

Academic norms are important. The *Nanfang Weekend* raised a legitimate, and indeed urgent, issue; however, Wang Binbin's mobilisation of symbolic violence and his prosecution-style presentation of what one Western observer characterised as a "pretty thin" case against Wang Hui (Custer 2010),[2] the specific historical and production contexts of Wang Hui's publication and the evolving nature of academic norms in China, as well as the *Nanfang Weekend*'s blatant instrumentalism and its persistent exclusionary practices in the presentation of the case,[3] undermined the high moral grounds both Wang Binbin and *Nanfang Weekend* claimed in the name of promoting professional norms. Moreover, the *Nanfang Weekend*'s agenda-setting role played into the market-oriented media's unspoken bias against the "new left," fed into the logic of media sensationalism, as well as unleashed a collective "cultural unconsciousness" against the academic elite on the Internet. The resulting spectacularisation of academic sectarianism and McCarthy-esque hunt threatened to not only revive Cultural Revolution-style symbolic violence, but also engender a highly cynical version of "anti-intellectual radicalism" that condemns the elite intellectual strata as a whole at best as a vested interested group in the current Chinese social order and at worse as a shameless, corrupt, and unworthy bunch. While it remains to be seen whether the media and Internet spectacle and the "great bourgeois academic cultural revolution" (Blum 2010) it unleashed will contribute to improved academic integrity and the public nature of the Chinese intellectual field, this newest and arguably ugly episode of intellectual publicity served to distract both the media and the academy from engaging the public around urgent political economic and social issues at a time when "serious and open intellectual debate" about visions are indeed urgently needed. By this time, more than a dozen workers at China's iphone marker Foxconn in Shenzhen – no doubt one of the most underrepresented social force in the Chinese media and intellectual fields – had broken into the Chinese and global media spotlights by protesting the inhumanity of their exploitation with a spade of suicides. This has been unfortunate not only for the individual academics involved, but also for China's already highly constrained, or as Timothy Cheek put it, "directed public sphere" (Cheek 2010).

Concluding Remarks

Post-1989 developments in Chinese intellectual and media fields have intersected to not only significantly reshape the politics of intellectual publicity, but also drastically redefine the terms of Chinese political communication. How did the highly dignified herculean figure of the post-Mao Chinese intellectuals in the media of the 1980s degenerate into the target of a cynical anti-intellectual radicalism in the Internet after more than two decades of "direct dialogue" with the West? How did Chinese liberal intellectuals who had not only envisioned a "direct dialogue" with their Western academic counterparts, but also advocated China's assimilation into "mainstream civilisation" end up accusing "Western" intellectuals who came to Wang Hui's defence of "interfering in Chinese academic affairs" (Yin 2010)? What has made Dai Qing, a brave individual who has fought for her own intellectual independence, to utter with such personal conviction of Wang Hui and his type of

"new left" intellectuals' political identity as "accomplices to tyranny" (*zhuangzhi de bangxiong*) and thus of the justice of Wang Binbin's and the *Nanfang Weekend*'s academic norm-masqueraded personal and political attack, even though she conceded that if it were others, the kind of technical shortcomings in Wang Hui's footnotes would have been forgiven?[4]

Symbolised by the *Nanfang Weekend* and liberal intellectual alliance and Zhu Xueqin's depiction of how liberalism had finally made a breakthrough in Chinese intellectual publicity, the Chinese intellectual field as represented by elite liberal intellectuals and market-oriented media outlets with liberal-oriented gatekeepers – have worked together to gain some relative autonomy vis-à-vis the domestic political field. From the perspective of those in the intellectual and media fields who have had to fight against the CCP's central censorship regime, this is a liberal story of struggling against an authoritarian state. The story is certainly a compelling one. After all, not only individuals such as Dai Qing have long been banned from domestic media publicity, even the *Nanfang Weekend* and its liberal intellectual contributors have been censorship victims or have had to exercise self-censorship. It is perhaps this victimisation experience and a binary logic of "you are either with us or against us" that have underscored the *Nanfang Weekend* and Wang Binbin's McCharthy-esque hunt against Wang Hui. This has posed a serious question regarding the power of media itself and the danger of what I call "liberal media instrumentalism" in a media system that ostensibly continues to be dominated by the CCP's own instrumentalist mentality. Along with the struggle for relative media and intellectual autonomy vis-à-vis the state, there are intersecting struggles within the media and intellectuals fields not only over professional norms, but also over the terms of intellectual and ideology hegemony.

In short, a one-dimensional anti-authoritarian narrative pitting reified and unitary media and intellectual fields on the one hand and the Chinese political field as represented by a monolithic central party state on the other no longer, if ever, fully accounts the politics of intellectual publicity in today's China. Within this context, it is important to underscore once again that the *Nanfang Weekend* and similar newspapers are themselves part of the party-state's highly-praised and protected media conglomerates, and thus part of the dominant market authoritarian social order. Similarly, it is no longer, if ever, adequate to conceptualise the political field exclusively in terms of the powers that be at the CCP central propaganda department and posit this field in opposition to the media and intellectuals fields. Within the sub-national level, the *Nanfang Weekend* and its sister publications within the *Nanfang Daily* conglomerate have not only benefited from the political protection of the Guangdong provincial authorities, but also even powerful forces at the CCP central leadership. At the transnational level, from the *Nanfang Weekend*'s "reward" by U.S. President Obama to Liu Xiaobo's Nobel Peace Prize to the international scholarly networks rallying behind the *Nanfang Weekend* and Wang Hui respectively, Chinese media and intellectual struggles over visions and divisions are deeply implicated in global political, media, and intellectual power relations.

Clearly, the pre-1989 days when a single media/intellectual text not only dictated the terms of debate over vision and division but also played into the highest level power struggles in the Chinese political field are over and perhaps for the good. The implosion of *River Elegy*'s self-inflated and unitary image of Chinese intellectuals as the singular and dignified spokesperson for the Chinese people (or even the

savoir of the Chinese people, in competition with the CCP) or the "chosen" group to conduct a "direct dialogue" with the West, is also perhaps not only inevitable, but also a healthy development toward a more democratic society and culture. The age of experts and the age of critics are perhaps not necessarily mutually exclusive. Just as professional intellectuals need a public, the public, despite all its intellectuality in the Gramscian sense, could still benefit from professional intellectuals – as long as the division between mental and manual labour exists and as long as the issue of representation in both the political and discursive realm remains. The question of who speaks for whom in what forum with what authority thus continues to be critically important. Within this context, the ascending power of the *Nanfang Weekend* and liberal intellectual alliance within China's CCP-controlled media system raises a number of questions regarding the new games of Chinese intellectual publicity: while the paper and its liberal intellectuals have been and may continue to be the victims of party censorship, does this necessitate the paper's instrumentalist and highly partisan approach to journalism in its treatment of "new left" intellectuals? If what China's media and liberal intellectuals struggle for is the relative autonomy of the academic and journalistic fields and their mutual constitution into a "public sphere" vis-à-vis the CCP's historically class-based claim to representation, can they accept that there could also be relatively autonomous "new left" voices within such a "public sphere"? Or does the unspoken "bourgeoisie" nature of this "public sphere" necessarily mean the exclusion and suppression of radical socialist voices? And, for China's "new left" intellectuals wishing to act as a thorn on the left side of the party state in imagining a democratic socialist alternative to the current market authoritarian social order, is it possible at all to find a relatively open space in a party-dominated and market-driven media system with a systematic bias against them? Or, will they be condemned to marginal leftist websites and the blogger sphere? Finally, fast forward to spring 2012: with the dramatic explosion of elite division with the Chinese political field and the CCP censorship regime's closure of marginal Chinese leftist websites sympathetic to the more socially-oriented reform policies of deposed former Chongqing party chief and Politburo member Bo Xilai, one wonders, what kind of new configuration of political, intellectual, and media power is emerging in China?

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Notes:

1. Author's personal email correspondence with a prominent left-leaning scholar, supported by a conversation with another scholarl who was included in a preferred mailing list maintained by one of the Nanfang papers to promote a core groups of media sources and to cultivate a particular editorial line.

2. For one of the key articles that refuted Wang Binbin's accusations, see Shu (2010); for English excerpts of the main arguments on both sides, see Lam (2010).

3. According to Wang Hui in an interview, the *Nanfang Weekend* did not contact him for his point of view when it twice published lengthy accusations of Wang Hui on March 25 and April 8, 2010 respectively. Moreover, when Shu Wei, Wang Hui's book editor at Sanlian Press, submitted her article refuting Wang Binbin's accusations, the paper said that it would not be able to publish till after two weeks, and moreover, it would drastically cut her article. Shu Wei eventually published her article on the April 3 issue of *Beijing Youth News* (Shu 2010). It was also clear that Liu Xiaolei, the *Nanfang Weekend* editor involved in the initial publication of Wang Binbin's article, was actively leading an anti-Wang Hui mobilisation outside his normal journalistic duties. See Han (2 August, 2010).

4. Author's personal conversation with Dai Qing, November 9, 2010, Vancouver.

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YUEZHI ZHAO

»KOMUNICIRANJE IN RAZREDNA RAZSLOJENOST NA KITAJSKEM«

UVOD

Namen uvoda je dvojen. Najprej naslavlja aktualni razvoj v kitajskem političnem komuniciranju z analizo domačih in transnacionalnih razsežnosti komunikacijske vojne ob politični drami okrog odmevnega padca člana politbiroja Kitajske komunistične partije Bo Xilaija in zloma njegovega modela razvoja »Chongqing«. Na temelju te analize članek postavlja v kontekst in uvaja nekatera pomembna spoznanja člankov v tokratni številki, da bi z njihovo pomočjo dodatno osvetlil komunikacijske politike v sagi Bo Xilaija. Uvod in celotna številka sta usmerjena v obravnavo komuniciranja, razredne zavesti in razrednega boja glede prihodnjih usmeritev kitajske preobrazbe v sedanjem turbulentnem obdobju globaliziranega informacijskega kapitalizma.

COBISS 1.02

YING-FEN HUANG

DRAMA *BIVANJSKA OMEJENOST*: OBČINSTVA KOT BLAGO, SPEKTAKEL IN FORMIRANJE RAZREDA

Članek proučuje proces formiranja razreda, ki ga obravnava popularna televizijska dramska nadaljevanka Bivanjska omejenost iz leta 2009, v luči spektakularne kapitalistične akumulacije v neoliberalni urbani Kitajski. Izpostavlja napetosti in naklonjenosti, ki nastajajo v procesih oblikovanja razreda znotraj kitajske "družbe spektakla": ločnico med vzpenjajočim se srednjim in delavskim razredom ter zavezništvo med mestnim srednjim razredom, vladajočim političnim razredom ter razredom domačih in tujih kapitalistov. Na eni strani smo priča dejanski razredni interesno-utemeljeni hegemonski enotnosti strankarsko-državnih nosilcev oblasti, domačih zasebnih in transnacionalnih kapitalistov ter nastajajočega srednjega razreda. Na drugi strani globoke ekonomske delitve in družbena nepravičnost, mediatizirane skozi kitajsko državno socialistično ideološko zapuščino, še naprej razvnemajo odpor delavskega razreda.

COBISS 1.01

WU CHANGCHANG

MIKRO-BLOG IN GOVORNO DEJANJE KITAJSKEGA SREDNJEGA SLOJA: PRIMER NESREČE VLAKA 23. JULIJA 2011

Članek proučuje pobude, procese in diskurzivne razporeditve, v katerih so se pripadniki kitajskega srednjega sloja po strahotni železniški nesreči 23. julija 2011 v blogosferi zoperstavili državnemu železniškemu sistemu in celotni kitajski politični strukturi. Analiza poudarja ključno »organsko intelektualno« vlogo novinarjev, pravnikov in javnih intelektualcev pri ustvarjanju »razredne zavesti« in subjektiviteto zaskrbljenega, protislovnega in negotovega omreženega srednjega sloja v kitajski hitro se polarizirajoči družbeni formaciji. Izstopajoča skupinska akcija kitajskega srednjega sloja je sicer bila rezultat številnih naključij, navidezno poenotenje govornih dejanj pa je zabrisalo globoke razpoke znotraj razreda. Naivno liberalistični in protidržavni slogani, značilni za mikroblogerske razprave, so končno pregnali in onemogočili kakršnokoli možnost za razpravo in spodbujanje konkretnih procesov reforme kitajskega sistema državne lastnine in demokratizacije kitajske politike.

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GUOXIN XING

SPLETNI AKTIVIZEM IN PROTI-JAVNA SFERA: ŠTUDIJA PRIMERA ODPORA MIGRANTSKIH DELAVCEV

Kitajski državnonadzorovani in komercializirani mediji in internetna ekologija imajo inherentne omejitve, ko gre za prikazovanje interesov delavcev kot industrijskih državljanov. Izhajajoč iz zahodnih teoretičnih kritik »javne sfere« in zgodovinske literature o delavskem boju za neodvisno komunikacijo v porevolucionarni Kitajski, članek uporablja obširno študijo primera kot temelj dvodelne analize, ki nazorno razkriva na eni strani vse bolj izključujočo in prokapitalistično naravo obstoječe kitajske javne sfere, na drugi strani pa delavsko prilastitev razpoložljivih tehnoloških sredstev za neodvisno komunikacijsko prakso. Članek opozarja na možno vzpostavitev kitajskega delavstva kot proti-javnosti v globoko razdeljeni razredni družbi na Kitajskem.

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WANNING SUN

PODREJENOST PO KITAJSKO: PODEŽELSKI MIGRANTI, KULTURNI AKTIVIZEM IN USTVARJANJE DIGITALNEGA FILMA

Tako kot domači medijski aktivisti drugod po svetu sedaj tudi ruralni migranti na Kitajskem uporabljajo digitalne video kamere za dokumentiranje svojega življenja in dela v kitajskem mestu. Tako ponujajo poglede, ki so tudi alternativni in kritični do prevladujoče kulture. Kakšna politična in kulturna socializacija je potemtakem potrebna, da bi se podeželskega migranta spremenilo v kulturnega aktivista? Kakšne vrste aktivistični imaginarij se je razvil iz tovrstnega kulturnega aktivizma? Kakšna je vloga nevladnih organizacij in kulturnih elit pri razvoju tega kulturnega fenomena in, končno, kateri izzivi in možnosti se temu razvoju nakazujejo v prihodnosti? Članek naslavlja omenjena obširna vprašanja z dvema obsežnima študijama: potovanje ruralnega migranta v aktivistično filmsko ustvarjanje ter pričakovanja in frustracije filmskega projekta o domačih delavcih.

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YUEZHI ZHAO

VAŠA ODDAJA JE UKINJENA: POLITIKE INTELEKTUALNE PUBLICITETE V KITAJSKEM HRABREM NOVEM MEDIJSKEM SVETU

Članek proučuje vse pomembnejšo komunikacijsko politiko med mediji in intelektualnimi polji v kitajskem hrabrem novem medijskem svetu. Na začetku izpostavi ključne dejavnike, ki so oblikovali razvojne politike intelektualne publicitete na Kitajskem po letu 1989. Nato oriše globoke delitve med liberalizmom in novo levico znotraj kitajskega intelektualnega polja ter vse večjo moč tednika Nanfang Weekend in liberalnega intelektualnega zavezništva znotraj kitajskega medijskega sistema, ki ga nadzoruje kitajska komunistična partija. V študiji primera, ki sledi, avtorica proučuje povezovanje destruktivne logike medijskega senzacionalizma, akademske korupcije, ideološke polarizacije in »liberalno medijskega instrumentalizma« v spektakularizaciji intelektualnih notranjih bojev in odvračanju pozornosti tako medijev kot akademskih krogov od angažiranja javnosti ob ključnih politično-ekonomskih in družbenih temah dneva.

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Book:

Novak, Janez and Peter Kodre. 2007. *Title of the Book: With Subtitle.* Place: Publisher.

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