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MAO'S WAR ON WOMEN: THE PERPETUATION OF GENDER HIERARCHIES  
THROUGH YIN-YANG COSMOLOGY IN THE CHINESE COMMUNIST  
PROPAGANDA OF THE MAO ERA, 1949-1976

by

Al D. Roberts

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree

of

MASTER OF ARTS

in

History

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2019

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## ABSTRACT

Mao's War on Women: The Perpetuation of Gender Hierarchies Through Yin-Yang  
Cosmology in the Chinese Communist Propaganda of the Mao Era, 1949-1976

by

Al D. Roberts, Master of Arts

Utah State University, 2019

Major Professor: Dr. Clayton Brown  
Department: History

Recent Western social theory has posited the idea that gender and sexuality are not binaries, but a socially constructed spectrum. Even so, the history of sexuality often follows a dichotomous male/female discourse since many past societies have socially constructed their own understanding of sexuality along those lines. Communist China, inheriting a tradition of conceptualizing sex as a contrast between yin and yang, has proliferated this sexual model through its political propaganda, despite the Party's stated goals of eliminating "feudal remnants" and promoting gender equality. This binary effects a disadvantage for women as well as ethnic minorities and the underprivileged.

The women in propaganda posters, comic books, and stage productions were certainly more powerful than their grandmothers, who adhered to the strict Confucian rules of female conduct in "old China." However, regardless of women's new elevated position, the Party subtly cast femininity as inferior to masculinity in two ways. First, they reinforced domestic and emotional stereotypes which prohibited female characters



from fully participating in the proletarian revolution. This is rooted in the Daoist philosophical concept of yin and yang, which held that yin, the natural essence of femininity, caused women to be passive and subservient, while yang, the essence of masculinity, caused men to be tougher and more powerful. Second, the Party framed the political discourse in terms of black and white where a person was either a true communist hero or a decadent bourgeois villain.

The latter is significant since, by portraying the Party with masculine yang, and capitalism with feminine yin, the People's Republic of China drew an implicit connection between femininity and the evils of capitalism, imperialism, and individualism. Laboring under such a paradigm, the Party's efforts to promote gender equality were doomed to fall flat. When Mao died in 1976, his successors continued his policies of promoting a yin-yang binarism which has continually punished femininity by limiting women's political influence, by discriminating against the LGBT community, and by oppressing ethnic and religious minority groups, all of which the Party has depicted in terms of "inferior" yin.

(231 pages)

## PUBLIC ABSTRACT

Mao's War on Women: The Perpetuation of Gender Hierarchies Through Yin-Yang  
Cosmology in the Chinese Communist Propaganda of the Mao Era, 1949-1976

Al D. Roberts

The Chinese Communist Party established the People's Republic of China in 1949 with the intention of creating a social utopia with equality between the sexes and China's diverse ethnic groups. However, by portraying gender, ethnicity, and politics in propaganda along the lines of yin and yang, the Party perpetuated a situation of oppression for women and minorities.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my committee members, Professors Clayton Brown, Julia Gossard, Li Guo, and Dominic Sur. Thank you, Dr. Brown, for helping me to become a better writer, and for coaching me how to navigate the swift currents of Chinese history. Thank you, Dr. Gossard, for your invaluable encouragement and advice, and for introducing me to the history of gender and sexuality. Thank you, Dr. Guo, for cultivating my love of the Chinese language, especially its poetry and literature. And thank you, Dr. Sur, for helping me to understand the plight of China's minorities, for keeping me on my toes, and for teaching me the fundamentals of Buddhist practice—this project would have killed me without meditation.

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I owe special gratitude to Dr. Frank Parker and Tom McIntyre. In opening your home, you gave me a quiet place when I needed it the most. I will be forever grateful for your friendship and generosity.

Finally, I owe the largest debt of gratitude to my loving parents. This journey has been well over a thousand miles, but you have been with me from the very first step. I love you both more than words can say.

Al D. Roberts

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## ABBREVIATIONS

- CCP*** The Chinese Communist Party was established in 1921. In 1949, the Communist Party won the civil war by defeating the Nationalist Party (referred to in this thesis as the Guomindang, although the “Kuomintang” is a common romanization). Mao Zedong assumed leadership of the Party in 1935 until his death in 1976.
- CRG*** Beneath Mao, the Cultural Revolution Group (中央文革小组) was the de facto ruling body in China from the start of the Cultural Revolution in 1966 until Mao’s death in 1976. It was headed by Mao’s wife, Jiang Qing, who used her authority to wholly “revolutionize” the propaganda ministry.
- PLA*** The People’s Liberation Army was established on 1 August 1927 as the military arm of the Chinese Communist Party.
- PRC*** The People’s Republic of China was established on 1 October 1949 by the Chinese Communist Party.

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION: A BINARY WORLD

On the first day of October 1949, Mao Zedong, Chairman of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), stood atop the Gate of Heavenly Peace at the southern edge of the Forbidden City and proclaimed to the assembled masses that “the Chinese people have stood up.” This moment marked the end of China’s “Century of Humiliation” (*bainian guochi* 百年国耻), a hundred years characterized by hordes of people addicted to illegally smuggled British opium, European colonization, Japanese invasion, and civil war. With the establishment of the Communist Party’s consolidated power over mainland China, the citizens of the new People’s Republic eagerly awaited their chance to start building a utopia free from class oppression, ethnic discrimination, and gender inequality. The Party made impressive strides toward these goals, but it ultimately failed.<sup>1</sup> This work investigates the reconstruction of traditional Chinese conceptions of gender, as well as its intersection with race and class, by examining the disparate portrayals of men and women in Chinese Communist propaganda during the Mao era

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<sup>1</sup> Examples can be found in Roseann Lake’s *Leftover in China: Women Shaping the World’s Next Superpower*, which explores different examples of how traditional Confucian attitudes toward women have carried over into the twenty-first century. This includes the idea that unmarried women past the age of twenty-five are “left overs” (page 25), and the common fantasy of Chinese men to marry someone who is beautiful, doting, hardworking, and “willing to turn a blind eye when they cheat” (page 56). Further demonstration can be found in Mei Fong’s *One Child: The Story of China’s Most Radical Experiment*, which provides examples of forced sterilizations (page 24, 67); coerced abortions (page 61, 68); daughter abandonment and sex-selective abortions caused by a preference for sons (page 109); laws regarding domestic violence (page 115); and the widespread attitude of single men that a bride must obey her husband and her in-laws (page 119). The Party also perpetuated class distinction by dividing society into the binary categories of good “red” communists and bourgeois “black” individuals: see Liang Heng’s memoir *Son of the Revolution* (New York: Vintage Books, 1984): 66-8. Examples of ethnic inequality are most visible in the Tibetan and Uighur populations: see chapters nine and ten in John F. Avedon, *In Exile from the Land of Snows: The Definitive Account of the Dalai Lama and Tibet Since the Chinese Conquest* (repr., New York: Vintage Books, 2015); Canyon Sam, *Sky Train: Tibetan Women on the Edge of History* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2009); and Chris Buckley, “Anti-Islam Detention Camps in China,” *New York Times* (New York City, NY), Sept. 8, 2018.

(1949 to 1976). Since Confucianism became the official state ideology of the Han Dynasty (202 BCE to 220 CE), traditional gender roles were shaped largely by the philosophical principles of the family-state compact and the Daoist doctrine of yin and yang. Mao intended to annihilate these traditional beliefs in favor of a “modern” Soviet model of gender equality, but custom was not ultimately replaced by the new socialist paradigm. Instead, the two merged into a new system which synthesized Confucian patriarchy with socialist prudism.<sup>2</sup> This synthetic gender paradigm undercut the Party’s ostensible goal of gender equality by reinforcing a binary patriarchal structure in which Han men were the pinnacle of society while all other groups fell into an intersectional hierarchy of oppression which has carried over into the post-socialist era.

Incorporating “gender” into Western historical methodology is a relatively recent development. With the rise of second wave feminism in the 1960s and 1970s, it was Natalie Zemon Davis who first reminded historians that they should tell the stories of both men and women, rather than only the “great men.”<sup>3</sup> Ten years later, beyond simply incorporating women to the historical narrative, Joan Scott redirected the trajectory of Western historiography by conceptualizing “gender” as both a subject of inquiry and as a method of conducting historical examinations of perceived power dynamics between sexed bodies, and that the study of these power dynamics will invariably intersect with

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<sup>2</sup> This new “socialist prudism” is expressed succinctly by Zheng Tiantian in *Tongzhi Living: Men Attracted to Men in Postsocialist China*: Mao reinforces the “heterosexual, marital, and reproductive sex model” because “sex for reasons other than reproduction was deemed deviant and abominable and so needed to be policed and regulated. These forms of sex included premarital sex, extramarital sex, prostitution, and same-sex acts. Sexual desires were demonized as lowly, corrupt, decadent, and incompatible with the state, because sex was believed to weaken, sap, and debilitate people’s energy that should be devoted to building the state” (page 41).

<sup>3</sup> Natalie Zemon Davis, “Women’s History in Transition: the European Case,” *Feminist Studies* 3 (1975-1976): 90.

race and class.<sup>4</sup> Judith Butler took Scott's idea one step further by arguing that gender (and even biological sex for that matter) are not essential characteristics, but a repetitive set of ritualized social performances that continuously reaffirm and simultaneously reconstruct one's gender identity.<sup>5</sup> Today, with growing acceptance of the LGBT movement, social theorists posit the idea that sex and gender are spectra wherein there are a wide array of sexual identities.

When applying Scott's theory to non-Western cultures, Gail Hershatte and Wang Zheng recognize that gender is intrinsically linked to hierarchical power relations, but, using China as an example, they also claim that the whole of Scott's arguments are not universally applicable to all cultures.<sup>6</sup> Many Anglophone scholars accidentally approach Chinese history from a Western Orientalist perspective by ignoring the Chinese scholarly discourse on gender.<sup>7</sup> Besides the obvious cultural variances, Hershatte and Wang point to linguistic differences that create barriers to international academic discourse. They use the example of *sex* and *gender*. In English, it is generally accepted that *sex* refers to the biological reproductive distinctions between "males" and "females," and that *gender*

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<sup>4</sup> Joan Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," *The American Historical Review* 91, no. 5 (1986): 1054, 1067.

<sup>5</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (repr., New York: Routledge, 2006), 152. Butler develops this idea by analyzing Foucault's research of an intersex individual named Herculine who, despite having been raised as a girl, was later declared to be a man and was compelled to perform all of the social rituals expected of men (pages 132-3, 136). Butler emphasizes her argument of gender performativity by quoting Simone de Beauvoir's claim that "one is not born a woman, but rather becomes one" (page 151). Zheng Tiantian, in *Tongzhi Living*, provides an example of a contemporarily performed masculinity within the *Tongzhi* (gay) community where performing a masculine role means not just behaving in a manly way, but keeping a physical distance from other men, displaying a hyper-macho attitude toward women, getting a wife/girlfriend, and having children (pages 152-3).

<sup>6</sup> Gail Hershatte and Wang Zheng, "Chinese History: A Useful Category of Gender Analysis," *The American Historical Review* 113, no. 5 (2008): 1407.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 1412.



refers to the socially constructed “masculine” and “feminine” identity of individuals regardless of their biological sex. However, Chinese has until now lacked any linguistic distinction between these two terms and translates both “sex” and “gender” as *xingbie* 性别—literally “different natures.”<sup>8</sup>

Furthermore, while Scott has helped modern Western sociologists re-conceptualize gender as a spectrum rather than as a compartmentalized binary,<sup>9</sup> Hershatte and Wang point to the Chinese historical dichotomy of *nan/nü* 男/女 (male/female) and claim that this binary was a “foundational organizing principle of society,” and that even though Mao and the CCP tried to erase certain aspects of the past, the *nan/nü* binary still exerts a strong influence in contemporary ideology.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, if we accept that gender is a socially performed construct, then we also have to accept that a particular society can construct their conceptions of gender to have a reified binary essence and that they will perform those genders according to social expectations. If so, then it is also important for scholars to study the gendered power relationships of that community as though they were an essentialized binary because that is how they have been constructed. This is the case with Chinese history. In China, *xingbie* refers to sexual differentiation and reproduction, but in order for Western historians to successfully consider aspects of *gender*, then, we ought to frame our historical analysis philosophically within the Daoist paradigm of yin and yang.

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<sup>8</sup> Hershatte and Wang, “Chinese History,” 1417. See also Howard Chiang, *Sexuality in China: Histories of Power and Pleasure* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2018), 3.

<sup>9</sup> Scott, “Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis,” 1065.

<sup>10</sup> Hershatte and Wang, “Chinese History: A Useful Category of Gender Analysis,” 1412, 1420.

In her study of the hierarchical disparity between men and women in propaganda posters, Harriet Evans attributed the CCP's patriarchal bias to biological differences which limited the Party's liberation of women because they were seen as weaker, less creative, less astute, and that women were driven by smaller interests and concerns than men.<sup>11</sup> It is certainly possible that biological differentiation exerted a strong influence on the CCP's policies, but what Evans stops just short of articulating is that the CCP's conception of gender is primarily based in the Daoist philosophical doctrine of yin-yang (阴-阳) dualism. Essentially, this holds that the universe is composed of two binary forces, each of which simultaneously supports and contradicts its opposite. Consequently, both yin and yang are best understood in contradistinction to each other. Originally, although still opposites, both terms were more neutral and less freighted with assumptions of value, but by the establishment of the People's Republic they had become significantly more Manichean. Yang is generally associated with positivity, energy, heat, life, light, strength, activity, and masculinity; whereas yin is associated with negativity, stasis, coldness, death, darkness, weakness, passivity, and femininity. Within this framework, all things in the universe contain both yin and yang, but in different measures. For example, every man contains a little bit of yin, but he is mostly composed of yang—the more yang a man possesses, the manlier he will be.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Harriet Evans, "Comrade Sisters: Gendered Bodies and Spaces," in *Picturing Power in the People's Republic of China: Posters of the Cultural Revolution*, ed. Harriet Evans and Stephanie Donald (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 1999), 64; Hershatter and Wang, "Chinese History: A Useful Category of Gender Analysis," 1410.

<sup>12</sup> Joseph A. Adler, *Chinese Religious Traditions* (London: Pearson, 2002), 59-66; Arthur Waley, *Three Ways of Thought in Ancient China* (repr., New York: Routledge, 2005), 34.

Beginning in August 1966, just after Mao instigated the Cultural Revolution, the Party launched a campaign to attack old customs, old culture, old habits, and old ideas—referred to as the “Four Olds.” Many scholars dismiss Daoism and Confucianism because of the Party’s fervid drive to eliminate feudal religion from society, which it saw as unenlightened superstition. The CCP was only partially successful in doing so since both of these ideologies shaped—and continue to shape—the modern Chinese sociopolitical landscape.<sup>13</sup> Yin and yang have shaped Chinese social and sexual relationships for thousands of years. For example, in his treatise on male homosexuality in ancient China, Bret Hinsch explains that normally when men paired off sexually, the man who performed the insertive role would have more yang (he would be older and would have a higher socioeconomic status), and the man who played the submissive role would be poorer and younger (which made him appear more feminine), and therefore he was thought to have more yin.<sup>14</sup> During the 1930s, a Shanghai newspaper published stories about Yao Jinping, a woman who claimed to have become a man, and A’nidu, a woman with androgynous physical features. Twenty years later, Xie Jianshun, an intersex soldier from Taiwan was likewise built by the press into a figure of public spectacle. In all three cases, the newspapers framed the discourse around these people in terms of yin and yang, thereby highlighting their cultural resilience as terms of gender description.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> An example of this this can be seen in the Chinese words for “positive”—*yangxing* 阳性, literally “has a *yang* nature”—and “negative”—*yinxing* 阴性, “has a yin nature.” Similar philosophical phenomena are found in the West as well; nobody identifies as a true Platonist, but all of Western society has been shaped by Plato’s ideas. In his book *Anatomy of Chinese*, Perry Link provides further examples of ancient culture that escaped the Communists’ purge of “Four Olds” (pages 4, 5).

<sup>14</sup> Bret Hinsch, *Passions of the Cut Sleeve* (Berkeley: UC Press, 1992), 9.

<sup>15</sup> Chiang, *Sexuality in China*, 131-2, 134.

The sexual connections to yin and yang are further highlighted by the Chinese language itself. One of the words for “penis” is *yangju* 阳具. One literal translation of this word is “sun instrument,” although “tool of yang” is just as valid. Conversely, one of the Chinese words for “vagina” is *yindao* 阴道, literally “shadow road” or “path of yin.” Even people who fall outside the traditional binary are subject to it. For example, a yin-yang person (*yinyangren* 阴阳人) may be either bisexual or intersex.<sup>16</sup>

Chen Xiaomei encourages scholars of Chinese history to “explore how [propaganda] posters present an ambiguous space where different meanings blur and overlap, without resorting to binary oppositions.”<sup>17</sup> On the other hand, while freely acknowledging that gender and sexuality are spectra, not binary systems, it is still important to understand that gender norms—as recognized and redefined by the CCP and by the general public during the Mao era—are in fact largely presented in a yin-yang binary. This does not deny that there are obvious exceptions. Anchee Min’s *Red Azalea* is a prominent example of the twilit shading in the sinuous void between yin and yang, but understanding this binary reveals that portrayals of women in propaganda do not in fact liberate women or promote gender equality.<sup>18</sup> Feminine yin was still subjected to masculine yang in Maoist China. As such, it is important to understand that the Party’s

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<sup>16</sup> Howard Chiang, *After Eunuchs: Science, Medicine, and the Transformation of Sex in Modern China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), 200-1.

<sup>17</sup> Chen Xiaomei, “Growing Up with Posters in the Maoist Era,” in Evans and Donald, 118.

<sup>18</sup> Anchee Min, *Red Azalea* (New York: Random House, 1994). Min’s memoir recalls her story as a sent-down youth to Red Fire Farm where she engages in a lesbian relationship with Yan, her Party Secretary. She also tells the story of a woman who once disguised herself to look like a man in order to enter a public bathhouse where she would massage the “sun instrument” of strangers (page 229).

declaration of gender equality simply meant that all genders were not equal to each other, but that all sexes were in fact only equally free to be masculine.

The hierarchical power dynamics of yin and yang have persisted through the Mao era, not just in spite of the CCP's relentless propaganda, but actually because of it and its performative nature. Chapter two focuses on portrayals of power in propaganda posters by considering four main arguments. First, the prominence of the Party's ideals and the creation of new class distinctions; second, the deification of Mao and his cult of personality which elevated Mao and his inner circle thereby creating a pantheon of gods, but neglecting the creation of a corresponding pantheon of goddesses; third, the masculinization of women and the absence of feminized men; and fourth, the feminization of China's ethnic minorities with special attention on the Tibetans and Uighurs.

Chapter three focuses on comic books produced after the Party took steps to nationalize the publishing industry. Because nationalization occurred in phases, discussions of gender and power evolved in sync with the political events affecting publishers. This meant that earlier comics melded old and new ideas about gender, whereas later comics in the 1970s were doctrinaire in their presentation.

Chapter four examines the officially canonized dramatic performances on stage and in film, commonly referred to as the "model works." These were especially important to Jiang Qing, Mao Zedong's wife and dean of arts during the Cultural Revolution, who oversaw all aspects of their creation and distribution. Because they were so high-profile, their political importance cannot be underestimated. Their depictions of gender and ideological struggle are emphasized in several ways, specifically

in the organization of the film credits, and in the CCP's depictions of health and sickness, and in targeted manipulation of the stage lighting.

A common theme throughout this thesis is a policy established by Jiang Qing and her court of followers during the Cultural Revolution called the Three Prominences. This required that in any form of propaganda, the most visible character should be the most politically pure. Because the Party strove to portray itself as strong, men often took center-stage. The intention was to highlight the new glory of the new Chinese society in contrast to feudal China's weak, feminine, and foot-bound past. Although men were typically the most prominent, women often took the focus. But the model women shown in propaganda, with their men's clothing and technical savvy, demonstrated the masculine yang of the party as "an extension of the new socialist nation and the very antithesis of old China, often represented as the 'sick man of East Asia'" when the government of the Qing dynasty was too weak to defend the Middle Kingdom from the onslaught of foreign trading concessions, extraterritorial rights, Russian encroachment, and a series of unequal treaties.<sup>19</sup> In other words, the CCP's propaganda campaigns were not intended to liberate women from oppression, but to free China from a century of international humiliation caused by an excess of yin.

The script of the CCP's propaganda ministry was primarily drawn from Chairman Mao's 1942 speech at the Forum on Art and Literature convened at the revolutionary headquarters in Yan'an.<sup>20</sup> Mao declared that artists and writers must not work for the

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<sup>19</sup> Daisy Yan Du, "Socialist Modernity in the Wasteland: Changing Representations of the Female Tractor Driver in China, 1949-1964," *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture* 29, no. 1 (2017): 64. 66.

<sup>20</sup> John Gittings, "Excess and Enthusiasm," in Evans and Donald, 29.

sake of art itself, but that they must serve the political interests of the people.<sup>21</sup> While this may sound like a promotion of utopian ideals, “serving the people” simply meant that art and literature followed at the discretion of the Party, which saw itself as the representative of the people.<sup>22</sup> This may sound sinister, but the motives of the propaganda ministry were not secret. Significant portions of Mao’s 1942 speech were reprinted in *The Little Red Book*, which was a compilation of the Great Helmsman’s speeches between the 1920s and the 1960s. Marshal Lin Biao, Mao’s right-hand deputy originally assembled the volume in the mid-1960s to be a tract of Mao’s personality cult within the armed forces, but a few months after its publication it became so universal that by the late 1960s, the entire populace carried *The Little Red Book* everywhere, memorized passages from it, and treated it with the reverence of scripture.<sup>23</sup> Included in Mao’s teachings is the notion that literature and art must be “powerful weapons for uniting and educating the people” and also for “attacking and exterminating our enemies,”<sup>24</sup> and that Communist art must combine matter and form to be both revolutionary in content and beautiful in style.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Mao Zedong, *Mao Zhuxi Yulu* [Quotations from Chairman Mao Zedong] (Beijing: Waiwen Chubanshe, 1966), 232-3.

<sup>22</sup> Stefan R. Landsberger, “The Deification of Mao: Religious Imagery and Practices during the Cultural Revolution and Beyond,” *China’s Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution: Master Narratives and Post-Mao Counternarratives*, ed. Woei Lien Chong (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2002), 143.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 146.

<sup>24</sup> Mao, *Mao Zhuxi Yulu*, 233-4.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 234-5. See also Wm. Theodore De Bary and Richard Lufrano, *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, vol. 2, *From 1600 to the Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 443.

Artistic propaganda was omnipresent since the Party's inception, but it was during the Cultural Revolution when, with Mao's wife Jiang Qing as the "standard-bearer" for the humanities, "politics and art [became] irrevocably intertwined."<sup>26</sup> In her own speeches to artists and writers, Jiang frequently stressed that the artistic elements of any given work were secondary to its revolutionary content.<sup>27</sup> Artists who failed to comply with the rigorous standards she set were treated harshly. Jung Chang recalled the story of a poet named Bian who fought with Chang's mother against the Guomindang in Manchuria. He was talented, but was driven to suicide because the Party wanted "propaganda, not self-expression."<sup>28</sup> The importance of Mao's directives in 1942 highlight the yin-yang binary of all power relationships in Chinese Communist society, not merely relationships of gender:

The [Cultural Revolution] used ideology and culture to divide society into two radically simplified classes of people, friend or foe, new or old, proletarian or capitalist. During the Cultural Revolution period, art was used as an ideological weapon by Mao in the process of social redefinition and assertion of totalitarian control.<sup>29</sup>

The early years of the Cultural Revolution saw the spontaneous formation of the Red Guards. Responding to Mao's calls to "bombard the headquarters" and that "it is right to rebel," the Red Guards were essentially roving gangs of uniformed teenagers who traveled across China purging remnants of traditional society by defacing religious

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<sup>26</sup> Richard King and Jan Walls, "Introduction: Vibrant Images of a Turbulent Decade," *Art in Turmoil: The Chinese Cultural Revolution, 1966-76*, ed. Richard King (British Columbia: University of British Columbia Press, 2010), 5-6.

<sup>27</sup> "Jiang Qing's Discussion with Arts Workers, November 1966," *Art and China's Revolution*, ed. Melissa Chiu and Zheng Shengtian (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 220.

<sup>28</sup> Jung Chang, *Wild Swans: Three Daughters of China* (repr., New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003): 154.

<sup>29</sup> Kuiyi Shen, "Propaganda Posters and Art during the Cultural Revolution," in Chiu and Zheng, 149.



artifacts, burning books, and persecuting families from wealthy or privileged backgrounds. Mao and the Party only managed to restore order by compelling Red Guard units to move to the countryside in order to study class struggle directly from the peasants. Many of them were stranded there for years, and some were never permitted to return to their homes in the city, simply becoming peasants themselves. But it is particularly in the rural areas that we see how entrenched traditional Confucian values were within Chinese society. These Red Guards spent their youth growing up in the cities where they were taught that “men and women are the same”<sup>30</sup> and that “women can hold up half of the sky.”<sup>31</sup> From there, they were sent to the countryside where their ideas about gender equality ran up against 2500 years of patriarchal tradition.<sup>32</sup>

Ding Ling was one of the CCP’s early generation of high ranking cadres, although by the summer of 1957 she “was labeled as the number-one rightist in China.”<sup>33</sup> In 1941 she recalled an experience in the rural hamlet of Xiacun. A young woman from the village had recently returned home after escaping from Japanese captivity where she had been repeatedly gang raped. Xiacun was in a region held by the Communists, and the residents had ostensibly received training in communist ideology, but they still treated this girl with scorn and contempt because she no longer possessed her virtue.<sup>34</sup> When

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<sup>30</sup> Wenqi Yang and Fei Yan, “The Annihilation of Femininity in Mao’s China: Gender inequality of Sent-Down Youth During the Cultural Revolution,” *China Information* 31, no. 1 (2017): 64.

<sup>31</sup> Shen, “Propaganda Posters and Art during the Cultural Revolution,” 159.

<sup>32</sup> Yang and Yan, “The Annihilation of Femininity,” 64-5.

<sup>33</sup> Chang, *Wild Swans*, 264.

<sup>34</sup> Ding Ling, *I Myself Am a Woman: Selected Writings of Ding Ling*, trans. Tani Barlow (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989), 302-315.

one female Red Guard was sent into exile thirty years later, contending with the village elders got her nowhere even if she premised her claims from *The Little Red Book*. The leaders “just ignored her and said women had no right to argue with men.”<sup>35</sup>

Traditional attitudes about women and sex blended easily with Mao’s ideas about “spiritual pollution” and “Communist morality.”<sup>36</sup> Jung Chang, who was a Red Guard herself during the Cultural Revolution, related how one of her classmates came home pregnant from a communist pilgrimage to Beijing. Because of this, she was beaten by her father and subjected to the shame and ridicule of her family. She subsequently hanged herself. Chang reflected that unfortunately, “this medieval concept of shame” was not one of the Four Olds presented to the Red Guards for destruction.<sup>37</sup>

Anchee Min related a similar experience from her own time as a rusticated youth. While working on the Red Fire Farm, one of her comrades, Little Green, was ambushed by the entire company while she and her “bookish lover” were in coitus.<sup>38</sup> This was a serious transgression because “a good female comrade was supposed to devote all her energy, her youth, to the revolution; she was not permitted to think about men” until she was expected to get married in her late twenties. The penalties for fornication were social ostracism for the woman and disgrace for her family.<sup>39</sup> As for Little Green’s lover, he was executed for rape.<sup>40</sup> Consequently, Little Green herself had a nervous breakdown

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<sup>35</sup> Yang and Yan, “The Annihilation of Femininity,” 75.

<sup>36</sup> Chang, *Wild Swans*, 220.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 395.

<sup>38</sup> Min, *Red Azalea*, 65.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 64.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 66.

and, like Ophelia, drowned herself in the river.<sup>41</sup> This experience and many others taught Min that immoral women were “worn shoes” and “porcelain with scars.” Afterward, she resolved to avoid the company of men.<sup>42</sup>

In considering the “repressive hypothesis,” Michel Foucault claimed that by repressing sexuality, society will in fact only discourse about sexuality even more.<sup>43</sup> Such is the case with Communist China, which required the documentation of sexual confessions and the creation of big character posters denouncing sexual crimes.<sup>44</sup> Simply by denigrating eroticism as “spiritual pollution,” the CCP empowered people’s erotic drives by recasting sex as an act of rebellion.<sup>45</sup> Much like the Junior Anti-Sex League of George Orwell’s *1984*, the Chinese under Mao were expected to sublimate their sexual instincts into building the socialist state.<sup>46</sup> As such, the very act of expressing sexual desire became bourgeois, individualist, and counterrevolutionary.<sup>47</sup> Because the panopticon of Chinese society was so invasive, the only “safe” places for lovers and masturbators to indulge themselves were the dark corners of public parks in the quiet

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<sup>41</sup> Min, *Red Azalea*, 67, 133.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 71-2. See also Chang, *Wild Swans*, 524.

<sup>43</sup> Michel Foucault, “We ‘Other Victorians’ from ‘The History of Sexuality, Volume I,’” *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 298-300.

<sup>44</sup> Shana Ye, “A Reparative Return to ‘Queer Socialism’: Male Same-Sex Desire in the Cultural Revolution,” in Chiang, 148-9.

<sup>45</sup> Wendy Larson, “Never This Wild: Sexing the Cultural Revolution,” *Modern China* 25, no. 4 (1999): 423.

<sup>46</sup> George Orwell, *1984* (repr., New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2003), 97, 148. See also Chiang, *Sexuality in China*, 10-11.

<sup>47</sup> Larson, “Never This Wild,” 429-31; Ye, “A Reparative Return to ‘Queer Socialism,’” 156.

moments between patrols.<sup>48</sup> Samuel Chotzinoff's assessment of gay intimacy in New York City during the first third of the twentieth century is just as apt in describing Maoist China: "privacy could only be had in public."<sup>49</sup>

Mao and the state became the sole object of adoration in the lives of the population. In the early 1950s, even showing affection for one's children became a symptom of "divided loyalties," although the Party relaxed this attitude by the mid-1960s, just prior to the onset of the Cultural Revolution.<sup>50</sup> Anything that demonstrated a sense of individual will was considered bourgeois, and was therefore immoral at best and criminal at worst. Falling in love from a chance meeting was a sign of depravity.<sup>51</sup> After all, love was selfish, selfishness was individualist, and individualism in a communal society was bourgeois. Every action was political, and nothing—not even one's personal thoughts and emotions—was private.<sup>52</sup> Even suicide was criminalized because it put the individual will over the will of the people.<sup>53</sup> What is more, throughout Chinese history, suicide was a "traditional gesture of [political] protest" and was hence construed as a lack of faith in Mao and the Communist Party.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 201-3; Min, *Red Azalea*, 291-2.

<sup>49</sup> George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World 1890-1940* (New York: Basic Books, 1994), 202.

<sup>50</sup> Chang, *Wild Swans*, 251, 307.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 363.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 153.

<sup>53</sup> Ji-li Jiang, *Red Scarf Girl: A Memoir of the Cultural Revolution* (New York: Harpercollins, 1997), 114-5.

<sup>54</sup> Chang, *Wild Swans*, 94, 345.

The placement of yang over yin in Party propaganda is demonstrative of Joan Scott's analysis that "emergent rulers have legitimized domination, strength, central authority, and ruling power as masculine" and that "enemies, outsiders, subversives, [and] weakness" are depicted as feminine, and that these rulers—including Chairman Mao Zedong—have upheld laws and customs that "put women in their place."<sup>55</sup> In other words, it is not that women qua women need to be controlled, but that "control" itself is socially conceived as masculine. Therefore, to suppress the feminine is to exalt the masculine and thus assert control. Or, to phrase this in a Chinese context, Mao and the CCP understood it as their birthright to exercise yang—the masculine force of power, control, domination, and strength—to wage war on the yin-possessed minorities of the steppes, the children of landlords, and femininity in general. By proclaiming an end to the Century of Humiliation, Mao was repudiating China's tradition of weakness and submission. His successors have changed tack in economics by opening China to foreign commerce and intellectual exchange, but they have all maintained Mao's social policies by censoring feminist and LGBT activists, and by curtailing the rights of minorities.<sup>56</sup> The Chinese Communist Party has, without fail, reaffirmed the ascendancy of yang over yin.

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<sup>55</sup> Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," 1072.

<sup>56</sup> Javier Hernandez and Zoe Mou, "Chinese Social Media Site Reverses Gay Content Ban After Uproar," *New York Times* (New York City, NY), Apr. 16, 2018.

## CHAPTER II

## FROZEN FACES: PROPAGANDIC FOUNDATIONS IN PARTY POSTERS

The posters had a great impact on my life. They taught me to be selfless and to be loyal to Mao and Communism. To be able to feel closer to Mao, I filled my house with posters. I looked at Mao before I closed my eyes at night and again when I woke. When I saved a few pennies, I would go to the bookstores to buy new Mao posters.

—Anchee Min, *Chinese Propaganda Posters*

One of the most important sources for our understanding of gender in the Mao era is the propaganda poster. Each one is a window into the world of Mao's idealized conception of a communist utopia, of which gender is an essential component. For the historian, each poster presents a tableau that helps us to understand the CCP's vision for the future. But for the average Chinese person who lived through the Mao era, posters were a pervasive advertisement that served as a standard of moral rectitude. As Chen Xiaomei later recalled, "I grew up in a world where posters remembered, talked back, and also constructed and reconstructed who I was and what was socially expected of me."<sup>1</sup> Posters hung from every public surface, and their bright colors, heroic subjects, and stylized political messages were designed for instant comprehension by the public who were thus inculcated with a sense of the Party's ideals. What is more, during a time in which literacy rates were climbing, but were still far below the current standard, propaganda posters drew more upon the audience's social and cultural awareness rather than on any formal education or erudition.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Xiaomei Chen, "Growing Up with Posters in the Maoist Era," in *Picturing Power in the People's Republic of China: Posters of the Cultural Revolution*, ed. Harriet Evans and Stephanie Donald (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 1999), 105.

<sup>2</sup> Harriet Evans and Stephanie Donald, *Picturing Power in the People's Republic of China*, 18.

At first glance, one can easily see the Party's efforts to be inclusive of women and ethnic minorities in their poster campaigns. The Party produced millions of posters during the Mao era which touched on a wide variety of subject matter including scientific advancement, military training (figures 1.1 and 1.2) and agricultural production (figures 1.3 and 1.4). Following Mao's declaration that "women can hold up half the sky," the latter years of the Cultural Revolution proliferated numerous posters depicting heroic young communist women.<sup>3</sup>

However, posters alone cannot wholly inform our understanding of reality. Each one captures the Party's ideal, not the authentic circumstances of real people and their lived experiences. As such, even though the Party attempted to enforce gender equality through its portrayals of women, the depictions of the Party ideal actually undermined their goal of gender, ethnic, and social equality by subtly reinforcing the patriarchal order in a vast majority of its propaganda posters. This is shown by considering four primary elements commonly found in posters. The first is the principle of the three prominences. The second is the deification of Chairman Mao. The third is about the one-way masculinization of women. The final analysis is the exoticization and eroticization of China's ethnic minorities which ultimately served to portray the Han majority with masculine yang, and the minorities with feminine yin.

The CCP's portrayals of women in posters are significant for two reasons. First, they illustrate the phrase that "whatever men can do, women can do too," which was

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<sup>3</sup> Kuiyi Shen, "Propaganda Posters and Art during the Cultural Revolution," *Art and China's Revolution*, ed. Melissa Chiu and Zheng Shengtian (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 159.

frequently expressed during the Mao era.<sup>4</sup> As part of the CCP's efforts to enforce gender equality, it was effective to show women performing tasks that have been traditionally performed by men (figures 1.3, 1.4, 1.5, and 1.6). Second, women were widely accepted as the most oppressed victims of the Chinese feudal order.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, by depicting "liberated" women performing tasks that had previously been denied to them, such as engaging in scholarship, mining, or fighting in the army, the Party was able to illustrate its contrast to Old China because it had "modernized" and turned previously suppressed groups into productive members of society.<sup>6</sup>

Perhaps the most common example of "modern" women performing conventionally "masculine" jobs is the female tractor driver (*nü tuolajishou* 女拖拉机手). Before the communist takeover in 1949, society expected women to confine themselves to the private world of the home where they would cook, clean, and weave. Men, on the other hand, were expected to participate in more public spheres such as farming and combat. Both were assigned different tasks, and both were associated with different technologies: society linked women to the loom and men with the plow.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Daisy Yan Du, "Socialist Modernity in the Wasteland: Changing Representations of the Female Tractor Driver in China, 1949-1964," *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture* 29, no. 1 (2017): 64.

<sup>5</sup> Mao Zedong, *Mao Zhuxi Yulu* [Quotations from Chairman Mao Zedong] (Beijing: Waiwen Chubanshe, 1966), 228-9. This passage in *The Little Red Book* was from a report by Mao in March 1927 on the peasant uprisings in Hunan. In it he explains that Chinese men have historically been oppressed by three authorities: political authority, familial authority, and religious authority. In order to liberate men, all three of these factors need to be eliminated. Women are also oppressed by these three authorities, but they also must contend against the fourth authority of the patriarchy.

<sup>6</sup> Du, "Socialist Modernity in the Wasteland," 68. For a specific analysis of depictions of women learning to read and write, see also Francesca Dal Lago, "Activating Images: The Ideological Use of Metapictures and Visualized Metatexts in the Iconography of the Cultural Revolution," *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture*, 21, no. 2 (2009): 184.

<sup>7</sup> Du, "Socialist Modernity in the Wasteland," 55, 61.



Images of women driving tractors were vital to the Party's endeavor to overthrow the old paradigm (figures 1.3 and 1.4). Indeed, the female tractor driver was so important to the Party's conception of "modernity" that Liang Jun, one of China's first female tractor drivers, was depicted on the reverse side of the 1962 one yuan RMB note.<sup>8</sup> By obliterating the boundary between "men's work" and "women's work," the Party tried to abolish the hierarchical boundaries that kept women oppressed.

The same tactic which allowed the CCP to showcase their technical and social modernization also gave them the opportunity to highlight their efforts to liberate China's ethnic minorities from their "backward" feudal traditions.<sup>9</sup> An article published in the *People's Daily* in January 1960 told the story about a Tibetan woman who came to China to learn tractor driving despite the Tibetans' supposed superstition that women could not work the soil without incurring the wrath of the gods who would wreak havoc on the land by killing yaks, poisoning the harvest, and causing widespread disaster. This woman learned her craft and heroically went home to Tibet to help liberate her people and to represent socialist modernity.<sup>10</sup>

### **The Three Prominences**

Jiang Qing, as head of the Cultural Revolution Group (*wenge xiaozu* 文革小组),<sup>11</sup> mandated that all works of art should be red, bright, and shining (*hong, guang, liang* 红

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<sup>8</sup> Du, "Socialist Modernity in the Wasteland," 56, 71.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 69.

<sup>10</sup> Boqi Wang, "Yige Zangzu Nü Tuolajishou [A Tibetan Female Tractor Driver]," *Renmin Ribao* [People's Daily] (Beijing, China), 6 January 1960, quoted in Du, "Socialist Modernity in the Wasteland," 69.

<sup>11</sup> The CRG was initially a small standing committee of personnel, fanatically loyal to Mao, who oversaw the development of art and literature (propaganda) during the Cultural Revolution. However, by

光亮).<sup>12</sup> Her intention behind the word “red” was twofold. As a color it is universally recognized as the symbolic hue of the Marxist proletarian revolution. This meant that because Mao, Jiang, and the CCP saw themselves as the heirs of Marxism-Leninism (figure 1.7), their official paintings and works of art would use liberal amounts of crimson. But it is also important to understand that “red” became an abstract descriptor for any thought or behavior that harmonized with Party ideology (figure 1.8). Likewise, “bright” and “shining” had practical implications since the function of propaganda is not met unless it draws the observer’s attention, but they also have symbolic significance as well since anything that brightly shines is ontologically full of yang. This meant that a work of art was not only intended to hit the eye like a vermillion firework, but that its content also needed to be “red” in the revolutionary sense, depicted in the vibrant style of Soviet Realism. It should be noted that Chinese traditional culture also saw red as an auspicious color, using it as a symbol of luck and prosperity during Lunar New Year celebrations and weddings. On the other hand, the Party artistically used black, the color of yin, to portray counterrevolutionary intent, and it is used ideologically as an adjective for undesirable elements within society.<sup>13</sup>

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1971, the small clique in the CRG effectively became the highest organ of state power under Mao until his death in 1976.

<sup>12</sup> Stefan R. Landsberger, “The Deification of Mao: Religious Imagery and Practices during the Cultural Revolution and Beyond,” *China’s Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution: Master Narratives and Post-Mao Counternarratives*, ed. Woei Lien Chong (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2002): 151.

<sup>13</sup> Landsberger, “The Deification of Mao,” 148.

Jiang's second requirement was that all art should adhere to the Three Prominences (*san tuchu* 三突出).<sup>14</sup> Essentially, this decreed that when multiple subjects are depicted, the most "positive characters" should be the most apparent. When all subjects are good communists, then the most prominent individual should be a "heroic character." When the artist is depicting a group of heroic communists, then the most prominent figure should be a legendary hero. "In painting and in theatrical settings, this meant that the heroic character was placed in the center of the composition or at center stage and brightly illuminated with a spotlight."<sup>15</sup>

One of the most common themes in propaganda posters is what some scholars have dubbed "the holy triumvirate" because its central figures are the workers, peasants, and soldiers (*gong-nong-bing* 工农兵). These three class categories, which had previously been among the most oppressed under the old feudal order, were now elevated to the upper "red" classes of Chinese society.<sup>16</sup> Each triumvirate poster is different, but there are similarities that link them all together. When the trio are facing to the right, their looks usually express feelings of contempt and determination. This is because of the Party's disgust for conservative ideology, tradition, and "rightists" (*youpai* 右派) (figures 1.9 and 1.10). When the triumvirate faces to the left, their countenances are commonly transfigured into expressions of hopeful optimism and beatific joy (figures

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<sup>14</sup> Craig Clunas, "Souvenirs of Beijing: Authority and Subjectivity in Art Historical Memory," in Evans and Donald, 55.

<sup>15</sup> Kuiyi Shen, "Propaganda Posters and Art during the Cultural Revolution," in Chiu and Zheng, 158. See also Harriet Evans, "Comrade Sisters: Gendered Bodies and Spaces," in Evans and Donald, 73.

<sup>16</sup> Tina Mai Chen, "Dressing for the Party: Clothing, Citizenship, and Gender-formation in Mao's China," *Fashion Theory* 5, no. 2 (2015): 149.

1.11 and 1.12). Again, this is reflective of the ideological binary that left is progressive and good (and full of yang), and right is traditional and bad (and full of yin).

These posters highlight the Party's apparent inclusivity of both sexes, but in most examples the trio is comprised of two men and one woman. Moreover, the woman never occupies the most prominent position. According to Jiang Qing's instructions regarding the *san tuchu*, the implication is that men are the better communists. Or, in familiar parlance, communism is an ideology of power and strength, which are both full of masculine yang. As Harriet Evans also highlights, it is interesting to note that "in the individual or collective representations of the triumvirate, [the woman] is invariably positioned as the 'peasant'"<sup>17</sup> (figure 1.13 is a rare exception, although here she is further from prominence than ever). As a member of the triumvirate, and as the largest social class in China, peasants were central to the new social order. But within Marxism's original framework, it was the urban proletariat whom Marx, Lenin, and Stalin held up as the champions of the oppressed, farmers were an afterthought. As such, it is significant that women are given an important place in the trio, but they are still only secondary.

The idea of prominence also informs our understanding of class. Although China was supposed to have become a classless society, the Party recognized ten different class backgrounds. Furthermore, even though the CCP intended for their system to be a meritocracy, class in the new order was primarily hereditary.<sup>18</sup> These classes determined what jobs someone was qualified to perform, where they could live, what schools their

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<sup>17</sup> Evans, "Comrade Sisters," 72.

<sup>18</sup> Julia F. Andrews, "The Art of the Cultural Revolution," in *Art in Turmoil: The Chinese Cultural Revolution, 1966-76*, ed. Richard King (British Columbia: University of British Columbia Press, 2010), 34.

children could attend, and with whom they were permitted to associate.<sup>19</sup> While officially there were ten classes, in practice there were only two. On one side were the five red classes of workers, poor peasants, soldiers, revolutionary cadres, and the families of revolutionary martyrs. On the other side were the five black classes of former land owners, wealthy peasants, rightists, counterrevolutionaries, and the nebulous category of “bad elements” (*huaiifenzi* 坏分子).<sup>20</sup> The former were celebrated because of their role in strengthening new China; the latter were condemned because it was they who had weakened old China during the Century of Humiliation.<sup>21</sup> The Party’s division of society into two groups where one was red, strong, and good while the other was black, weak, and evil, was predicated on yin-yang binarism.

Even if someone had grown up in a celebrated “red” family, it was easy to fall into the black classes. One could transgress the Party themselves and darken their name, or the community could condemn them if anyone in their family was accused of criminality. The doubt and suspicion fostered by the political environment of the Cultural Revolution encouraged some to settle old scores. Jung Chang related a moment from her time as a Red Guard when a woman denounced her neighbor as a Guomindang spy who kept a secret photograph of Chiang Kai-shek in her home. The Red Guards did not find the nationalist leader’s portrait, but they still humiliated and tortured the woman.

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<sup>19</sup> Wenqi Yang and Fei Yan, “The Annihilation of Femininity in Mao’s China: Gender Inequality of Sent-Down Youth During the Cultural Revolution,” *China Information* 31, no. 1 (2017): 66.

<sup>20</sup> Liang Heng and Judith Shapiro, *Son of the Revolution* (New York: Random House, 1984), 66-8.

<sup>21</sup> Jung Chang, *Wild Swans: Three Daughters of China* (New York: Simon & Schuster, reprinted 2003), 364. Chang mentions a third class of “grays” but this was primarily a temporary category for people with ambiguous class backgrounds before they were ultimately classed as black. There were also Red Guards who, for some infraction or another, were punished by their units to work alongside the blacks for a set period of time.

Any Red Guard who showed signs of pity or restraint were castigated for their weakness and declared class enemies themselves.<sup>22</sup> Even Liu Shaoqi, the nominal president of China, and his wife Wang Guangmei were seized by the Red Guards and placed under house arrest, but not before Wang's captors had dressed her like a prostitute and dragged her through the streets, thus highlighting the contrast between the degenerate yin of the reactionary Liu family with the upright yang of the Red Guards. Not even death could offer relief. If an adult committed suicide, then they could still posthumously become black and their children as well.<sup>23</sup> Anyone, for any reason, could be accused as an agent of the bourgeoisie or as someone who "walked the capitalist road" (*zouzipai* 走资派), and then the permanent dossiers of both they and their family were indelibly reclassified.

There were only three ways for someone to remove the stain of their black class. First, if a child's parents were reclassified as blacks, then the child could "draw a line" between themselves and their families. This meant publicly renouncing their ties of kinship and severing all contact. In a culture where the Confucian doctrine of filial piety still held sway, this was a difficult act for the child to contemplate, and a heartbreaking reality for the parents who became isolated from their progeny.<sup>24</sup> Second, before the Communist takeover, when a woman married, she abandoned her ancestral home and became a member of her husband's family. The CCP retained this tradition. If a woman inherited her father's black status, she could make herself red again by marrying into a

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<sup>22</sup> Chang, *Wild Swans*, 381

<sup>23</sup> Ji-li Jiang, *Red Scarf Girl: A Memoir of the Cultural Revolution* (New York: HarperCollins, 1997), 141.

<sup>24</sup> Chang, *Wild Swans*, 457; Jiang, *Red Scarf Girl*, 198.

red family. However, poor peasants were usually the only “red” class to marry “black” women, which meant that a woman had to choose between retaining her persecuted status or spending the rest of her life in the fields.<sup>25</sup> The last way to abandon yin for yang was, if your spouse was accused of counterrevolutionary activity, to unhesitatingly file for divorce.<sup>26</sup>

The image in figure 1.14 shows a “struggle session” where a person from a black background is being confronted by their peers. One must use gender-neutral language here because even though the condemned is likely male, there is no certainty. A favorite Red Guard method for humiliating their victims was shaving their heads. Sometimes the Red Guards would remove all the hair, and sometimes they would give a class enemy a “yin and yang head” by shaving only half of the scalp. In those cases, the condemned would finish shaving their heads when they got home.<sup>27</sup> In any case, the accusers in the image all stand erect, their faces bright, and their positions prominent within the frame—especially the soldier. They are the embodiment of yang. The accused, with their back toward us, their head down, their clothing dark, and their body in shadow, is the embodiment of weakness, defeat, and yin.

### **The Deification Movement**

Mao assumed the leadership of the Party in the 1930s, but his personality cult only matured after 1949 when schools replaced their curriculum of classical literature

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<sup>25</sup> Yang and Yan, “The Annihilation of Femininity,” 71-2.

<sup>26</sup> Liang, *Son of the Revolution*, 11-16.

<sup>27</sup> Chang, *Wild Swans*, 365.

entirely with the teachings of the Chairman.<sup>28</sup> Then, at the start of the Cultural Revolution in 1966, Mao abnegated his humanity and became a god. Or, in other words, “Mao ceased to be merely the unifying symbol of the revolutionary leader, and simply *became*” the Communist Party.<sup>29</sup> This was only possible because of Mao’s mastery of propaganda. Zheng Shengtian, a student of painting at the Zhejiang Academy of Fine Art, recalled that in mid-1967 “the professors and students had little to do, and so they poured their energy into the fanatical” *zaoshen yundong* 造神运动, literally “god-creating movement.”<sup>30</sup> Zheng and his colleagues took it as their mission to “transform the whole country into a ‘sea of red,’ in which Mao’s image was ubiquitous.”<sup>31</sup>

An emperor has presided over the Middle Kingdom for most of its history. One of the Chinese titles for that office is *tianzi* 天子, literally “son of heaven.” With the mandate of the gods and the devotion of his subjects taken for granted, the emperor exercised complete autonomy and wielded absolute power. Despite his efforts to eliminate “old culture,” Mao was the gleeful inheritor of this tradition. In fact, one of the most common phrases during the Mao era was *Mao Zhuxi Wansui* 毛主席万岁, literally “ten thousand years to Chairman Mao” although a more colloquial translation would be “long live Chairman Mao” (figure 1.15). According to Jung Chang, her father, a high-ranking cadre himself, refused to say this phrase since “ten-thousand years” was historically only reserved for the emperor, and that as a communist it was inappropriate

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<sup>28</sup> Chang, *Wild Swans*, 329.

<sup>29</sup> Landsberger, “The Deification of Mao,” 139.

<sup>30</sup> Zheng Shengtian, “Art and Revolution: Looking Back at Thirty Years of History,” in Chiu and Zheng, 25.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.



to address Chairman Mao in this way. However, Chang's father was not representative of a large number of people in this regard.<sup>32</sup>

The Cultural Revolution can be divided into two phases.<sup>33</sup> The first half (1966 to 1971) focused on deifying Mao's image and solidifying his cult of personality. The Mao cult persisted throughout the Cultural Revolution, and even after Mao's death, but it began to tone down after the death of Defense Minister Lin Biao and his alleged attempt at deicide.<sup>34</sup> At that time, the artistic deification movement officially ended, but Mao was still depicted with great veneration.<sup>35</sup> The second phase of the Cultural Revolution (1971 to 1976) was presided over by Jiang Qing, who used her new platform to settle old scores and establish political power in her own right rather than simply exercising the delegated power of her aging husband.

Nevertheless, by 1965 Mao's visage was so common that postage stamps were replaced by miniature copies of Mao's most famous posters.<sup>36</sup> That same year, Jung Chang recalled that when her father heard her recommit herself to obey her grandmother, he corrected her to say "I will obey Chairman Mao."<sup>37</sup> Mao's image was so revered that even throwing away old newspapers with his picture in them was sinful and counterrevolutionary.<sup>38</sup> Violence against Mao's portrait was nearly as serious as actual

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<sup>32</sup> Chang, *Wild Swans*, 413.

<sup>33</sup> Andrews, "The Art of the Cultural Revolution," 30.

<sup>34</sup> Landsberger, "The Deification of Mao," 159.

<sup>35</sup> Yan Shanchun, "Painting Mao," in Chiu and Zheng, 98.

<sup>36</sup> Robert Benewick, "Icons of Power: Mao Zedong and the Cultural Revolution," in Evans and Donald, 123.

<sup>37</sup> Chang, *Wild Swans*, 322.

<sup>38</sup> Landsberger, "The Deification of Mao," 158.

assaults upon his person. One Tibetan woman languished in prison for twelve years for the simple peccadillo of swinging a spade into a poster of Mao during a moment of pique.<sup>39</sup>

Despite the Party's ostensible goals of equality and peace, the 2.2 billion posters of Mao were lessons in power, domination, and the omnipresence of Big Brother.<sup>40</sup> In paintings of the Chairman, not only was he the most prominent figure, but in images where he appears with others, his divinity is enhanced because he is kept aloof and untouchable by the common man.<sup>41</sup> Even when he is drawn as part of a crowd, he maintains his godliness through the absence of physical contact.<sup>42</sup> Mao was frequently depicted reaching out to shake someone's hand, but the handshake itself is rarely, if ever, portrayed.

Following Jiang Qing's command that revolutionary art must be "red, bright, and shining," Mao's face is flooded in light from unseen sources and his halo often illuminates the ecstatic countenances of everyone around him.<sup>43</sup> One of the most common tropes is to depict Mao's head as the actual sun, which itself is the literal embodiment of yang (they are in fact the same word. See figure 1.16). But even during the later years of the Cultural Revolution when Mao's presence became more indirectly

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<sup>39</sup> Canyon Sam, *Sky Train: Tibetan Women on the Edge of History* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2009), 66.

<sup>40</sup> Benewick, "Icons of Power," 125.

<sup>41</sup> Chang, *Wild Swans*, 320-1.

<sup>42</sup> Benewick, "Icons of Power," 129.

<sup>43</sup> Landsberger, "The Deification of Mao," 149, 151.

observed in posters, the bright red sun always symbolized Mao's beneficent love for the people, and the image of the sunflower likewise symbolized the heart of a true communist since its petals are perpetually oriented toward the light.

One reason that Mao was so successful in building his cult of personality was because he made use of the religious traditions and iconography that were already in place. Once he had eliminated all of the old gods and replaced his image with theirs, the people had no one upon whom to shower their zeal except for Mao himself. He became the new god of the hearth, the god of the harvest, and the god of fertility. All blessings and good fortune, no matter how small, were attributed to Mao.<sup>44</sup> Every home placed Mao's portrait in the most prominent place. Before the Red Guards destroyed the family alters, that was the primary location for Mao to sit (figure 1.17).<sup>45</sup> Afterward, from whichever surface he looked down, his portrait had to be kept dusted and spotlessly clean, and even his frame had to be "without blemish."<sup>46</sup> Outside of propaganda posters, many people practiced ritualized dances and sang hymns to Mao, his quotations became mantras, and his profile on every Red Guard badge became a talisman to ward off evil.<sup>47</sup> Following the Dalai Lama's exile from Tibet in 1959, the Beijing government forbade residents of Lhasa to display his pictures on the household altars and instead mandated

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<sup>44</sup> Landsberger, "The Deification of Mao," 140, 156.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 154.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 157.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 155, 158.

that the only images worthy of respect were of the Communist trinity: Chairman Mao, Zhou Enlai, and Zhu De.<sup>48</sup>

Between 1966 and 1971, painters understood that Mao Zedong was the only appropriate subject for their work. The most celebrated of these was Liu Chunhua's *Mao Zhuxi qu Anyuan* 毛主席去安源 (*Chairman Mao goes to Anyuan*), which was one of the first paintings proclaimed by Madam Mao to be a "model work" (Figure 1.18).<sup>49</sup> The image depicts a young Mao marching determinedly to the Anyuan coal mine in 1922 where he catalyzed the Chinese Communist movement by inspiring the workers to revolt against their employers.<sup>50</sup> The religious and political symbolism of this painting have been widely analyzed, but a common point is the similarities between Liu's depiction of Mao and the Madonna paintings of Raphael.<sup>51</sup>

One aspect of the Mao cult was the institutional canonization of revolutionary martyrs. Many of these heroes were enshrined by the Party in their very own propaganda posters. Some of these include the peasant Wang Guofu and the child soldier Pan Dongzi. Most of these martyrs are men, although there are a few women including Liu Hulan who was executed by the Guomindang in 1947, and Zhao Yiman who was

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<sup>48</sup> Sam, *Sky Train*, 220. Sonam Choedron, the woman providing this account specifically mentions Mao and Zhou, and that there was one other man whose name she could not remember. The third man was most likely Zhu De; see Stefan R. Landsberger, "The Deification of Mao," 161-2.

<sup>49</sup> Landsberger, "The Deification of Mao," 151-2; Yan, "Painting Mao," 94.

<sup>50</sup> Andrews, "The Art of the Cultural Revolution," 37, 43. Although, as Andrews explains, this is an example of the Party trying to rewrite the past in order to serve the present. It was actually Liu Shaoqi who went to Anyuan and mobilized the miners, although after his arrest in 1967 and subsequent purge from the Party a year later, Liu's good works were attributed to Mao.

<sup>51</sup> John Gittings, "Excess and Enthusiasm," in Evans and Donald, 35. See also Julia F. Andrews, "The Art of the Cultural Revolution," 44. However, while many scholars insist that Liu drew his inspiration from Raphael, during a 2007 interview, Liu himself denied any exposure to Western religious imagery: see Zheng Shengtian, "Chairman Mao Goes to Anyuan: A Conversation with the Artist Liu Chunhua," in Chiu and Zheng, 127.

executed by the Japanese in 1936. But none are as well-known or as cherished as the Liberation Army Soldier Lei Feng (figure 1.19). The Party's late heroes were celebrated, not simply because of the way they lived their lives, but because of the revolutionary passion with which they died. Many of them attained communist "sainthood" in the cult of Mao because they sacrificed their lives for "the revolution, the Party, or Mao."<sup>52</sup> Lei Feng's diary, which Lin Biao miraculously procured after Lei's death in a workplace accident in 1962, is full of adoration for Chairman Mao and personal exhortations to be a better soldier for the Great Helmsman.<sup>53</sup> The most common theme in Lei's diary is the belief that the greatest virtue is blind loyalty to Mao.<sup>54</sup> Civilians and students everywhere were commanded to study and emulate the example of Lei Feng. Teachers taught their pupils that the "essence of Lei Feng was his boundless love and devotion to Chairman Mao."<sup>55</sup>

Between the Three Prominences and the Mao cult, one begins to see the disproportionate representation between men and women in CCP artwork. Chen Xiaomei discussed her experiences growing up with stories about "Uncle Lei Feng," and implicitly questioned the Party's lack of any correspondingly potent female heroes. She also pointed to other famous works of art like *The Founding of the Nation* (figure 1.20), where the only woman in a horde of men is Song Qingling, widow of the late Sun Yat-sen.<sup>56</sup> As a youth, Chen felt inspired by the painting, but it was not until later that she came to

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<sup>52</sup> Landsberger, "The Deification of Mao," 146, 158.

<sup>53</sup> The document is most likely a forgery.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 147.

<sup>55</sup> Chang, *Wild Swans*, 313-4.

<sup>56</sup> The founder of the Republic of China.

understand that the one-to-ten gender ratio in *The Founding of the Nation* was reflective of “the unequal gender relationship in the CCP hierarchy, which ran counter to its official claim that it strove for gender equality.”<sup>57</sup>

The martyred dead, however, were not the only ones to mirror the light from Mao’s red sun. The highest echelons of Party cadres were frequently depicted either in their own right or else they are shown alongside the Chairman, staring at him with soppy expressions of blissful oblivion (figure 1.21). The most common of these were Lin Biao, the military’s chief-of-staff; Chen Boda, Mao’s former secretary and close associate; Kang Sheng, Mao’s spy master and chief of the secret police; and Premier Zhou Enlai.<sup>58</sup> The implication behind these posters is that the deification movement not only turned Mao into a god, but it also created a small pantheon of lesser gods.<sup>59</sup> From a religious point of view, what is conspicuous only by its absence is any corresponding pantheon of goddesses. There were certainly prestigious candidates, not least of which was Deng Yingchao, the wife of Zhou Enlai. She was a devoted member of the Communist Party and an active participant in Chinese politics since the May Fourth Movement in 1919; she was also an unwavering proponent of women’s rights.<sup>60</sup> But the point remains that Mao’s omnipresence highlighted the fact that only Big Brother was watching—“little sister” could not be found.

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<sup>57</sup> Chen, “Growing Up with Posters in the Maoist Era,” 107; see also page 114, which explores other paintings where men are predominantly more numerous in propaganda than women.

<sup>58</sup> Chang, *Wild Swans*, 341.

<sup>59</sup> Landsberger, “The Deification of Mao,” 157.

<sup>60</sup> Wang Zheng, “‘State Feminism’? Gender and Socialist State Formation in Maoist China,” *Feminist Studies* 31, no. 3 (2005): 539–41, 543. See also Gail Hersatter and Wang Zheng, “Chinese History: A Useful Category of Gender Analysis,” *The American Historical Review* 113, no. 5 (2008): 1413–35.

There are occasional posters depicting Jiang Qing (figures 1.16 and 1.21), but these were rarely produced and infrequently purchased by the public. After all, to display a poster of Jiang by herself “would indicate adherence to the most radical strand of Cultural Revolutionary politics.”<sup>61</sup> In 1977, one year after Mao’s death and the subsequent arrest of Jiang Qing, there was a small poster campaign dedicated to Mao’s first wife Yang Kaihui. She had been tortured and executed by the Guomindang in 1930, but despite this level of sacrifice for the proletarian cause, any mention of Yang would have been unthinkable so long as Jiang Qing’s control of the artistic world was unquestioned.<sup>62</sup> Part of the reason why Yang was resurrected almost fifty years after her death was to remind the people that she had been Mao’s “true wife.” After Mao’s passing, in order to save his legacy and therefore the legacy of the entire Party, all the blame for the failures of the Cultural Revolution were laid upon Jiang Qing and her confederates in the Gang of Four. But following the wider trends of Chinese history, “all the wisdom is man’s wisdom. The fall of the kingdom is always the fault of the concubine.”<sup>63</sup>

Mao’s immediate successor, Hua Guofeng, tried to inherit Mao’s cult of personality in addition to Mao’s political chair (figure 1.22), but his term in office was short since Deng Xiaoping effectively sidelined Hua a year into his administration.<sup>64</sup> But the religious fire went out on the ninth of September 1976, when “the reddest sun

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<sup>61</sup> Gittings, “Excess and Enthusiasm,” 35.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>63</sup> Anchee Min, *Red Azalea* (New York: Random House, 1994), 274.

<sup>64</sup> Landsberger, “The Deification of Mao,” 140, 160.

dropped from the sky of the Middle Kingdom.”<sup>65</sup> In the face of their overwhelming sense of relief, neither Anchee Min nor Jung Chang could summon genuine tears for Mao’s demise. And yet because of the social expectation that they wail and grieve, both buried their faces and shook with affected sobs.<sup>66</sup> This not only evidences Butler’s theory of performativity, but also William Shakespeare’s declaration that besides gender, “all the world’s a stage.”<sup>67</sup>

### **Manly Women and Womanly Men**

Just as there are occupations that are conventionally understood as masculine, so too are the sartorial styles commonly worn as the uniforms for those occupations. Clothing, then, also helps us understand gender construction, power relationships, and the performed social rituals expected of both men and women.<sup>68</sup> Following the understanding that femininity, as a manifestation of yin, is something that promotes weakness within society, Mao, as early as 1934, encouraged women to engage in masculine tasks such as agriculture.<sup>69</sup> During the 1950’s, Mao proclaimed equal wages for equal work regardless of sex,<sup>70</sup> and with the implementation of collectivized farming,

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<sup>65</sup> Min, *Red Azalea*, 327.

<sup>66</sup> Chang, *Wild Swans*, 632-3; Min, *Red Azalea*, 327.

<sup>67</sup> William Shakespeare, *As You Like It* 2.7.138.

<sup>68</sup> Margorie Garber, *Vested Interests* (New York: Routledge, 1992): 3-4, quoted in Chen, “Growing Up with Posters in the Maoist Era,” 113.

<sup>69</sup> Mao, *Mao Zhuxi Yulu*, 229.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 230.



women and men were both brought together to work in the public sphere,<sup>71</sup> although it should be noted that even then women were not remunerated at the same rate as men.<sup>72</sup>

In 1959, Mao wrote a poem encouraging Chinese women to “doff femininity and don military attire.”<sup>73</sup> Overnight, all forms of propaganda began to portray women in army uniforms and overalls performing the dangerous and physically demanding jobs that had previously been men’s.<sup>74</sup> It became a source of pride to see women clinging to power lines (figure 1.3 and 1.5), fighting in combat (figures 1.2 and 1.13), working in the fields (figures 1.3 and 1.4), and repairing or operating heavy machinery (figure 1.6). While it is said that art imitates reality, in cases of propaganda, reality imitates art. One interesting result from this is that women became masculinized, but so too did men as they had to increasingly contend for jobs and status against a wider pool of competitors.<sup>75</sup> Jung Chang remembered the day in 1964 when her mother started wearing drab masculine clothing and concealing features of her femininity.<sup>76</sup> Likewise, Chen Xiaomei recalled how she tried to emulate the physical, moral, and spiritual strength of Lei Feng as the ideal Chinese model of heroic manliness. For her, it became a “fashion

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<sup>71</sup> Du, “Socialist Modernity in the Wasteland,” 55.

<sup>72</sup> Huaiyin Li, “Life Cycle, Labor Remuneration, and Gender Inequality in a Chinese Agrarian Collective,” *Journal of Peasant Studies* 32, no. 2 (2005): 278, 289, 297.

<sup>73</sup> Chang, *Wild Swans*, 331.

<sup>74</sup> Evans, “Comrade Sisters,” 64, 66.

<sup>75</sup> Landsberger, “The Deification of Mao,” 149.

<sup>76</sup> Chang, *Wild Swans*, 324.

statement” of revolutionary orthodoxy to wear her brother’s hand-me-downs and to strut around acting tough.<sup>77</sup>

In addition to men’s baggy garments, women started to take on other masculine traits.<sup>78</sup> Yan Sheng, Anchee Min’s Company Commander at Red Fire Farm, was celebrated for her muscular stature, especially her shoulders which “swelled like steamed bread.”<sup>79</sup> As a Red Guard, Jung Chang witnessed her peers trying to “talk, walk, and act like aggressive, crude men.” These same girls would bully and harass other females who maintained elements of their femininity. Chang acknowledges, however, that it was difficult to be truly feminine when everyone was required to wear only their “shapeless” uniforms of blue, gray, or green.<sup>80</sup>

At the same time, the strong and masculine women in propaganda posters also introduce a paradox. Each of these model women still maintain obvious feminine characteristics. Sometimes the characters in propaganda are wearing men’s clothing, but their faces are still fetchingly made up (figure 1.6). Although quite early, relative to other posters, figure 1.15 was produced in 1959, the same year in which Mao encouraged women to “doff femininity.” The woman’s arms are lifted in a standard posture of strength, but her hair, her jewelry, her daughter, and the sea of flower petals around her all speak to her obvious femininity and maternalism.

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<sup>77</sup> Chen, “Growing Up with Posters in the Maoist Era,” 113.

<sup>78</sup> Yang and Yan, “The Annihilation of Femininity,” 66.

<sup>79</sup> Min, *Red Azalea*, 60.

<sup>80</sup> Chang, *Wild Swans*, 396.

Despite the testimonies of Chen and Chang that everyone wore the same drab colors, women in posters were frequently shown sporting floral patterns and garish colors (figures 1.2, 1.3, 1.4, and 1.12).<sup>81</sup> Posters during the Cultural Revolution give the impression that women were expected to be manly while appearing alluring. This indicates the Party's intention of promoting masculine strength in every citizen, but it also signifies the underlying assumption that women are creatures of yin. Liang Jun, China's first female tractor driver, was sent by the CCP to attend a conference for model workers in the Soviet Union. Prior to her departure, she was instructed to purchase a new wardrobe. Thinking dogmatically rather than politically, Liang purchased a new set of blue cotton work clothes. Upon seeing this, her Party cadres ordered her to buy a new *qipao*, a traditional Chinese form-fitting silk gown—something she would never be allowed to wear outside of Moscow.<sup>82</sup>

However, just because the rhetoric of the time stressed that “women can hold up half the sky,” this must not be confused with the actual state of affairs in the workplace.<sup>83</sup> Despite the Party's efforts to change public attitudes toward women performing masculine jobs, society failed to create enough occupational opportunities for women, who frequently slid back into the same traditional tasks from which the Party sought to liberate them.<sup>84</sup> Jung Chang had the opportunity to work as an electrician herself, although she notes that female electricians were so rare and glamorous that people

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<sup>81</sup> Chen, “Dressing for the Party,” 149.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 151.

<sup>83</sup> Clunas, “Souvenirs of Beijing,” 57-8.

<sup>84</sup> Du, “Socialist Modernity in the Wasteland,” 70.

would stop in wonder every time she scaled a pylon.<sup>85</sup> Furthermore, the general public was steeped in attitudes about traditional gender roles. This is illustrated by a 1958 article published in *The People's Daily* which argued that women should spend more time taking care of children rather than tractors.<sup>86</sup>

While some women tried to wear their clothing with minute “signs of care and thoughtfulness,” it took great ingenuity for someone to build her outfit in a manner that helped her stand out in ways subtle enough that no one could accuse her of individualism.<sup>87</sup> This only deepens the paradox around feminine beauty and political orthodoxy. Especially during the Cultural Revolution, anything that made someone stand out indicated that that person was too much of a bourgeois individual. This included women’s efforts to be beautiful or fashionable.<sup>88</sup> In her memoir, Rae Yang recalled that “anything that would make girls look like girls was bourgeois. We covered up our bodies so completely that I almost forgot that we were boys and girls. We were Red Guards, and that was it.”<sup>89</sup> The new one-size-fits-all uniforms of blue and gray masculinized the populace, but ideologically they also feminized individualism, fashion, color, and women in general by affiliating anything with *yin* with the bourgeoisie.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Chang, *Wild Swans*, 570.

<sup>86</sup> Jiazhang Dai, “Guan Haizi bi Guan Tuolaji Geng Zhongyao [Tending Children is More Important than Tending Tractors],” *Renmin Ribao* [People’s Daily] (Beijing, China), 17 December 1958, quoted in Du, “Socialist Modernity in the Wasteland,” 73.

<sup>87</sup> Chang, *Wild Swans*, 434, 497.

<sup>88</sup> Yang and Yan, “The Annihilation of Femininity,” 67.

<sup>89</sup> Rae Yang, *Spider Eaters: A Memoir* (Berkeley: UC Press, reprinted 2013), 139-40. See also Evans, “Comrade Sisters,” 64.

<sup>90</sup> Chen, “Dressing for the Party,” 161-2.

Whether they wanted to or not, most women dressed like men because they did not want to be ostracized or shunned.<sup>91</sup> When Jung Chang joined the Red Guards and donned her own uniform, she too admitted that she felt uncomfortable displaying so much masculinity, but she chose to persevere rather than jeopardize her social standing.<sup>92</sup> Indeed, in 1964, Chang began sewing erroneous patches onto her garments in order to enhance her image as someone truly “proletarian.”<sup>93</sup> Women who flouted custom were rare exceptions. In exile at Red Fire Farm, Anchee Min recalled that Little Green always braided colorful string into her braids and comported herself with grace and delicacy. Min was simultaneously entranced and repulsed by Little Green since she was “full of bourgeois allure” and because “her femininity mocked us.”<sup>94</sup> Chen Xiaomei’s mother was an actress for the Party and was therefore permitted to wear stylish dresses and high-heeled pumps. Chen remembered a feeling of indignation when she overheard others denigrating her mother’s femininity and castigating the “foreign origin” of her fashionable attire.<sup>95</sup>

The contradiction between the different femininities of women in real life and women in propaganda is resolved only by the complete elimination of femininity. In the new order, women could be good communists, all they had to do was “become indistinguishable from men—that is, to forget that they were women.”<sup>96</sup> Even then, one

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<sup>91</sup> Yang and Yan, “The Annihilation of Femininity,” 68.

<sup>92</sup> Chang, *Wild Swans*, 379.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 357.

<sup>94</sup> Min, *Red Azalea*, 56.

<sup>95</sup> Chen, “Growing Up with Posters in the Maoist Era,” 112-3.

<sup>96</sup> Yang and Yan, “The Annihilation of Femininity,” 77-8.

might make the argument that the Party had in fact equalized both genders, but this is incorrect. Under Mao, masculinity and femininity were not made equal to each other. Instead, everyone, whatever their biological sex, was only equally free to be masculine. Erasing femininity from the public discourse did not erase women which, as a group, constituted half of the population. In effect, because women are so numerous, gender differences are impossible to completely eradicate; consequently, femininity itself is impossible to eradicate, which meant that in Maoist society, attempts to obliterate feminine yin only further subjugated it to masculine yang.<sup>97</sup>

The domination of yang over yin is further highlighted by an analysis of what is missing from posters.<sup>98</sup> There are images of women birthing piglets (figure 1.3), images of women tending nurseries (figure 1.23), images of women cooking, cleaning, and spinning wool, but so far as can be discovered, there is not a single propaganda poster depicting a man doing this kind of nurturing or domestic work, even though actual men certainly condescended to perform such tasks.<sup>99</sup> Mao famously declared that “times have changed, women can do the same as men,”<sup>100</sup> and that “whatever men comrades can accomplish, women comrades can too.”<sup>101</sup> On the surface, these quotations sound

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<sup>97</sup> Yang and Yan, “The Annihilation of Femininity,” 67.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 67, 68, 70.

<sup>99</sup> Chang, *Wild Swans*, 135. Jung Chang discusses how her father became a skilled spinner at Yan’an. Traditional attitudes toward woman are further codified into the Chinese language itself. The word *jijian* (屌奸) was first coined during the Tang dynasty as a description for male homosexual intercourse. “The first character (*ji*) depicts a woman under a field and originally meant ‘a man being like a woman.’” It now has an almost exclusive meaning of anal sex although it still conveys the distaste men might feel for being used like a woman. See Bret Hinsch, *Passions of the Cut Sleeve* (Berkeley: UC Press, 1992), 88-9.

<sup>100</sup> Evans, “Comrade Sisters,” 63. 时代不同了，男女都一样。

<sup>101</sup> Yang and Yan, “The Annihilation of Femininity,” 63-4. 男同志的事情，女同志也能办到。

egalitarian and empowering, but in practice there was still gender inequality since there is no true inverse inasmuch that men are the same as women or that men comrades can do the same tasks as women comrades. The idea of “women holding up half of the sky” also means that women were mining half of the coal, erecting half of the buildings, and planting half of the rice. But at the same time, men were not bearing and raising half of the children, cooking half of the food, or sewing half of the clothing. Images of men feeding babies, operating looms, frying woks, or even sweeping the floor would have demonstrated an intention to promote gender equality. However, as the natural carriers of yang energy, images of men performing domestic chores would have represented a “taming” or “weakening” of yang by showing men doing “women’s work.”

### **Orientalism and the Feminine “Other”**

Edward Said published *Orientalism* in 1979. This text highlighted the propensity of Western scholars to portray the diverse civilizations and ethnic cultures between Hungary and Japan as a homogeneous “other”—something fundamentally alien that cannot be fully comprehended.<sup>102</sup> Having constructed the division between Orient and Occident, the West granted to itself everything that is familiar and wholesome, while relegating to the East everything that is exotic, strange, and inferior.<sup>103</sup> Having then identified the Orient with the exotic, it became the task of the Western scholar to create a new field of study: hence, Orientalism.<sup>104</sup> Simply put, Orientalism grows out of

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<sup>102</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 49, 204.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 50.

economic, political, and religious interests; it becomes a rigidly defined academic discipline which generates a complex discourse; and this discourse in turn is used by the state to bolster the imperial machine.<sup>105</sup> When the Orient or Orientals are written about, they are never discussed in their own right, but as outsiders that have a secondary role to play relative to the centers of power.<sup>106</sup> In Said's own words, "Orientalism [is] a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient," and "the relationship between Occident and Orient is a relationship of power [and] domination."<sup>107</sup> For Westerners, Orientals are not residents of a different geography—they are an inferior group that must be either feared or controlled.<sup>108</sup> For the Orientalist, the Orient represents everything that is erotic, exotic, sexually available, and diseased.<sup>109</sup> However, as a pseudo-scholarly practice, anyone can fall into Orientalism regardless of their geographical or ethnic background.

China recognizes fifty-six native ethnicities within its borders, although one of them—the Han—represents 91% of the population. The Party built a unique role in the CCP's propaganda campaigns for the remaining 9%. One might applaud the Party's efforts to include the minorities at all in their art, literature, and film. However, the depictions of colorfully dressed steppe peoples ecstatically singing paeans to the Communist Party are the CCP's efforts to Orientalize their minority populations (figures

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<sup>105</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, 95.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 71.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 3, 5.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 92, 301.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 167, 185, 188, 190, 206.



1.1, 1.19, 1.22, and 1.24). In other words, “the representation of the minorities in such colorful, romanticized fashion has more to do with constructing a majority discourse, than it does with the minorities themselves.”<sup>110</sup> And indeed, the propaganda ministry initiated several campaigns where artists were encouraged to paint exciting minority themes in vivid colors other than the ideal *red*. As the auspicious color of communist yang, red was reserved primarily for the Han majority and, by extension, the Party.<sup>111</sup>

With the collapse of the Qing Dynasty and its Manchu-controlled bureaucracy in 1911, the new republican government and its communist successor both established the Han as the symbol of new China and progressive modernity.<sup>112</sup> While posters during the Cultural Revolution cultivated a sense of communal unity by depicting men and women in the drab uniforms of the worker-soldier-peasant triumvirate, representations of China’s ethnic minorities were the exception.<sup>113</sup> In posters, the Han simply wear “clothes,” but images of minorities are always garbed in “costumes” (figures 1.19, 1.22, and 1.24).<sup>114</sup> Figure 1.25 is a good example. Naturally, as the ultimate hero, Chairman Mao occupies the most prominent position within the image. Of the adoring crowds surrounding his motorcade, those closest to him are all Han, dressed in their appropriate attire. Visible in the outer ring, however, are people with skull caps, turbans, and darker skin indicating

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<sup>110</sup> Dru Gladney, “Representing Nationality in China: Refiguring Majority/Minority Identities,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 53, no. 1 (1994): 93-4.

<sup>111</sup> Evans, “Comrade Sisters,” 73-4; Gittings, “Excess and Enthusiasm,” 31.

<sup>112</sup> Ben Hillman and Lee-Anne Henfry, “Macho Minority: Masculinity and Ethnicity on the Edge of Tibet,” *Modern China* 32, no. 2 (2006): 253.

<sup>113</sup> Chen, “Dressing for the Party,” 143 156.

<sup>114</sup> Gladney, “Representing Nationality in China,” 104.

that these pilgrims have travelled from China's westernmost provinces to pay homage to the Great Leader. In many posters with the triumvirate in the foreground, the background is often filled with recognizable minority costumes.<sup>115</sup>

As a nationality, the word "Chinese" loosely applies to all fifty-six ethnicities. But there is a clear elevation between the Han and everyone else since "Han" and "Chinese" are virtually interchangeable in political discourse, and that *hanyu* (汉语), literally "language of the Han," is always translated into English as "Chinese."<sup>116</sup> Yin-yang binaries of power are illustrated by the distinct Orientalist dichotomy drawn by the CCP between the Han and the minority groups. As Dru Gladney says of China's ethnicities: "minority is to majority as female is to male."<sup>117</sup>

In art, literature, film, and television, the ruling Han depict themselves as the personification of normality, health, and modernity. Shown in this way, they are the natural inheritors of leadership in China. On the other hand, the minorities, while patronizingly celebrated, are depicted as exotic, erotic, and sexually deviant.<sup>118</sup> Under communism, the Han majority adopted an attitude of prudish morality. Prostitution and pornography were criminalized, and even softcore nudity was heavily restricted. The primary exception to this was the depictions of minorities who were often shown naked—sometimes bathing—as though the viewer were voyeuristically spying on something sexy, but natural, mysterious, and fragile. Images of nude minorities were

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<sup>115</sup> Benewick, "Icons of Power," 129.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 98.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 93. See also Hillman and Henfry, "Macho Minority," 253.

<sup>118</sup> Gladney, "Representing Nationality in China," 101-2.

sold in “tourist boutiques and minority crafts shops” as though the Han were pimping the minorities for popular consumption.<sup>119</sup>

Before the communist takeover in 1949, the Han lexicon held several derogatory terms for the ethnic groups on the fringes of society. The Party successfully dropped these terms, but the attitudes behind the pejorative names persisted.<sup>120</sup> This has led to the “internal Orientalism” of the CCP which portrayed the representations of the various minority groups as “rural women” whereas the Han majority was portrayed as “male urban sophisticates.”<sup>121</sup> The posters with Han subjects highlights the yang of the CCP by portraying them as strong, modern, and “normal.” Their yang is further emphasized when juxtaposed with the yin of the primitive, though exotic, minority groups.<sup>122</sup> But the cheerful, tolerant, even avuncular attitude of the Han for their neighbors, as shown in propaganda posters, is drastically different from reality. Jung Chang recalled that while serving in the countryside, members of the Yi minority group were always given the filthiest and most dangerous jobs while their Han overseers supervised from comfort and safety.<sup>123</sup>

The CCP justified their 1950 invasion and annexation of Tibet by pointing to old imperial maps that showed Tibet as a part of China. Nevertheless, despite the fraught political history between China and Tibet, the fact remains that both nations are separated

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<sup>119</sup> Gladney, “Representing Nationality in China,” 106-7.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 103.

<sup>121</sup> Louisa Schein, “Gender and Internal Orientalism in China,” *Modern China* 23, no. 1 (1997): 70, 87.

<sup>122</sup> Hillman and Henfry, “Macho Minority,” 251.

<sup>123</sup> Chang, *Wild Swans*, 509.

by different languages, cultures, and religious traditions. The pacifism and deeply rooted orthopraxy of Tibet's Vajrayana Buddhist monasteries led the Chinese to think that the Tibetan peasants were oppressed by the superstitious traditions of the priesthood, and that Tibetans in general were "stupid and backward" because of the thin Himalayan air.<sup>124</sup> In order to bolster their prejudice, the CCP depicted Tibet's monastic government as "dark, feudal, and cruel" by casting the monks as blood-sucking parasites.<sup>125</sup> Despite the Party's profession as the champions of regional autonomy and religious liberty, by the early years of the Cultural Revolution, religious practice was officially criminalized in Tibet and millions disappeared into the archipelago of gulags across Qinghai and Gansu.<sup>126</sup> Many of the imprisoned nuns and laywomen turned to their faith for comfort, only to be further punished by their Chinese guards who insisted that "religion is poison for your mind! The gods will not feed you! Stop the religion!"<sup>127</sup>

Jiang Qing was especially jingoistic in her attitude toward minority groups, which she labelled as "foreign invaders."<sup>128</sup> One of the central doctrines of the Buddhist tradition is *ahimsa*, or nonviolence. However, building out of Mao's declaration that "political power comes from the barrel of a gun,"<sup>129</sup> Jiang Qing claimed that pacifism

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<sup>124</sup> Sam, *Sky Train*, 23.

<sup>125</sup> John F. Avedon, *In Exile from the Land of Snows: The Definitive Account of the Dalai Lama and Tibet since the Chinese Conquest* (New York: Random House, 1979), 228.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, 247, 288.

<sup>127</sup> Sam, *Sky Train*, 48.

<sup>128</sup> Nick Holdstock, *China's Forgotten People: Xinjiang, Terror, and the Chinese State* (London: I.B. Tauris & Co, 2015), 45.

<sup>129</sup> Mao, *Mao Zhuxi Yulu*, 49.

was a bourgeois vice.<sup>130</sup> Consequently, Tibetan children were conscripted into extermination brigades whose sole purpose was to kill insects and pets as a way of purging them of nonviolent inhibitions.<sup>131</sup> China's ethnic minorities were given politically black status and were therefore treated as second class not only because of their unique cultural traditions, but even for speaking their native languages, which were branded as inherently counterrevolutionary and reactionary.<sup>132</sup>

The artificial binary that ascribed yang to Han China and yin to Tibet meant that anything "good" produced by Tibet had to be appropriately Sinicized, and everything else had to be cheapened and denigrated. The Potala Palace, Tibet's most famous landmark in the heart of Lhasa, was constructed by the fifth Dalai Lama in the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century. After China's invasion, however, the Potala was plastered with large posters of Chairman Mao.<sup>133</sup> Today, tourists are informed that the Potala was built and maintained jointly by Tibetan and Chinese engineers.<sup>134</sup> Mount Everest, the highest natural peak on Earth, once separated Tibet and Nepal. Now it is claimed by China as a point of national pride.<sup>135</sup> Bilingual building signs in Lhasa prominently feature bold Han characters over smaller Tibetan script, even if the building was built by Tibetans, used exclusively by

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<sup>130</sup> "Summary of the Proceedings of the Forum on Literature and Art in the Armed Forces, Convened by Comrade Jiang Qing with the Endorsement of Comrade Lin Biao, 18 April 1966," in Chiu and Zheng, 226.

<sup>131</sup> Avedon, *In Exile from the Land of Snows*, 289.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, 280-1.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>134</sup> Sam, *Sky Train*, 34, 92.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, 123.

Tibetans, and was housed in the Tibetan quarter of town.<sup>136</sup> When laying the first railroad that connected Tibet to the rest of China, Tibetan laborers were paid half of the salary of their Han colleagues,<sup>137</sup> and when the Chinese built brothels in Lhasa, a Han girl's rates surpassed one hundred yuan whereas a Tibetan girl could be had for "a bowl of noodles."<sup>138</sup>

The "internal orientalism" of China toward its minority groups, painting the Han as masculine and the Tibetans as feminine, was further displayed during the early 1960s when the Red Guards, in a similar punishment to that of Wang Guangmei, compelled the wives of Tibetan officials to parade through the streets of Lhasa wearing all of their makeup and jewelry, each carrying trays of her toiletries.<sup>139</sup> Again, as late as 2006, rather than highlighting those aspects of their culture which the Tibetans themselves would have been most proud, the public announcements on that very train to Lhasa which the natives had built for half wages declared that "the Tibetan People are a 'hardworking and hospitable minority group,' good at singing and dancing."<sup>140</sup> In their fear of the "other," the Chinese government diminished the "wildness" of the Tibetans by portraying them as a friendly tribe of noble savages and nomadic jesters, all the while alluding to the alluring mysticism of the Tibetans' anti-Marxist superstitions and primitivism.<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> Sam, *Sky Train*, 92.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, 138.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, 220.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

Part of the CCP's efforts to Orientalize China's minority groups meant hyper-feminizing minority women (figures 1.19), but it also meant hyper-masculinizing minority men (figures 1.1 and 1.22). This is in part because ideal masculinity is socially constructed differently in China than it is in the West. Physical strength and machismo are important elements of manhood, but even more manly is the gentleman (*junzi*, 君子), the scholar (*caizi*, 才子), and the man of culture (*wenren*, 文人).<sup>142</sup> Consequently, when the Party illustrated Mongolian horsemen or Tibetan Khampas, they always have thick facial hair and bulging muscles. In a way, the CCP claims the virility of the minority groups for their own while they also maintain a sense of barbaric otherness between the minorities and the Han. The minority depictions of masculinity are worth celebrating, but there is a clear preference for the man who stands resolute but calm (figure 1.18), or so dedicated to the cultivation of his mind that he stays up reading late into the night (figure 1.26).<sup>143</sup>

The Chinese treatment of Tibet is not unique among China's minority groups. The Mongolians and the Uighurs all received similar torments. In Xinjiang during the Cultural Revolution, Muslim Uighurs were also condemned as "backward" and "feudal," Qur'ans were incinerated, mosques were destroyed, imams were tortured and killed, and religious customs were condemned and forbidden.<sup>144</sup> The primary difference between Tibet and Xinjiang is the reception of their respective plights in Western media. Tibet has a charismatic advocate in the person of the Dalai Lama, and Westerners are favorably

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<sup>142</sup> Hillman and Henfry, "Macho Minority," 255.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 254.

<sup>144</sup> Holdstock, *China's Forgotten People*, 45.

disposed toward Buddhism and its core doctrine of nonviolence. But there is no corresponding expatriate to speak for the Uighur establishment of East Turkestan, and neither is Islam as kindly received in the Western media.<sup>145</sup>

Although the Cultural Revolution ended in 1976, the problems between the Han majority and China's minority groups, most notably the Tibetans and Uighurs, has not stopped. In 2018, the United Nations recognized that under the government of Xi Jinping nearly one million Uighurs have been declared carriers of an "ideological virus" and have been detained in prison camps where they are separated from their families, reeducated, and compelled to renounce Islam.<sup>146</sup> The Mao era laid the foundation for the conceptualization of the Han as the group with the greatest yang, and the minorities as the weak and foreign bearers of yin. Just as the Party tried to erase femininity as a way of promoting masculine strength, the Party has made concerted efforts to erase ethnic minority cultures as a way of promoting Han dominance.<sup>147</sup>

## Conclusion

The Chinese Communist Party successfully deployed countless propaganda posters to buttress their agenda. In a world where few could read, posters helped convey the Party's message directly to every person. Intentionally or otherwise, the Party built on the inherited framework of philosophical Daoism's binary worldview of yin and yang.

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<sup>145</sup> Justin M. Jacobs, *Xinjiang and the Modern Chinese State* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2016), 226.

<sup>146</sup> NYT Editorial Board, "Will Donald Trump Stand Up to China?," *New York Times* (New York City, NY), Sept. 18, 2018.

<sup>147</sup> Li Cunxin, *Mao's Last Dancer* (New York: Putnam, 2003), 57.



The CCP tried hard to eliminate remnants of feudal culture, including Daoism, but they paradoxically employed the very paradigm that they sought to undo.

The frozen tableaux in the poster campaigns attempted to construct a world where men and women were equal to each other, but the project was doomed from the onset because of Jiang Qing's doctrine of the Three Prominences. The CCP's posters were red, bright, and shining, and they also followed the pattern of featuring most prominently the characters from Party lore that were the most inspiring. Women occasionally held the most prominent position in posters, but this was usually only in posters populated entirely by other women. By and large, the most prominent communist heroes were men. One of the common themes in posters was the worker-peasant-soldier triumvirate. In most cases, the formula for these posters is two men and a woman. The woman is usually a peasant, but whatever her role she is never the most prominent. The triumvirate is always made up of three members of the Han, and they are frequently positioned prominently before hordes of China's ethnic minorities waving *The Little Red Book*. The underlying message is that the best heroes of communism are Han men. Men have yang, and women have yin; the Han have yang, and the minorities have yin.

The most prominent hero is always Chairman Mao Zedong. His eminence in posters helped expand the power of his personality cult. In every image and wherever he went, millions of Chinese citizens chanted the hope that Mao, like his imperial predecessors, would live forever. His posters, badges, statues, and memorabilia were treated as icons, and his books were revered as scripture. By abolishing the old religions and expelling the old gods, Mao became the sole object of adoration in the hearts of his subjects. Not only was he exalted as the apex of divinity, but with his

elevation came a minor pantheon of lesser gods, saints, and beatified martyrs. Though never quite to his level, the upper echelons of Mao's closest cadres were treated with similar degrees of veneration, even though they themselves were always oriented toward Mao. Beyond that, anyone who sacrificed their life for the Chairman and the Party was officially canonized in the Mao cult. Some of these saints were women, but a vast majority of them were men, and none were more revered than the soldier Lei Feng. From a religious perspective, the cult of Mao was nearly complete in that it bore all the elements one might expect to find in a religious following. However, what is missing is any corresponding reverence to any pantheon of goddesses. The cult of Mao is a religion dedicated entirely to the worship of yang.

The Party attempted to enforce gender equality by showing women performing numerous traditionally masculine tasks such as hanging power lines, mining coal, and operating heaving machinery. They were encouraged to dress like men, act like men, and treat everyone else like men. Nevertheless, posters frequently depict women wearing colors and patterns that would be inappropriately feminine on a man; they are often shown doing customarily feminine jobs; and poster women often have their makeup done and their hair in plaits that are simple, yet stylish. In a world where the genders are ostensibly equal, what is missing is any indication that men were encouraged to wear clothing or perform tasks beneath the dignity of their sex. Few dispute the patriarchal oppression of women under imperial Confucianism, but before the collapse of the Qing dynasty it was not uncommon to see male prostitutes, feminine male actors—sometimes

with bound feet—and even the occasional male concubine.<sup>148</sup> All of this disappeared in new China.

Just as women were proclaimed equal, even as their yin was subjected to yang, so too were China's ethnic minorities proclaimed to be equal in posters, even as they were subjected to the oppression of the Han. As a way of claiming ownership of the minorities, the CCP Orientalized their own citizens as a way of justifying the Chinese occupation of non-Chinese peoples. In other words, the Han claimed yang for themselves and assigned yin to everyone else, thereby granting themselves permission to dominate minority communities just as Confucian men traditionally dominated women. The Chinese occupations became so draconian in some places that just as sex acts became bourgeois and counterrevolutionary in mainstream society, so too did acts of kindness and generosity in outer regions like Xinjiang and Tibet.<sup>149</sup> Thus, the poster campaigns of the CCP helped to rewrite social mores and gender norms, all the while maintaining subtle, though enduring, elements of traditional Chinese culture.

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<sup>148</sup> Hinsch, *Passions of the Cut Sleeve*, 153.

<sup>149</sup> Sam, *Sky Train*, 51.

## CHAPTER III

## NOT JUST FOR CHILDREN: COMMUNIST COMICS IN BLACK AND WHITE

All through the night we exchanged comic books, without even speaking. I observed my companions—workers, petty officials, and peasants. No one paid attention to the cold or to the repeated stops; they were all completely absorbed in their reading. And if one of them finished his comic book before the others, he looked around him with restrained impatience, and then, when he got the next one, plunged into it without delay. Several times the stewardess came into the compartment with more hot water for the tea, but no one noticed, and the conductor had to knock his ticket puncher against the metal rim of the baggage rack, as if to arouse sleepers, in order to get any attention.

—Gino Nebiolo<sup>1</sup>

The *Liezi*, one of the canonical texts of religious Daoism, tells the story of a nonagenarian known only as the “foolish old man.”<sup>2</sup> He was discouraged that the two mountains Taihang and Wangwu impeded the road to his home, and so he called together his children and explained to them that it was his wish to remove the mountains. Another old gentleman, referred to in the *Liezi* as the “wise old man,” tried to explain to the foolish old man how futile his project was because the foolish old man and his sons would never live long enough to remove the mountains. Undaunted, the foolish old man said that when he died, his sons would carry on with the work and so would his grandsons after them. The mountains were not getting any taller, but his descendants

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<sup>1</sup> John A. Lent and Xu Ying, *Comics Art in China* (Jackson, Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi, 2017), 95. Nebiolo was an Italian man travelling in China in 1973 during the Cultural Revolution. See also Chen Minjie, “Chinese *Lian Huan Hua* and Literacy: Popular Culture Meets Youth Literature,” in *Perspectives on Teaching and Learning Chinese Literacy in China*, eds. Cynthia Leung and Jiening Ruan (Berlin: Springer, 2012), 160.

<sup>2</sup> This text is attributed to Lie Yukou (circa 400 BCE) although its genuine authorship is unknown and is believed to have been written in the second or third century CE, see *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, vol. 1, *From Earliest Times to 1600*, ed. Wm. Theodore De Bary and Irene Bloom (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 98n21.

would be endless. How then could they fail to level the mountains? The wise old man had no response.<sup>3</sup> The gods were so moved by the determination of the foolish old man that they magically removed the mountains in a single night. The story of the foolish old man became a proverb: *yu gong yi shan* 愚公移山 (literally “the foolish old man moves the mountains”). In colloquial English, this phrase might be understood that in any quixotic endeavor, “where there’s a will there’s a way.”<sup>4</sup> The Chinese language contains many hundreds of these idiomatic proverbs called *chengyu* 成语. Each is precisely four characters, and each is meant to remind listeners of the story behind the proverb and the wisdom encapsulated within it.<sup>5</sup>

This chapter is about popular stories circulated in China between the years of the founding of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) and the death of Mao Zedong. Like all stories, they were intended to entertain, but they were also meant to educate individuals in order to guide their behavior. In that regard, these stories are no different than any other form of propaganda such as the posters discussed in the previous chapter. But stories are different from posters and paintings because they are not a static snapshot of a single moment—they can present a complex idea and develop it over time, thereby allowing the propagandist to develop plot and character depth in a way that a poster

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<sup>3</sup> Situ Tan, ed., *Zhongguo Chengyu Xuancui* [Best Chinese Idioms] (repr., Kowloon, Hong Kong: Haifeng Publishing, 1986), 240-1.

<sup>4</sup> Jiao Liwei et al., *500 Common Chinese Idioms: An Annotated Frequency Dictionary* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 48-9.

<sup>5</sup> Some English idioms function in the same narrative way, such as “sour grapes,” or “crying wolf,” but many do not, such as “casting pearls before swine,” nor is there an expectation that English idioms will meet syllabic criteria.

cannot.<sup>6</sup> This chapter will center on a specific manifestation of Chinese print culture called *lianhuanhua* 连环画, loosely translated hereafter as “comic books,” although there is nothing comedic about them. Comic books are an important source for understanding yin-yang cosmology and the reconceptualization of gender in modern China because they show themes that were popularly received by the public, as well as what the Party bureaucracy wanted people to internalize. Moreover, like posters, comic books were useful tools in fostering both political orthodoxy and literacy in a world that generally could not read.<sup>7</sup>

Stories and legends, whether they are in religious texts like the *Liezi* or in casual ephemera like comic books, are not only important to the civilizations that tell them, but they are also important to the historians that study those civilizations. Salman Rushdie described cultural myths as “the family album or storehouse of a culture’s childhood.”<sup>8</sup> By examining the stories of a society, historians are effectively studying the “storehouses” and “family albums” of that society. In attempting to psychoanalyze the mentalité of French society during the overthrow of the *ancien regime*, historian Robert Darnton turned to a comparative analysis of folktales in order to approximate the worldview of the average French commoner.<sup>9</sup> In other words, “folktales are historical

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<sup>6</sup> Daisy Yan Du, “Socialist Modernity in the Wasteland: Changing Representations of the Female Tractor Driver in China, 1949-1964,” *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture* 29, no. 1 (2017): 74-5.

<sup>7</sup> Mary Ann Farquhar, “Comic Books and Popularization,” *Children’s Literature in China: From Lu Xun to Mao Zedong* (New York: East Gate, 1999), 191.

<sup>8</sup> Salman Rushdie, *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 2000), 83.

<sup>9</sup> Robert Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre: and Other Episodes in French Cultural History* (New York: Basic Books, 1984), 6.

documents,” and the best way to understand the mindset of a historical community is to understand the stories they tell themselves.<sup>10</sup>

What follows is a brief explanation of the history and political deployment of Chinese comic books, specifically as it relates to the CCP’s efforts to equalize both sexes. Despite the Party’s intentions, however, this chapter will show that their treatment of gender draws a line between the “inferior” yin of femininity and the powerful yang of masculinity. This is done in five ways, three of which will be considered discretely, and two more which are relevant throughout this examination. The first is how gender is represented in comic books published during the transitional phase between 1949 and 1965. This was the period where traditional values were blended with newly articulated communist ideals. These comics most clearly demonstrate the evolution of established ideas that women should be demure, and radical new ideas that women should be valiantly hard workers.

Second, as both politics and the comic book industry refined their processes through the 1960s and 1970s, even though the women in Chinese comic books were strong and courageous, they were frequently given a handicap against which they had to struggle. These handicaps were either triggered by the physicality of their sex, or they were caused by the social prejudice against women. In either case, the successes of the

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<sup>10</sup> Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre*, 13. Darnton explains that even when analogs of recognizable stories are found in communities across Europe, each variation differs according to the social needs and expectations of that given locality. For example, in German tales such as “Hansel and Gretel” or “Jack and the Beanstalk,” the protagonists generally manage to escape terrible danger through a combination of luck, hard work, and magical interference whereas the French tales of “Tom Thumb” and “Jack the Giant-Slayer” recount stories of heroes who manage to survive in a harsh world through craftiness and tricksterism (22, 55-6). Darnton’s point is that in order to understand the situation of the French Revolution, one must recognize that French peasants saw their world as a strenuous place where the powerful preyed upon the weak, and that the only means of survival was using every stratagem available to turn the tables (31, 35).

various heroines carries an undertone of surprise as though the narrator was thrilled with the success of these women—even though they were not men.

Third, not only is gender cast in terms of a yin-yang binary, so too is age. The heroes in communist novels and comic books are young and energetic, most of them are in their teens and twenties, and virtually no heroes are over forty. Furthermore, the antagonistic class enemies in comics are generally old and lethargic. This is a further repudiation of tradition since Confucian ethics requires filial respect for one's elders. In old China, age represented venerability and wisdom, as expressed in the word for "teacher"—*laoshi* (老师)—which literally means "old master." In new China, however, it was the young who gave their instructions to the old.

The final two ways in which the Party employs the yin-yang binary to undermine their enforcement of gender equality are visible in the juxtaposition between good and evil. Many of the comics under consideration feature flawless heroes and sinister villains. The heroes always stand erect and are described in warm and energetic terms. The villains, on the other hand, are always hunched, usually scowling, are described as cold and lazy, and frequently have harsh-sounding names. Much like the yin-yang differentiations of class discussed in the previous chapter, the heroes and villains inhabit a world of black and white—literally as well as figuratively in the case of comic books. This difference is even more noticeable in comics published during the Cultural Revolution which were subject to the requirements of the Three Prominences. In those cases, the heroes usually wear white (or red, as described in the text), and they are positioned high in the center of the frame. Class enemies usually wear black, and, if they appear in the same panel, are typically drawn below the hero and near the edge.



Furthermore, the “enemy” need not always be a person. Especially in comics produced during the Cultural Revolution, most actions were described in martial language. Quotidian chores like driving a bus through a snow storm,<sup>11</sup> painting a group of peasants,<sup>12</sup> or repairing a leaky roof, were all described as battles to be won.<sup>13</sup> In this way, the entire world was transformed into a total war of the righteous versus the wicked.

In these cases, the effect is to associate all things with yin as undesirable. This includes the unintended consequence of implicitly linking women with class enemies and the enfeebled. In addition to the divisions mentioned above, the last characteristic of gender imbalance is that in all comic books identified by the author, the villains and class enemies are always men. Female characters may innocently exhibit ignorance or myopia, but their occasional flaws are minimal and endearing. So far as can be determined, there is not a single female character in CCP comic books capable of overt selfishness or intentional evil. Conversely, women frequently take on the hero’s role although in most comic books the hero is generally a male. All the comic books selected for inclusion within this chapter have female heroes, but in most instances, they draw comfort and encouragement from an older, wiser male in the chain of command above them. Also, in most cases, each story contains a disproportionate ratio of male to female characters. For example, in *The Young Sentry of the East China Sea* and *Haiying*, the teenage heroines

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<sup>11</sup> Cui Yabin, ed., *Xin Zhanzhang* [The New Station Manager] (Beijing: Renmin Meishu Chubanshe, 1974), 43, book number 5793 2110, East Asian Library, Stanford University, Palo Alto, CA.

<sup>12</sup> “Nongmin Nü Huajia: Li Fenglan [The Peasant Female Artist: Li Fenglan],” *Yan’an Huakan* (1974, issue 5): frame 18, Chinese Pictorial Magazines and Art Education Materials 1950s-1970s, Box 1 延安画刊 [The Yan’an Pictorial], East Asia Library, Stanford University, Palo Alto, CA.

<sup>13</sup> Hu Xingdeng, “Yu Shui Qing [The Closeness of Fish and Water],” *Yan’an Huakan* (1972, issue 9): frame 1, Chinese Pictorial Magazines and Art Education Materials 1950s-1970s, Box 1 延安画刊 [The Yan’an Pictorial], East Asia Library, Stanford University, Palo Alto, CA.

Xiaohong and Haiying are the protagonists of their stories, but they are also the only females in their entire eighty-two and one-hundred-sixteen-page publications.

### **A Brief History of Comic Books in China**

In order to understand the scope of how deeply comic books shaped politics and the reconstruction of gender, it is important to understand the history of the Chinese comic book industry because the vicissitudes of the Mao era played an equally important role in the government, gender norms, and comic publishers. The word “*lianhuanhua*” literally means “a chain of pictures” or “serial images,” and was first used in 1927 as an umbrella term for any publication that contained a series of drawings linked together to tell a story. Prior to this, these publications were generally referred to as “picture books,” “little person books,” “children’s books,” or “small books.”<sup>14</sup> Despite the relatively recent coinage of the word, some scholars trace the origins of Chinese comic books to serial woodcut images in texts from the Yuan (1279 to 1368 CE) and Ming dynasties (1368 to 1644 CE),<sup>15</sup> although some point to examples from the Wei dynasty (220 to 264 CE),<sup>16</sup> or even the Han dynasty (206 BCE to 220 CE).<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless, it was not until the conclusion of the Opium Wars (1839 to 1860 CE) that commercial publication of comic books in China became practical, following the British importation of lithographic

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<sup>14</sup> Chen, “Chinese *Lian Huan Hua* and Literacy,” 158; Kuiyi Shen, “Lianhuanhua and Manhua—Picture Books and Comics in Old Shanghai,” in *Illustrating Asia: Comics, Humour Magazines, and Picture Books*, ed. John A Lent (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2001), 101, 103.

<sup>15</sup> Mo Weimin, “‘Linked Pictures’: The Phenomenon of Lianhuanhua,” *Book Bird* 44, no. 3 (2006): 31.

<sup>16</sup> Farquhar, *Children’s Literature in China*, 193.

<sup>17</sup> Pan Lingling, “Post-Liberation History of China’s Lianhuanhua,” *The International Journal of Comic Art* 10, no. 2 (2008): 694.

printing for English-language newspapers. The widespread implementation of lithography drastically affected the cost efficiency and speed of publication.<sup>18</sup> Even so, the comic book industry did not truly begin until 1920 when Shanghai opera companies realized that most civilians could not afford the price of admission, but they could afford to read the story and look at the pictures if the plots of the operas were published in small, cheaply bound books.<sup>19</sup>

The opera companies catalyzed the *lianhuanhua* industry, but comics quickly morphed into adaptations of popular literature.<sup>20</sup> The ones that recreated classic tales were especially marketed to children because they made up the largest readership, but this was with the understanding that comic books were read and enjoyed by audiences of all ages.<sup>21</sup> In fact, comic books were often a child's first teacher, or in many cases, their only teacher. What is more, comic books were frequently used by urban adults as a way of acquiring literacy.<sup>22</sup>

Despite their popularity, few people chose (or could afford) to purchase comic books for themselves. The "small person books" were considered vulgar by the upper classes and bookstore proprietors. Consequently, several small businesses purchased comic books directly from the publishers and began to rent them in corner bookstalls

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<sup>18</sup> Mo, "Linked Pictures," 31.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 32-3; Shen, "Lianhuanhua and Manhua," 100.

<sup>20</sup> Shen, "Lianhuanhua and Manhua," 101.

<sup>21</sup> Chen, "Chinese *Lian Huan Hua* and Literacy," 159-60; Mo, "Linked Pictures," 30; Farquhar, *Children's Literature in China*, 193; Rebecca Scott, "'Seizing the Battlefield' in the Face of 'Guerrilla Vending': The Struggle over the Dissemination of Lianhuanhua, 1949 to 1956," *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture* 29, no. 1 (2017): 136-7.

<sup>22</sup> Mo, "Linked Pictures," 35.

where customers would pay the fee and then read their rented books right there in the shop.<sup>23</sup> There were several benefits of renting comic books instead of selling them. First, rented copies were quickly disseminated to a much wider audience than they would if customers purchased them. For example, if a single title had a printing of one hundred thousand copies, and if only thirty different people rented each copy, then that comic book could reach an audience of thirty million.<sup>24</sup> Second, the rental fees were cheap. Ji-li Jiang recalled that during her childhood, she and the neighborhood children would spend hours at Grandpa Hong's corner bookstall. For a fen,<sup>25</sup> each child could rent two comic books. Jiang estimated that she spent about thirty fen every week, and after reading her allotment of sixty comic books, Grandpa Hong would let her read another one for free. She reflected that her favorites were always the retellings of classic Chinese masterpieces like Wu Cheng-en's *Journey to the West*, and foreign stories like *Snow White* and *Aladdin*.<sup>26</sup>

Most of China's elites had negative opinions of comic books, but a few of the most influential authors and social agitators defended the fledgling industry, including Mao Dun (1896-1981) and Lu Xun (1881-1936). Mao Dun recalled that starting in the late 1920s, comic-renting bookstalls were omnipresent and extremely popular. According to him, comic books were the most effective tool for educating the masses, and the combination of simple phrases and images improved literacy rates.<sup>27</sup> However,

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<sup>23</sup> Farquhar, *Children's Literature in China*, 195; Shen, *Illustrating Asia*, 103.

<sup>24</sup> Scott, "Seizing the Battlefield," 149.

<sup>25</sup> The smallest denomination of Chinese coinage.

<sup>26</sup> Ji-li Jiang, *Red Scarf Girl: A Memoir of the Cultural Revolution* (New York: HarperCollins, 1997), 20.

<sup>27</sup> Chen, "Chinese *Lian Huan Hua* and Literacy," 162.

he also explained that before 1949, comic book stalls were usually only patronized by men and boys since literacy was still actively denied to most women.<sup>28</sup> Lu Xun also advocated on behalf of *lianhuanhua* as a worthy addition to the “temple of art” because they combined literature and illustration in a way that was accessible to the common man.<sup>29</sup>

In the 1920s and 1930s, both the Communist Party and the Guomintang observed the popularity of comic books and how effective they were at spreading new ideas to the lower classes.<sup>30</sup> Like Mao Dun and Lu Xun, Chairman Mao and the other Party leaders at Yan’an promoted comic books as a way to promote literacy and to “occupy the consciousness of the youth.”<sup>31</sup> While the CCP and the Guomintang simultaneously waged war against each other and the Japanese, both parties used comic books to inspire a sense of patriotism in their fighters and feelings of anti-Japanese resistance among the populace.<sup>32</sup> Even though both parties had weaponized *lianhuanhua*, the Communists used it to greater effect since not only did they employ it to mobilize the citizenry against the Japanese, but they also drew popular support away from the Guomintang by

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<sup>28</sup> Chen, “Chinese *Lian Huan Hua* and Literacy,” 162n2.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 163; Farquhar, *Children’s Literature in China*, 194-8; Mo, “Linked Pictures,” 36.

<sup>30</sup> Rosemary Roberts, “The Politics and Aesthetics of Rediscovering Heroes of the ‘Red Classics’ in *Lianhuanhua* of the Reform Era,” in *The Making and Remaking of China’s ‘Red Classics,’* eds. Rosemary Roberts and Li Li (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2017), 115.

<sup>31</sup> Pan, “Post-Liberation History of China’s *Lianhuanhua*,” 703.

<sup>32</sup> Roberts, “Politics and Aesthetics of Rediscovering Heroes,” 122.

promulgating ideas about how communist ideology was more beneficial to the common man than Chiang Kai-shek's brand of nationalism.<sup>33</sup>

By the time the Communist Party consolidated its administration of the mainland in 1949, there were roughly eight hundred bookstalls renting comics in Shanghai—nearly one on every street corner.<sup>34</sup> Three years later, this number had reportedly ballooned to 350,000—although it should be noted that this number seems implausibly high and may be including the greater Shanghai area and surrounding cities. Nevertheless, daily consumers of comic books were estimated to be between two and four hundred thousand (with each person reading multiple comic books per visit), whereas daily cinema audiences only totaled one hundred thousand.<sup>35</sup>

The 1949 “Liberation” marked the stark division between old China and new China.<sup>36</sup> Once the Japanese and the Guomindang had both been pushed out, the Party recognized that the popularity of comic books was so ubiquitous that one of the first priorities after the founding of the PRC was nationalizing the publishing industry under the authority of the Ministry of Culture.<sup>37</sup> Bian Chunguang, the head of the Publishing Bureau, declared that “the priority should be given to those [pictorial books] which aim at propagating the socialist spiritual civilization, promoting revolutionary heroes, excellent communities, and individuals.”<sup>38</sup> Shortly thereafter, recognizing that “*lianhuanhua* is

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<sup>33</sup> Chen, “Chinese *Lian Huan Hua* and Literacy,” 167.

<sup>34</sup> Mo, “Linked Pictures,” 34.

<sup>35</sup> Farquhar, *Children's Literature in China*, 202.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 199.

<sup>37</sup> Lent and Ying, *Comics Art in China*, 80-1; Scott, “Seizing the Battlefield,” 139.

<sup>38</sup> Pan, “Post-Liberation History of China's *Lianhuanhua*,” 694-5.

read by children as well as adults, illiterates as well as educated,” Mao ordered Zhou Yang, the vice-minister of the Publicity Department, to found a state-run *lianhuanhua* publishing house as a way of shoring up popular support through political education.<sup>39</sup>

The transition to a nationalized publishing industry took seven years. The primary step was censoring and purging all the pro-Guomindang and counterrevolutionary comics that had been published on the free market before 1949.<sup>40</sup> During the first few years of the PRC, comic producers tried to follow Party doctrine, but without clear guidelines, many of them made political mistakes such as showing positive depictions of the Guomindang and American contributions during WWII; sometimes they referred to Communism as the “new democracy;” and sometimes they transgressed acceptable norms of class struggle such as telling a story about a kind landlord or a cruel peasant.<sup>41</sup>

Furthermore, the system of renting comics from alleyway bookstalls—itself a holdover from the Republican era—made it difficult for state censors to control what people were reading. Many shops carried books that had been criminalized but were still popular, and other book renters had no permanent location for censors to monitor because the proprietors operated from their bicycles.<sup>42</sup> A 1951 survey of comic books on Shanghai’s streets estimated that only thirty percent of the books in circulation were passable, and the public was not cooperating with removing the offending titles because

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<sup>39</sup> Pan, “Post-Liberation History of China’s Lianhuanhua,” 702. Roberts, “Politics and Aesthetics of Rediscovering Heroes,” 122.

<sup>40</sup> Chen, “Chinese *Lian Huan Hua* and Literacy,” 168.

<sup>41</sup> Farquhar, *Children’s Literature in China*, 216-7.

<sup>42</sup> Scott, “Seizing the Battlefield,” 147, 156.

they still preferred the traditional “feudal” tales about magic and demons—things which the Party determined were “poisonous.”<sup>43</sup> Likewise, a similar survey conducted in Beijing determined that only twenty to twenty-five percent of the comic books in circulation qualified as “revolutionary.”<sup>44</sup>

Like all works of art and literature, comic books fell under the purview of Mao’s 1942 Talks in Yan’an where he declared that art was not to be produced for its own sake but should serve the function of bolstering the influence of the Party. This meant that while the illustrations in comic books should be qualitative and entertaining, their revolutionary content was far more valuable to the propaganda machine.<sup>45</sup> Part of the value behind the new comic books lay in the fact that even though they were read by all age groups, they were particularly effective in shaping the literacy and political understanding of children and young adults.<sup>46</sup> The Party used this by identifying the key slogans that they wanted young people to internalize, and then repeating them *ad nauseum*.<sup>47</sup>

Despite the new controls placed on the publishing industry after nationalization, publishers still maintained a relatively high degree of autonomy. Profanity and sexuality

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<sup>43</sup> Farquhar, *Children’s Literature in China*, 201-2, 214.

<sup>44</sup> Scott, “Seizing the Battlefield,” 152.

<sup>45</sup> Chen, “Chinese *Lian Huan Hua* and Literacy,” 167; Farquhar, *Children’s Literature in China*, 192-3, 241; Pan, “Post-Liberation History of China’s Lianhuanhua,” 703; Roberts, “Politics and Aesthetics of Rediscovering Heroes,” 123.

<sup>46</sup> Farquhar, *Children’s Literature in China*, 243.

<sup>47</sup> Scott, “Seizing the Battlefield,” 144-5. Amusingly, this is reminiscent of George Orwell’s *Animal Farm* when the sheep are taught only to recite “four legs good, two legs bad,” (repr., New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2003), 21-2.



were strictly taboo, but scenes of graphic violence were encouraged.<sup>48</sup> In 1951, just over 1,800 different titles were published in more than 19 million copies. By 1957 those numbers had climbed to as high as 2,300 titles and over 100 million copies.<sup>49</sup> Publishers, however, found certain titles to be so profitable that they simply rewrote older versions of comic books that were already in circulation and rereleased them. For example, by the end of 1952, there were, on the market, more than twenty different versions of the classic revolutionary story of *The White-Haired Girl*.<sup>50</sup>

In 1952, the New China Bookstore became the main distributor of roughly eighty percent of the industry's new comic books.<sup>51</sup> The following year, the Central Government announced the First Five Year Plan which called for greater economic controls all the way to the village level. This allowed the party to maintain a tighter grasp on new publications entering circulation. The effect on the market was notable by 1955 when new stories started to emphasize class struggle and the sharp contrasts between "oppressed versus oppressors."<sup>52</sup> Finally, by 1956, the PRC completed its nationalization of the publishing and distribution industries including newspapers, periodicals, novels, textbooks, and *lianhuanhua*.<sup>53</sup> Despite the CCP's newly totalized controls, the most

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<sup>48</sup> Mo, "Linked Pictures," 38.

<sup>49</sup> Pan, "Post-Liberation History of China's Lianhuanhua," 703.

<sup>50</sup> Scott, "Seizing the Battlefield," 142.

<sup>51</sup> Farquhar, *Children's Literature in China*, 215.

<sup>52</sup> Lent and Ying, *Comics Art in China*, 83.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

popular comic books among readers remained the illegal copies of classical Chinese folktales.<sup>54</sup>

The end of the 1950s and the beginning of the 1960s were the high-water mark for comic books in China.<sup>55</sup> The CCP gave copies to factories and school libraries as a way of entertaining the masses and instructing them in Party doctrine.<sup>56</sup> Indeed, most people lacked the means to own a television or to pursue entertainments beyond reading comic books.<sup>57</sup> In recalling her own experiences growing up during this period, Chen Xiaomei discussed the cultural significance of comic books: “With more than ten thousand *lianhuanhua* produced, and seven hundred million copies published by 1963, one can easily imagine the psychological, ideological, and cultural impact they had on the lives of millions of children in Maoist China.”<sup>58</sup> Comic books continued to play an important role in Chinese politics throughout the twentieth century, but the turmoil of the Cultural Revolution and the shifting political landscape meant that there was little stability in the comic book industry starting from the latter half of the 1960s.<sup>59</sup>

One of the changes that affected comic books was the doctrine of the Three Prominences which was first articulated in 1969 by Yao Wenyuan, a literary critic and

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<sup>54</sup> Scott, “Seizing the Battlefield,” 140.

<sup>55</sup> Mo, “Linked Pictures,” 31; Pan, “Post-Liberation History of China’s *Lianhuanhua*,” 702; Roberts, “Politics and Aesthetics of Rediscovering Heroes,” 115.

<sup>56</sup> Scott, “Seizing the Battlefield,” 145.

<sup>57</sup> Chen, “Chinese *Lian Huan Hua* and Literacy,” 160-1.

<sup>58</sup> Chen Xiaomei, “Growing Up with Posters in the Maoist Era,” in *Picturing Power in the People’s Republic of China: Posters of the Cultural Revolution*, ed. Harriet Evans and Stephanie Donald (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 1999), 110.

<sup>59</sup> Lent and Ying, *Comics Art in China*, 105.

one of Jiang Qing's confederates in the Gang of Four.<sup>60</sup> This meant that like all posters, operas, ballets, and films produced during the Cultural Revolution, each frame needed to give prominence to good communists over class enemies, great communists over good communists, and ultimate heroes over everyone.<sup>61</sup> This meant that if he appeared at all, prominence was always given to Mao, even if his image was only a picture on the wall looking down on the drama unfolding below him.

The greatest shakeup to impact the publishing industry—and indeed, all of China—came in 1966 when Mao launched the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. Jiang Qing's criticism of the arts provoked Mao into claiming that elements of feudalism had remained prevalent in most art and literature published between 1949 and 1965. In an effort to clear the slate and start over, Mao condemned most of the existing publications as “revisionist black art.”<sup>62</sup> One contributor wrote an article in the *Workers Daily* on 18 May 1965 relating his horror and shame when he came home one day to find that his children were happily sketching images from comic books of “emperors, generals, scholars, beauties and the like,” instead of the revolutionary worker-peasant-soldier triumvirate.<sup>63</sup>

This backlash against “feudal art” instigated a witch hunt against authors, illustrators, and publishers, many of whom were arrested, tortured, and sent to the

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<sup>60</sup> Lan Yang, “The Ideal Socialist Hero: Literary Conventions in Cultural Revolution Novels,” in *China's Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution: Master Narratives and Post-Mao Counternarratives*, ed. Woei Lien Chong (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2002), 188-9, 202.

<sup>61</sup> Farquhar, *Children's Literature in China*, 235; Lent and Ying, *Comics Art in China*, 96; Roberts, “Politics and Aesthetics of Rediscovering Heroes,” 123.

<sup>62</sup> Farquhar, *Children's Literature in China*, 233.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 234.

countryside for reeducation. As a result, the Red Guards executed some while others committed suicide, died prematurely from health complications, or spent years performing hard labor.<sup>64</sup> This culture of fear and uncertainty meant that from 1966 to 1971, the comic book industry ground to a complete halt.<sup>65</sup> In an analysis of 383 scholarly articles on *lianhuanhua* published in China between 1949 and the 1990s, fifty-five were published between 1949 and 1965; only two were published during the decade of the Cultural Revolution.<sup>66</sup> The purges of intellectuals and the closure of art schools and publishing houses meant that control of the artistic world fell even more tightly into the hands of Jiang Qing.<sup>67</sup> Afterward, the few cartoonists who remained never deviated from the Party's accepted story formulae.<sup>68</sup> Even book renters were affected. Grandpa Hong, the alleyway bookstall proprietor who had rented *Aladdin* and *The Tale of Two Cities* to Ji-li Jiang, found his business closed by the Red Guards who plastered his shop with big-character posters accusing him of "propagating feudal, capitalistic, and revisionist ideals" that had poisoned the minds of the youth.<sup>69</sup>

The comic book industry only revitalized with the direct encouragement of Zhou Enlai, although few people were eager to participate at first.<sup>70</sup> Moreover, the comic

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<sup>64</sup> Lent and Ying, *Comics Art in China*, 100-2; Pan, "Post-Liberation History of China's Lianhuanhua," 704.

<sup>65</sup> Pan, "Post-Liberation History of China's Lianhuanhua," 710.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 696, 704.

<sup>67</sup> Lent and Ying, *Comics Art in China*, 88.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 93.

<sup>69</sup> Jiang, *Red Scarf Girl*, 48.

<sup>70</sup> Lent and Ying, *Comics Art in China*, 93. Pan, "Post-Liberation History of China's Lianhuanhua," 705.

books of the latter half of the Cultural Revolution were never as popular as they were from 1949 to the mid-1960s. This was because all new artistic creations were intended to be purely proletarian and revolutionary. Consequently, most titles focused on building the Mao cult, class struggle, the joys of collectivization, or the supremacy of the Party.<sup>71</sup> Jiang Qing also voiced support for resurrecting the publication of comic books, but as a former actress, her attention was primarily focused on developing the revolutionary model operas. Therefore, the first comic books published in the 1970s simply retold the stories of the revolutionary stage productions.<sup>72</sup>

Once the new genre of revolutionary comic books was established, besides the retellings of the model operas, many titles simply repeated the plots of lesser known plays and novels that had already received the approval of Jiang Qing and the Cultural Revolution Group. As a result, the comic books of the 1970s were formulaic repetitions of what the government wanted the people to have rather than the stories that the people wanted for themselves.<sup>73</sup>

The history of the comic book industry in China helps us understand the changing social conceptions of gender. Before complete nationalization, the earliest comics dealt with sex in ways that clearly demonstrated traditional gender roles, and yet they also tried very hard to promote ideas of gender equality. As politics became more sharply divided, so too did portrayals of gender reveal the greater binary distinctions of yin and yang.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Chen, "Chinese *Lian Huan Hua* and Literacy," 170; Farquhar, *Children's Literature in China*, 233; Lent and Ying, *Comics Art in China*, 93.

<sup>72</sup> Farquhar, *Children's Literature in China*, 235; Lent and Ying, *Comics Art in China*, 93; Pan, "Post-Liberation History of China's Lianhuanhua," 705.

<sup>73</sup> Farquhar, *Children's Literature in China*, 242.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 236.

Although yin and yang have clear manifestations in early comic books, the divisions between good and evil were more ambiguous. Early writers were encouraged to create “backward” characters and heroes who suffered from self-doubt. However, as time progressed, comic book topics (including gender) became more polarized such that there were only three types of characters: class enemies, perfect communists, and ordinary “good” communists who demonstrated how special the heroes were.<sup>75</sup>

It is also worth mentioning again that women in CCP comic books were further “de-fanged” insofar as they were never allowed to play the villain. In traditional Chinese literature, there are two main motifs for women, and, as Susan Mann pointed out, both themes supported the Confucian patriarchy by relying on yin-yang cosmology.<sup>76</sup> One is the female warrior who is celebrated in her own right but who also personifies the yin which drives her husband’s (or father’s) yang to a position of greater influence.

The other trope is the seductress that saps a powerful man of his energy and wisdom. In either case, there cannot be yang without yin; but again, in either case, women hold a secondary position. Just as the universe is driven forward by the interplay of yin and yang, the cycle of dynastic transition is driven forward by the interplay of men and women. One of the most famous examples of the seductress is the last of China’s Four Great Beauties, the Tang dynasty concubine Yang Guifei. Although her story has been embellished over the past millennium, she is generally credited with distracting

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<sup>75</sup> Pan, “Post-Liberation History of China’s Lianhuanhua,” 703; Roberts, “Politics and Aesthetics of Rediscovering Heroes,” 117; Yang, “The Ideal Socialist Hero,” 188.

<sup>76</sup> Susan Mann, “Myths of Asian Womanhood,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 59, no. 4 (2000): 841-3.

Emperor Xuanzong to the point that she is blamed for the An Lushan Rebellion.<sup>77</sup> It should be noted, however, that it is not simply *women* that have the power to end dynasties, but feminine *yin* which has that power. After all, the fall of the Western Han is blamed on the *male* consort of Emperor Ai who, despite his sex, played the same seductress role as Yang Guifei.<sup>78</sup> Furthermore, although the Dowager Empress Cixi is largely credited with the collapse of the Qing dynasty and the entire imperial system, it was the excessive *yin* of the court eunuchs and “womanly” Mandarins that were blamed for the Century of Humiliation which only the yang of the CCP could ameliorate.

### **The Heroines of Early CCP Comics**

Despite the negative roles given to women in traditional Chinese history and literature, there are many stories of celebrated women who pretend to be men in order to go to war to fight for the country, or to receive an education.<sup>79</sup> In China, the most famous example of the female warrior is Hua Mulan. The earliest record of Mulan is from a poem written during the Northern Wei dynasty in the sixth century CE.<sup>80</sup> The irony is that Mulan herself might not have even been Chinese. The Northern Wei was ruled by Xianbei nomads who conquered northern China in 386 CE and ruled the native Han population.<sup>81</sup> Nevertheless, the original story was embellished over the centuries with

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<sup>77</sup> Mann, “Myths of Asian Womanhood,” 844-9.

<sup>78</sup> Bret Hinsch, *Passions of the Cut Sleeve: The Male Homosexual Tradition in China* (Berkeley: UC Press, 1992), 45-6.

<sup>79</sup> Such as Zhu Yingtai in the Chinese classic *The Butterfly Lovers*.

<sup>80</sup> Feng Lan, “The Female Individual and the Empire: A Historicist Approach to Mulan and Kingston’s Woman Warrior,” *Comparative Literature* 55, no. 3 (2003): 231. Susan Mann, “Myths of Asian Womanhood,” 846.

<sup>81</sup> Lan, “The Female Individual and the Empire,” 231.

four main revisions between the Tang and Qing dynasties which transformed Mulan into a Confucian Han girl surnamed Hua who fought to protect both her father's honor and the Emperor's life.<sup>82</sup>

There were many different comic book versions of the Mulan story circulating in China's metropolises during the 1950s. The following is an analytic summary of one such that was published by the New China Bookstore in 1950, one year after the founding of the PRC and the Party's efforts to nationalize the publishing industry. In this version, there are many elements of the traditional story, but this is blended with the publisher's attempt to satisfy the expectations of the Party. For example, in the comic, Mulan was raised in a small village near Yan'an.<sup>83</sup> This is significant because Yan'an served as the Communist Party Headquarters from 1935 until 1949. It was the crucible where Mao and the top echelon of Party leaders articulated the central doctrines of Chinese Communism, including Mao's 1942 Talks on Art and Literature. It was in Yan'an that the Party found sanctuary after the Long March from Jiangxi in 1935, and it was there that they led their forces against both the Japanese and the Guomindang. By placing Mulan in this location, it implies a clear statement about the closeness between Mulan and the Party.

Mulan is celebrated as a woman with a great deal of yang, but in this version, she is also held up as an exemplary vessel of yin. In addition to her unusual prowess as a martial artist, Mulan is skilled in the domestic arts of cooking, weaving, and obeying her

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<sup>82</sup> Lan, "The Female Individual and the Empire," 233-6. Susan Mann, "Myths of Asian Womanhood," 847.

<sup>83</sup> Wang Shuhui, *Mulan Congjun* [Mulan Joins the Army] (Beijing: Xinhua Shudian, 1950), 1, book number 5793 1136, East Asian Library, Stanford University, Palo Alto, CA.



father, Hua Hu.<sup>84</sup> The enemy against whom Mulan must fight changes from version to version, but in this instance, China was invaded by the king of the Turks who commanded his soldiers to “rape and pillage as you wish. Burn every house. If you see a person, then kill them.”<sup>85</sup> This is a curious choice for the publisher to make. China has fought many different tribes and nationalities along its shifting borders over the centuries, but the main Turkic groups have come from the Taklamakan Desert in the Tarim Basin. Today this region is China’s westernmost province of Xinjiang. At the time this comic was published, the PLA was in the process of occupying the region and pacifying the Turkic Uighurs who live there. In the comic, the king of the Turks occupied Jiayuguan, the first major city along the Silk Road between Urumqi (the capital of Xinjiang) and Xi’an (China’s ancient capital).

When the call came for Hua Hu to go to war, he was too ill to leave his bed, and his son, Hua Mudi, was too young to take his place. Distressed, Mulan reflected that she wanted to help, but no one would allow a woman to join the army (see figure 2.1).<sup>86</sup> When her sister, Muhui, saw that Mulan was troubled, she assumed that Mulan’s anguish was caused by a man and thoughts of marriage.<sup>87</sup> When Mulan finally determined to dress as a man to take her father’s place in her brother’s name, she remained a filial daughter and resolved not to do anything without her father’s permission. Although he granted his assent eventually, his initial response was that “women belong in the home—

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<sup>84</sup> Wang, *Mulan Congjun*, 3.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 6.

they should not have this kind of courage.”<sup>88</sup> Her mother was also afraid that as a woman, her daughter would be incapable of killing a man. To allay her parents’ fears, Mulan reassured them by performing the sword dance (see figure 2.2).<sup>89</sup>

When Mulan finally joined the army, she made friends with three other new recruits who also happened to come from another village near Yan’an. But as they trained and traveled together, another soldier complained that “women at home sure have a happy and carefree life” while “all the hardships are born by men.” Mulan replied that “the women remain behind producing the food and clothing for the front along with everything else” that the army needs.<sup>90</sup> This exchange is new to the Mulan story, but it exemplifies the Party’s efforts to promote gender equality as defined in the Marriage Law passed the same year this comic was published.

Despite her sex, Mulan had more yang than the average soldier. While training, she beat all her comrades in hand-to-hand combat, and during her first battle, she drove away the king of the Turks and saved the Grand Marshal He Tingyu. Then, while Marshal He was recovering from his wounds, Mulan rallied the Chinese army and led them into battle by calling on them to “avenge the humiliation of our country.”<sup>91</sup> This battle cry would have struck a chord with the audience of this comic since it was only the year before that Chairman Mao had ascended Tiananmen Gate and proclaimed an end to the Century of Humiliation.

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<sup>88</sup> Wang, *Mulan Congjun*, 9.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 16-7.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 19, 22, 24.

According to the comic, Mulan spent twelve years becoming a seasoned veteran as the second-in-command to Marshal He.<sup>92</sup> This illustrated the idea that women can do anything that a man can do—but there still needed to be a man in charge. During the final battle outside the gates of Jiayuguan, she was wounded by three arrows in her left arm, but she still managed to unhorse the Turkic king and capture him alive.<sup>93</sup> When her victorious army retook the city, she ordered the soldiers to “closely observe our military discipline. In all respects, cherish and respect the general public. Do not be course among the people.”<sup>94</sup> This command is strikingly similar to Chairman Mao’s 1947 “Three Disciplines and Eight Attentions,” which, among other things, commands the PLA not to take anything from the people without paying for it, to be polite, to not damage anything that is not theirs, and not to abuse the people.<sup>95</sup>

During the first century CE, Ban Zhao, China’s first female historian, wrote a book entitled *Admonitions for Women*. This text codifies the rules of female submission that became the standard of behavior for women and girls for the next two thousand years. In it, women were commanded to be humble, to refuse all honors, to work diligently, and to behave properly in the home.<sup>96</sup> When the war was finally over, Mulan’s only desire was to return home to resume her traditional roles as outlined by Ban

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<sup>92</sup> Wang, *Mulan Congjun*, 26.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 31-2.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>95</sup> Mao Zedong, *Mao Zhuxi Yulu [Quotations from Chairman Mao Zedong]* (Beijing: Waiwen Chubanshe, 1966), 197-8.

<sup>96</sup> Ban Zhao, “Admonitions for Women,” in De Bary and Bloom, 821, 822; see also Patricia Buckley Ebrey, ed., “Women’s Virtues and Vices,” in *Chinese Civilization: A Sourcebook*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: The Free Press, revised 1993), 75-6.

Zhao. When Marshal He tried to reward his lieutenant by showering Mulan with gifts and marriage to his daughter, Mulan demurred and begged leave to go home so her arrow wounds could heal.<sup>97</sup> The commander reluctantly agreed, but after formally ending his commission before the emperor, Marshal He went to Mulan's home with the intention of forcing the marriage. When Hua Hu finally presented Mulan to the general as a model of Confucian womanhood, Marshal He "didn't know what to do. It was as though he had woken from a dream."<sup>98</sup> The comic ends with the marshal's bewildered stupefaction, which is a perfect culmination for a 1950 publication about gender. Masculinity in a woman was something that should be praised, but beyond that, no one was yet sure how to respond (see figure 2.3).

The celebrated paradigm of the *nü ban nan zhuang* 女扮男装 ("woman disguised as a man") found a modern analog in Guo Junqing, a woman who, as a fourteen-year-old girl pretended to be a sixteen-year-old boy in order to join the PLA in 1945. When her secret was discovered after five years in the military, the Party was so impressed that they made her the subject of numerous propaganda campaigns in posters and comic books which declared that she was a "modern Mulan." When she was thirteen, her father was killed by the local landlord. Homeless with her mother and younger brother, Guo discovered that she was safer if she cut her hair like a boy. When the PLA liberated her hometown, she was so awestruck by the soldiers and their determination to defend China, that she made up her mind to enlist for herself. It took two attempts, but she finally

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<sup>97</sup> Wang, *Mulan Congjun*, 37-8, 42.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

joined by saying that she was two years older than she was and that she was a boy named Guo Fu. When she first donned her uniform, she looked small, but “formidable.”<sup>99</sup>

The following year, even though she was only a fifteen-year-old “maturing young woman,” she not only received army training for shooting, use a bayoneting, and throwing grenades, but she excelled at each.<sup>100</sup> A year later, in 1947, Guo was granted membership in the CCP and taught that “there is no hardship that a member of the Chinese Communist Party cannot overcome!” As a way of expressing her affection for the other soldiers in her platoon, she stayed up late repairing the holes in their shoes and socks. Her comrades were so impressed that her class love for them was greater than their familial love for their own brothers.<sup>101</sup>

She continued to excel in every responsibility that she was given, and was therefore promoted to command her own platoon and lead men into battle. During a charge against the enemy, however, she was betrayed by her own womanhood when she experienced a menstrual cramp and passed out on the battlefield (see figure 2.4). As she regained consciousness, she reminded herself that “there is no hardship that a communist cannot endure,” even if that hardship is her female biology.<sup>102</sup> It is at this point in the comic that the narrator makes the editorial declaration that “women today have countless

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<sup>99</sup> Min Zhao, “Xin Hu Mulan [The New Hua Mulan],” in *Dang he Renmin de Hao Nüer: Ding Youjun* [The Good Daughter of the Party and the People: Ding Youjun] (Tianjin, China: Zhongguo Xin Minzhu Zhuyi Qingnian Tuan Tianjin Shi Gongzuo Weiyuan Hui, 1951), frame 5, book number 5793 5607, East Asian Library, Stanford University, Palo Alto, CA.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>101</sup> Zhao, “Xin Hua Mulan,” 11-3.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 15-6.

heroic examples, proving that women can do all kinds of work.”<sup>103</sup> Because of Guo’s health problems, she eventually contracted a gynecological illness (*funü bing* 妇女病, literally “women’s disease”), which worsened because she could not divulge her sex to anybody. When she finally revealed her secret to the doctor, and her comrades discovered that they were being led by a nineteen-year-old girl rather than a twenty-one-year-old man, they were all deeply impressed.<sup>104</sup>

Because of Guo Junqing’s years of service, and because of the rarity of her situation, she had the honor of meeting Chairman Mao and receiving a medal from him. Furthermore, because she was considered a model soldier, she was granted the honor of touring the Soviet Union. Her deeds were known to the Russians, and many congratulated her on her successes. However, as one might expect from a Chinese woman of the early 1950s who exhibited both yin and yang, she always modestly replied that “we must study well from the Soviet Union.”<sup>105</sup>

Communist women did not all need to dress as men in order to serve their country. When Chengdu<sup>106</sup> was “liberated” in late 1949, nineteen-year-old Ding Youjun decided to join the revolution. Out of all the women in Chengdu, only Ding Youjun tested into the People’s Revolutionary Cadre School. This was a great honor, but it was also a daunting prospect. Implying the traditional attitude that physical hardships were best endured by men, Ding’s family and friends all asked her “why would a woman

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<sup>103</sup> Zhao, “Xin Hua Mulan,” 19.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 21-3.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 25-6.

<sup>106</sup> The capital city of Sichuan Province.

endure such hardships?” Her response was that the purpose of “joining the revolution is to create a happy life for the people.”<sup>107</sup>

In the course of her duties, Ding was transferred to Ya'an in Xikang County, a newly occupied region that had formerly been western Kham in Tibet. The weather was cold, but she cared for her sick comrades and offered them continual encouragement.<sup>108</sup> She was also constantly trying to improve herself. Even so, she was denied entry into the Communist Party and the Youth League, although the latter admitted her on her second application.<sup>109</sup>

On another transfer in southern Sichuan, Ding was captured by a gang of Guomindang bandits that had remained behind when the main army fled to Taiwan. The enemy tried to extract information from her by bribing her, threatening her, and even torturing her, but comrade Ding Youjun had a “will of iron” and revealed nothing. In frustration, they violated one of a traditional Chinese woman’s most important qualities by stripping her naked and parading her through the streets of Jade Dragon Village. However, the townspeople were respectful of her virtue, and each of them averted their eyes rather than peep at her shame.<sup>110</sup>

In a final attempt to discover any information from comrade Ding, the Guomindang bandits asked her if she was a communist. She proudly replied that even

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<sup>107</sup> Shuang Lou, *Dang he Renmin de Hao Nüer: Ding Youjun* [The Good Daughter of the Party and the People: Ding Youjun] (Tianjin, China: Zhongguo Xin Minzhu Zhuyi Qingnian Tuan Tianjin Shi Gongzuo Weiyuan Hui, 1951), frames 1-2, book number 5793 5607, East Asian Library, Stanford University, Palo Alto, CA.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 4-5.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 7-10.

though she was not a member of the Party, she was “a member of the Chinese New Democracy Youth League.”<sup>111</sup> The Communist Youth League changed its name to the New Democracy Youth League for a brief window between 1949 and 1956. Although this was the official name of the organization, any reference to “New Democracy” became a political mistake worthy of censorship after 1960.<sup>112</sup> Because of Ding’s affiliation with the Party, the bandits made a final attempt to make use of her. Eight Party cadres had barricaded themselves in a nearby blockhouse. The bandits instructed Ding to convince her comrades to surrender or they would kill her. Instead of obeying them, Ding shouted to her comrades that they must be brave, that the bandits were few, and that reinforcements were on the way. In the final moment before the bandit leader shot her, Ding roared “ten thousand years to Chairman Mao, and ten thousand years to the Chinese Communist Party!” The bandits felt compelled to shoot her, but as Ding fell into a “pool of blood,” her final words were a call for her comrades not to fear because “the revolution requires bloodshed, my death counts for little, numberless millions will avenge me.”<sup>113</sup>

When the PLA arrived, the villagers indeed avenged Ding’s murder by exterminating the Guomindang bandits and joining the revolution.<sup>114</sup> The local Party branch voted to honor Ding Youjun by granting her posthumous membership in the CCP. The comic book ends with a solemn exhortation that “we must all study the spirit of

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<sup>111</sup> Shuang, *Dang he Renmin de Hao Nüer*, frame 11.

<sup>112</sup> Scott, “Seizing the Battlefield,” 143.

<sup>113</sup> Shuang, *Dang he Renmin de Hao Nüer*, frames 12-4.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.



comrade Ding Youjun; we must thoroughly eradicate bandits and spies; we must be firm in our resolve to suppress counterrevolutionaries; and we must strengthen the dictatorship of the people's democracy."<sup>115</sup> One cannot help but wonder, given the fact that Ding Youjun was a real person who exhibited unswerving loyalty to Mao and the Party, exemplified Party ideals, and died a heroic death for the people's sake, why is it that Lei Feng is always held up as the archetypal revolutionary martyr when his own death was so mundane? Are there greater differences between Ding Youjun and Lei Feng than merely the yin and yang of their sexes? It is the author's opinion that to whichever degree Ding's sacrifice was more inspiring than Lei's, it was Lei's masculine yang which gave him greater cachet as a political prop for mobilizing young communists of both sexes. Young boys would likely have found it difficult to pattern themselves after a woman, regardless of how impressive she was.

### **Comics of the Cultural Revolution: The Handicap of Yin**

After the five-year gap from 1966 to 1971 when all comic book production ceased, the publishing industry resumed, but the plot themes and overall presentation had entirely changed. Not just comics, but all official Cultural Revolution literature was politically sanitized. There were no works of science-fiction, no fantasy, and no romance. The only stories approved for release were tales of heroism, nationalism, class struggle, party unity, collectivization, and obedient self-sacrifice.<sup>116</sup> Despite these uplifting themes, women in comic books often needed to struggle against obstacles that

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<sup>115</sup> Shuang, *Dang he Renmin de Hao Nüer*, frames 16-7.

<sup>116</sup> Yang, "The Ideal Socialist Hero," 186.

male characters did not. Sometimes these impediments were physical, like Guo Junqing's menstrual cramp in the heat of battle, or Aunt Yao who successfully managed to chase down a Guomindang spy despite her previously bound feet.<sup>117</sup> And sometimes these obstructions are entirely abstract. The next four comic books illustrate the deeply rooted social barriers that women had to face. Their inclusion is significant because they highlight the Party's efforts to recognize and overcome these barriers, but they also perpetuate the problem by continuing to rely on the traditional mode of casting gender in a yin-yang dichotomy.

The first comic tells the story of the female workers in the March Eighth Machine Station. Their work involved great dangers and heavy labor as they travelled around the country performing industrial projects for the peasantry. The nature of their work was already quite empowering, but the name of their organization, which is a reference to International Women's Day, further highlights their assertions of gender equality. In the case of this particular story, the workers in the unit were tasked with building a derrick to drill a freshwater well for a rural village.<sup>118</sup> "As soon as they started drilling," a watching peasant was heard to make the disparaging comment that "leaving the kitchen to operate drilling technology, this is a mockery of the blood and sweat of the commune members." The women were so incensed that they redoubled their efforts to fight class struggle by finishing the well. During their group political study that night, they read the words of

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<sup>117</sup> Miao Di and Zhao Zhifeng, "Yao Daniang Zhuo Tewu [Aunt Yao Catches a Spy]," in *Dang he Renmin de Hao Nüer: Ding Youjun* [The Good Daughter of the Party and the People: Ding Youjun], frame 13.

<sup>118</sup> "'San Ba' Jitai [The 'March Eighth' Machine Station]," *Hebei Gong-Nong-Bing Huakan* (1972, issue 9): frame 1, Chinese Pictorial Magazines and Art Education Materials 1950s-1970s, Box 5 河北工农兵画刊 [The Hebei Worker-Peasant-Soldier Pictorial], East Asia Library, Stanford University, Palo Alto, CA.

Chairman Mao that “times have changed, men and women are the same. What men comrades can accomplish, women comrades can also accomplish.” They finished by criticizing Liu Shaoqi and his supposed counterrevolutionary lie that “women are useless” (see figure 2.5).<sup>119</sup>

In addition to the backward attitudes of some of the peasants, the women had to contend with the rocks that obstructed their drill bits and the icy winds that threatened to blow down the derrick. During a desperate nighttime battle against an icy gale, one girl named Xiuying tried to race up the ladder to cut loose a tarpaulin that was catching the wind like a sail. When another girl tried to hold her back from doing something so reckless, Xiuying revealed her strength by proclaiming that “the more dangerous, the more must a communist rise up.”<sup>120</sup> When the women finished digging the well, the peasants all marveled at how sweet the water was and thanked the women with profound gratitude. But remembering the source of all goodness, the female construction crew reminded the peasants that Mao Zedong Thought was the true source of sweet freshwater.<sup>121</sup>

A similar comic tells the story of a group of friends in a rural village whom everyone referred to as “the twelve sisters of Wafang Tai.” Following Chairman Mao’s call to control the environment, the villagers all decided to build a reservoir, but it was the twelve sisters that took the initiative to start carrying stones.<sup>122</sup> To backfill the base

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<sup>119</sup> “‘San Ba’ Jitai,” frames 4-5.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>122</sup> “Wafang Tai ‘Shi Er Jiemei’ [The ‘Twelve Sisters’ of Wafang Tai],” *Hebei Gong-Nong-Bing Huakan* (1973, issue 5): frames 1, 4, Chinese Pictorial Magazines and Art Education Materials 1950s-

of the dam, it was the sisters who proactively started pushing barrows of dirt. However, the narrator betrays the traditional attitude that women are not ideally suited to physical labor by saying that when the sisters first started pushing their carts, they looked like they were dancing the *yangge* 秧歌, a rural folk dance which evokes an air of delicacy and grace. But the more dirt they moved, the harder they became and the more they encouraged other women to participate.<sup>123</sup> When the men could not pack the soil fast enough, the sisters volunteered to help. Tamping the earth required the repetitive lifting of heavy rocks and logs, but they said “if [the boys] can do it, so can we!”<sup>124</sup> Still, despite the demonstration of their grit and determination, one lazy class enemy (the only person wearing all dark clothing) tried to discourage everyone by remarking that “this kind of work is hard enough for tough men, you ladies...” He barely finished his thought before the sisters and the commune members all united in criticizing him and his crimes (figures 2.6 and 2.7).<sup>125</sup> Finally, after five years of continuous battle, the villagers and the twelve sisters completed the dam.<sup>126</sup>

Some comics combine class hatred with superstition to oppose discrimination. In *Driving the Horses Forward*, miss Tian Yun found a class enemy named Han Yingzhao (鹰爪 “hawk’s talon”) savagely beating a communal plow horse. She commanded him to

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1970s, Box 5 河北工农兵画刊 [The Hebei Worker-Peasant-Soldier Pictorial], East Asia Library, Stanford University, Palo Alto, CA.

<sup>123</sup> “Wafang Tai ‘Shi Er Jiemei,’” frames 8-10.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., 5-6.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 16.

stop and rebuked him for abusing the animal. Han cowered away and insisted that he was only trying to improve the team's production rates, but Tian was not deceived and became even angrier with him. Snatching his whip, she declared that people like him should not be entrusted with those kinds of tools.<sup>127</sup> However, Tian Yun lacked the training to finish plowing the field herself, so she asked wise old Geng Zhong to teach her as a way of counterattacking their class enemies.<sup>128</sup> Meanwhile, Han Yingzhao and a “small handful of evil fellows” asked themselves if anyone had ever has seen a girl plowing the fields. They recalled that Geng Zhong's daughters had attempted it, and that their cow had died shortly thereafter (although it was Han himself who had poisoned it). Consequently, Han began spreading the rumor that it was bad luck for a woman to plow because “it will enrage the local harvest god!”<sup>129</sup> Even so, Geng and Tian continued to train other women to master the plow.<sup>130</sup>

Early one morning, while it was still dark, Tian Yun was preparing her horses, and failed to notice the “black shadow” that crept up and spooked one of the animals.<sup>131</sup> The panicked beast charged toward the canal, dragging the cart behind it. Geng Zhong happened to be out and noticed a “black shadow” watching from the trees which he soon realized was Han Yingzhao.<sup>132</sup> Just as the horse and cart were about to plunge into the

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<sup>127</sup> “Cema Xiangqian [Driving the Horses Forward],” *Yan'an Huakan* (1974, issue 3): frames 4-6, Chinese Pictorial Magazines and Art Education Materials 1950s-1970s, Box 1 延安画刊 [The Yan'an Pictorial], East Asia Library, Stanford University, Palo Alto, CA.

<sup>128</sup> “Ibid., 8-9.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 10, 12-3.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 21.

canal, Tian Yun courageously leapt in front of the charging steed and grabbed its harness.<sup>133</sup> Before the observing commune members could start celebrating, Geng Zhong unmasked the crimes of Han Yingzhao and the masses joyfully criticized him right there on the spot.<sup>134</sup>

Chinese society had to adjust its thinking about sex and gender, but it also had to alter its understanding of marriage rituals. Ailing, the main character of *The New Sister-in-Law*, narrates the story of her elder brother's wedding day. Traditional Chinese weddings were expensive affairs with specific rituals that required a great deal of time and attention.<sup>135</sup> Ailing's new sister (who is not given a name) had a very untraditional wedding. At twenty-five she was older than a customary bride, but she was also a member of the Party, so the couple wanted a revolutionary wedding with neither guests nor gifts.<sup>136</sup> Instead of the large procession to the groom's home, Ailing went to find her new sister and escort her to the house. Along the way, Ailing carried a heavy bag which she assumed was her sister's trousseau.<sup>137</sup>

Ailing was a member of the commune's cotton production team, so after eating breakfast together, the bride suggested that she and Ailing go to the cotton fields to spray for aphids. Only Ailing's mother was surprised that a bride would do that on her own

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<sup>133</sup> "Cema Xiangqian," 24.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>135</sup> Jung Chang, *Wild Swans: Three Daughters of China* (repr., New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003): 14-6.

<sup>136</sup> Zhou Chongzhi, "Xin Saosao [New Sister-in-Law]," *Yan'an Huakan* (1974, issue 3): frames 3-4, Chinese Pictorial Magazines and Art Education Materials 1950s-1970s, Box 1 延安画刊 [The Yan'an Pictorial], East Asia Library, Stanford University, Palo Alto, CA.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid., 9.

wedding day (see figure 2.8).<sup>138</sup> When they arrived at the cotton fields, Ailing was thrilled to find that her new sister was an expert at spraying pesticide. When Xiaofang, a new girl on the cotton team, was discovered to have been spraying improperly, the new sister-in-law patiently stopped and explained to Xiaofang that “cotton aphids are just like class enemies, they are always hiding in the shadows and gloom. It is unacceptable not to aim at them properly.”<sup>139</sup>

This comic also highlights the preferred utilitarianism of the Mao era to the perceived decadence of the past. After one of the spray canisters broke, the new bride took it home for repair. When Ailing returned later and found that her new sister had mended it better than new, she wondered where her sister had found all the tools. When her new sister was about to put her greasy tools into her trousseau bag, Ailing shouted “sister-in-law, how can you put those tools in your trousseau bag?” Momentarily confused, her sister chuckled and said “Ailing, these tools *are* my trousseau!” Looking inside the sack, Ailing did not see a single garment, just hammers and nails, wrenches, screws, and a few books with titles like *Planting Cotton for the Revolution* and *Discussions on Practice*.<sup>140</sup>

### **Comics of the Cultural Revolution: Youth and Yang**

As previously established, strength is one of the greatest qualities of yang. Part of the reason why men have been historically understood as creatures of yang is because of

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<sup>138</sup> “Xin Saosao,” 7, 10.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 12-4.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., 24-5.

their musculature. One of the ways that the Party portrays itself as a strong and healthy organization is by presenting the heroes in comic books as youthful, energetic, and robust. The inclusion of children and teenagers in Party propaganda serves the dual function of instructing young people in the duties and behaviors that are socially expected of them, but it also plays upon the nostalgic fantasies of adults.<sup>141</sup> Images of healthy children symbolize the idea of rich abundance, and as the next generation, they also represent hopeful innocence and a bright future.<sup>142</sup> In traditional Chinese society where the Confucian doctrine of filial piety was a foundational principle of social ethics, children represented the continuation of familial prosperity.<sup>143</sup> With the Cultural Revolution's efforts to obliterate Confucian influence, children ceased to be emblematic of the family legacy and became symbols of continuity for the Party as the successors of the communist revolution.<sup>144</sup>

*Glorious Youth* was one comic that praised the energy of young communists. The hero, Zheng Jiayuan, was never afraid to get dirty or carry heavy burdens when she worked in the fields. After she took the peasants as her ideological masters and constantly studied the works of Mao, "her heart scorched like a fire."<sup>145</sup> She never lost the correct perspective of seeing everything in terms of "class analysis." Consequently,

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<sup>141</sup> Stephanie Donald, "Children as Political Messengers," in Evans and Donald, 80, 86.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., 96.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 81.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 87.

<sup>145</sup> Zhang Dexi et al., "Zhuangli de Qingchun [Glorious Youth]," *Hebei Gong-Nong-Bing Huakan* (1973, issue 3): frames 2, 4, Chinese Pictorial Magazines and Art Education Materials 1950s-1970s, Box 5 河北工农兵画刊 [The Hebei Worker-Peasant-Soldier Pictorial], East Asia Library, Stanford University, Palo Alto, CA.



she was able to discover a bad element who was sowing dissension in the village, so the commune all waged a “fierce class struggle” against the man until he was eliminated (he is also the only person in the illustration wearing black; see figure 2.9).<sup>146</sup>

Because of her youthful vigor, Zheng had the strength to withstand her injuries as she fought a wildfire in her bare feet.<sup>147</sup> Then, during a thunderstorm in 1971, a mudslide caused a breach in the local reservoir. Heedless of danger, Zheng charged into the opening and did her best to contain the water.<sup>148</sup> The cold temperatures and tumbling rocks took their toll, however, and her wounds became infected with tetanus. Before she died, she encouraged her comrades to “live your life to risk everything for the revolution and die in a way that offers all your loyalty to it.”<sup>149</sup> Because she sacrificed her *glorious youth* to the Party, Zheng was made an honorary member of the Communist Youth League.<sup>150</sup>

A young person need not die to be recognized as a symbol of political strength. In *The Young Sentry of the East China Sea*, fourteen-year-old Wu Xiaohong (小红 “little red”) single-handedly captured three Guomindang spies who were dispatched from the “Chiang gang” on Taiwan who were still “unwilling to accept their own defeat.”<sup>151</sup> The

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<sup>146</sup> “Zhuangli de Qingchun,” frame 5.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid., 8-9.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid., 14, 16.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>151</sup> *Donghai Xiao Shaobing* [The Young Sentry of the East China Sea] (Shanghai: Shanghai Renmin Chubanshe, 1974), 2, book number 5793 3357, East Asian Library, Stanford University, Palo Alto, CA.

PLA and the People's Militia killed or captured the detachment of spies except for the commander Wang Jiao (王蛟, he is named after a mythical flood dragon; essentially his name indicates that he is a harbinger of disaster), and his two companions Jiang Yibiao and Zhou Dehai.<sup>152</sup> The three of them escaped into the mountains where Xiaohong and her little brother were grazing the communal ox.<sup>153</sup> Even though the spies were wearing false PLA uniforms,<sup>154</sup> Xiaohong's father had "often taught them to remember their class hatred, to always be vigilant, and to be on strict guard against spies," which helped Xiaohong uncover the truth.<sup>155</sup>

In conversation with them, Xiaohong observed that the three special agents were cruel and arrogant, not kind like the real PLA. Neither did they recognize that her red scarf identified her as a member of the Young Pioneers, or that the cow belonged to the collective and not her family.<sup>156</sup> As the spies crept away, she instructed her brother to go home and report to the militia while she went to track the enemy.<sup>157</sup> When the spies left the path to climb Rams Horn Point, Xiaohong hung her red scarf on a branch pointing east to alert the following militia which way to go. She reflected that "the red scarf was like a corner of the red flag, dyed in the blood of the revolutionary martyrs."<sup>158</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> *Donghai Xiao Shaobing*, 4.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, 6-8.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, 21-2, 26, 28.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, 30-3, 35.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, 49-50.

With the strength and nimbleness of youth, Xiaohong raced to the top of the mountain ahead of the spies and trapped them there by hurling rocks down on their heads.<sup>159</sup> When Xiaohong saw the PLA and the militia rushing up the valley, she pulled a conch shell from her pouch and blew it with all of her might to alert the soldiers of her position. Despite the spies' continual displays of weakness and cowardice, Wang Jiao nearly succeeded in stabbing Xiaohong before he was shot through the wrist by the oncoming soldiers.<sup>160</sup> Once the spies were securely captured, Platoon Leader Zhang returned the red scarf to Xiaohong and "everyone praised [her] as someone that was truly worthy to be called a good child of Chairman Mao's instruction, a red successor to the revolution, and a heroic young sentry of the East China Sea!" (see figure 2.10).<sup>161</sup>

One final example of youth and yang is the story of Jiang Haiying (海英 "ocean hero") working on a fishing boat in the Taiwan Strait, and how she discovered a class enemy on board named Chen Wulao (乌佬, "black crow scoundrel," incidentally his costume is entirely black).<sup>162</sup> When she first came aboard, Haiying was encouraged by the wise old captain who reminded her that "when we fish, it isn't for the sake of a single family, it is to support the building of socialism and the world revolution."<sup>163</sup> Even so, Haiying's seasickness soon overcame her and she took to her berth. As a way of helping

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<sup>159</sup> Ibid., 65-6, 70-3.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid., 74, 79.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid., 80-2.

<sup>162</sup> Zhu Haiwen, *Haiying* (Beijing: Renmin Meishu Chubanshe, 1975), 3, 6, book number 5793 2930, East Asian Library, Stanford University, Palo Alto, CA.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid., 11, 15-6.

her overcome her condition, the captain taught her the words of Chairman Mao that “there is nothing to fear from the waves and the wind. Human society is developed from the storm.”<sup>164</sup> Although Haiying continued to feel ill, the words of the Great Helmsman helped her to endure. This quote attributed to Mao is similar to another one made by him in 1964, requoted from the Little Red Book: “the successors to the proletarian revolutionary enterprise will be produced in the midst of mass struggle and they will grow up in the training of the great winds and waves of the revolution.”<sup>165</sup>

As Haiying became more comfortable at sea over the course of a year, she noticed the suspicious behaviors of Chen Wulao, who it turns out was actually a powerful fish baron before liberation and had escaped punishment by changing his name and moving to a new port. Because he had lost his wealth and privilege, his heart was full of hate and all he wanted was to destroy new China.<sup>166</sup> When Haiying brought her thoughts to the captain, the two of them crafted a plan to expose Chen as a class enemy before the entire crew.<sup>167</sup> When their plan succeeded, Chen jammed the ship’s propeller with an old fishing net and then jumped into the sea, presumably to swim to Taiwan (see figure 2.11).<sup>168</sup> Haiying was determined that Chen should not escape, so she jumped in after him, and because she was a younger and more powerful swimmer than the bald old villain, she succeeded in capturing him and subduing him in the water (see figure 2.12).

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<sup>164</sup> *Haiying*, 25.

<sup>165</sup> Mao, *Mao Zhuxi Yulu*, 216.

<sup>166</sup> *Haiying*, 35-9, 51, 54-8.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*, 70-5, 88.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*, 104-5.

When the other sailors brought him back to the boat, they tied him up and took him back to port, demonstrating the mighty yang of the Chinese Communist Party and the People's Republic of China.<sup>169</sup>

## Conclusion

In 1945, Chairman Mao wrote an essay reinterpreting the story of the foolish old man who moved the mountains. From the Daoist perspective, the old man was foolish because he did not practice *wuwei* 无为, the doctrine of non-action whereby the wisest course is to follow nature. In other words, he was foolish because he chose to undertake the impossible task of moving the mountains rather than simply walking around them. Chairman Mao, however, praised the old man's spirit by recasting the two mountains as evils that needed to be removed. "Today, two great mountains are oppressing the Chinese people, one is called 'imperialism,' and one is called 'feudalism,'" if the entire great family of the Chinese nation all contributed in levelling those two mountains, then they would not even need the help of supernatural gods. And what did it matter how much time it would take?<sup>170</sup> From then on, all good communists, including the characters in *lianhuanhua*, did their best to move the mountains.<sup>171</sup> Comic books were useful tools in fighting imperialism and feudalism, but this was only because of the unique history of Chinese *lianhuanhua*.

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<sup>169</sup> Haiying, 109-14.

<sup>170</sup> Mao, *Mao Zhuxi Yulu*, 154-5.

<sup>171</sup> Gao Liu, ed., "Minban Xiaoxue Jiaoshi—Zhao Yufen [The Community Elementary School Teacher—Zhao Yufen]," *Hebei Gong-Nong-Bing Huakan* (1973, issue 6): frame 12, Chinese Pictorial Magazines and Art Education Materials 1950s-1970s, Box 5 河北工农兵画刊 [The Hebei Worker-Peasant-Soldier Pictorial], East Asia Library, Stanford University, Palo Alto, CA.

Starting in the 1920s, because they were so cheap to produce and to rent, comic books became the most popular entertainment for the lower classes. Both parties weaponized comic books during the civil war and the Sino-Japanese War, but it was the Communist Party who utilized them most effectively. When the CCP won the civil war in 1949, they identified the comic book as one of the highest priorities for propaganda because they were such useful tools in disseminating literacy and political indoctrination to a wide audience. When the Party succeeded in nationalizing the publishing industry in 1956, comic books entered their “golden age.” But with the start of the Cultural Revolution in 1966, all publication ground to a halt until 1971. The new comic books were pure propaganda, so their set patterns and themes meant that they were never as popular as the *lianhuanhua* of the 1950s and 1960s.

The golden age of comic books became a transitional period where classic Chinese literature melded with Party ideology to create hybrid stories that were both customary and revolutionary by reinterpreting contemporary issues through the lens of an ancient tradition. Mulan was one of the most recognizable characters because she typified the Confucian woman while championing the Party’s interpretation of the valiant heroine. Guo Junqing embodied the same ideals, but although she was not as well-known as Mulan, as a member of the Party her example became even more relevant. Ding Youjun was an outstanding example of an early communist warrior who fought and died for her ideals without the need to pretend she was anything but a woman.

Female characters had to face impediments that males did not. Sometimes these were physical, and sometimes they were the discriminatory attitudes of class enemies. This was the case for the women of the March Eighth Machine Station, the “twelve

sisters of Wafang Tai,” and Tian Yun in her attempts to learn the plow. At other times, as in the case of *The New Sister-in-Law*, the barriers to women’s success were the inherited ideas about marriage that would have kept the young bride at home on her wedding day rather than spraying for aphids or repairing broken equipment.

The divide between yin and yang is found in age as well as sex. Yang is the power of the universe that is hot, energetic, and strong; yin, as its opposite, is cold, lazy, and feeble. After the weakness of the Century of Humiliation, the CCP bolstered its image of strength by portraying comic book heroes as energetic youths while class enemies are usually older, frequently cowardly, and always lazy. This is demonstrated by Zheng Jiayuan who died giving herself to the rural peasants by leaping into icy water, and by fourteen-year-old Wu Xiaohong who bravely tracked three cowardly spies, beat them in a race to the top of a mountain, and trapped them there until help arrived. Finally, Jiang Haiying personified the strength of the Party by exposing the crimes of Chen Wulao and by overpowering him in the water.

But yin and yang are not just categories of power, they are also categories of value. Traditional Chinese society assigned to men the power of yang, and to women the weakness of yin. The Party tried to impose gender equality, but by failing to decouple yin and yang from women and men, the project was fundamentally flawed from the beginning because comic books drew a parallel line between yang and yin, and good and evil. The names of heroes have positive meanings while the names of villains are harsh and pejorative; the villains usually wear all black (the color of yin) and the heroes usually wear all white or red (auspicious colors of yang). The line between good and evil is further deepened by the martial language of class struggle. By framing everything in

soldierly terms, the conflict is not just political, it becomes a trial of hot versus cold, selfless versus selfish, and energetic versus lazy. In other words, all of these are divisions of yin and yang, and by associating everything that is undesirable with yin, there is an implied connection between all the negative imagery and women in general.

Finally, the women in Chinese comic books are relegated to limbo insofar as they are never permitted to perform either extremes. In other words, all the villains in *lianhuanhua* are men; female characters were never permitted to be the class enemy even though women in real life were accused of crimes just as often as men. Nor could women be the ultimate heroes in their own stories. Mulan was an officer, but she was first subjected to the rule of her father before she became subjected to the rule of Marshal He. Tian Yun took the initiative to learn the plow, but she was always under the guiding hand of Geng Zhong. Xiaohong tracked the three Guomindang spies all by herself but only until Platoon Leader Zhang of the PLA arrived to help. Haiying captured Chen Wulao in the Taiwan Strait, but each of her actions was under the authority and the training of the old captain.

Stories are vital primary sources for historians because they are the “storehouses” and “family albums” of a national childhood. As such, the albums of the People’s Republic of China reveal a disguised prejudice against femininity, even when it hides under a masculine facade.



## CHAPTER IV

## SETTING THE STAGE: THE MODEL WORKS OF MADAM MAO

I was raised on the teachings of Mao and on the operas of Madam Mao, Comrade Jiang Ching. The word “entertainment” was considered a dirty bourgeois word. The opera was something else. To love or not love the operas was a serious political attitude. It meant to be or not to be a revolutionary. The operas were taught on radio and in school, and were promoted by the neighborhood organizations. For ten years. The same operas.

—Anchee Min, *Red Azalea*<sup>1</sup>

Of all the weapons in the CCP’s propaganda arsenal, nothing was more impactful than the model stage productions. In Chinese, these performances are referred to as *yangbanxi* (样板戏) which is sometimes translated as “model operas” although “model theatrical performances” would be closer to the mark since, of the seventeen *yangbanxi* that were ultimately produced by the end of the Cultural Revolution in 1976, only nine of them were true operas. The other eight productions consisted of four ballets, two symphonies, and two scores composed for piano with vocal accompaniment.<sup>2</sup> However, the Party did not create most of these until the mid-1970s, which did not give the later shows much time to influence society as effectively as the forerunners. The first eight *yangbanxi* were based on popular revolutionary stories which had already circulated for nearly twenty years before the announcement of their ascension to model status came during the second year of the Cultural Revolution.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Anchee Min, *Red Azalea* (New York: Random House, 1994), 3, 17.

<sup>2</sup> Fan Xing, “The ‘Broken’ and the ‘Breakthroughs’: Acting in ‘Jingju’ Model Plays of China’s Cultural Revolution,” *Asian Theatre Journal* 30, no. 2 (2013): 364.

<sup>3</sup> Rosemary Roberts, *Maoist Model Theatre: The Semiotics of Gender and Sexuality in the Chinese Cultural Revolution, 1966-1976* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2010), 2.

Nevertheless, despite the actual number, a common saying during the 1970s and 1980s was that there were “eight hundred million people watching only eight shows” (*bayi renmin [kan] batai xi* 八亿人民[看]八台戏). The saying is humorous, but inaccurate, since there were more films and plays than even the seventeen *yangbanxi*, though it does express the idea that people felt artistically frustrated during the final decade of the Mao era.<sup>4</sup> This chapter will briefly examine the history of *yangbanxi* and their influence on gender and politics. Although these productions were primarily performed live on stage, Jiang Qing and the Cultural Revolution Group (CRG) launched a campaign to cinematize the model works in the late 1960s.<sup>5</sup> These films became the canonical versions of the *yangbanxi*.<sup>6</sup> Of these films, the author has identified five of the most influential and popularly well-received to analyze their content in terms of gender dynamics and yin-yang binarism: *The White-Haired Girl* (ballet), *The Red Detachment of Women* (ballet), *The Red Lantern*, *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy*, and *Azalea Mountain*.

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<sup>4</sup> Paul Clark, “Model Theatrical Works and the Remodelling [sic] of the Cultural Revolution,” in *Art in Turmoil: The Chinese Cultural Revolution, 1966-76*, ed. Richard King (British Columbia: University of British Columbia Press, 2010), 167; Lanlan Du, “From Taboo to Open Discussion: Discourses of Sexuality in *Azalea Mountain* and *Red Azalea*,” *Comparative Literature Studies* 52, no. 1 (2015): 131; Yawen Ludden, “Making Politics Serve Music: Yu Huiyong, Composer and Minister of Culture,” *The Drama Review* 56, no. 2 (2012): 152; Yawen Ludden, “The Transformation of Beijing Opera: Jiang Qing, Yu Huiyong and *Yangbanxi*,” *Journal of Contemporary Chinese Art* 4, no. 2/3 (2017): 154.

<sup>5</sup> Parris H. Chang, “Who Gets What, When and How in Chinese Politics: A Case Study of the Strategies of Conflict of the ‘Gang of Four,’” *Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs*, no. 2 (1979): 22; Clark, “Model Theatrical Works,” 182.

<sup>6</sup> The film versions needed to be abridged from the original scripts. Under the direction of the CRG, studio management often truncated the script by more than a third. See *Yang Ban Xi: The Eight Model Works*, directed by Yan Ting Yuen (Scarabee Films, 2005), 0:40:00 to 0:41:00, <https://www-filmplatform-net.dist.lib.usu.edu/product/yang-ban-xi/>.

As illustrated during the previous chapters, the Party made apparently impressive strides in its campaign to promote gender equality which, in the model works, is shown in the creation of strong female leads. However, the *yangbanxi* also betray subtle markers of sex discrimination by scripting a greater number of male roles than female roles; by creating powerful female characters that still must report to higher ranking men; by writing scenes where good communists frequently challenge the decisions of their female superiors, while male cadres are not challenged; and by perpetuating the traditional stereotypes that women are best suited to domesticity and emotionality.

Besides these phenomena, gender hierarchies were reinforced by the yin-yang dichotomies discussed in previous chapters with four main differences that are unique to the theatre. The first of these is found in the opening credits of each opera, which draws a sharp political divide between the red heroes and the black antagonists. Second, proletarian heroes are all generally depicted in the bloom of health while the villains are pallid, obese, and weak. Third, in their most basic conception, yang and yin can be understood as light and darkness. As such, the film production teams employed clever techniques to imbue the stage lighting with political significance in a way that cannot be fully developed in posters or comic books. Finally, playing on the idea that yang is metaphysically represented by heat, each *yangbanxi* deploys fire—as a prop and through dialogue or soliloquy—as a further representation of the communist revolution.

There is one other significant factor which distinguishes the *yangbanxi* from propaganda posters and comic books: the composition and performance of the musical scores. Below is some analysis of the music, but greater musicological research is required to fully understand the political significance of the songs and their influence on

gender, politics, and yin-yang cosmology, particularly in the *yangbanxi* symphonies and concertos. This is a promising field of inquiry, given composer Yu Huiyong's synthesis of Eastern music theory with Western instrumentation, and with the implementation of traditional Beijing-operatic techniques with modern themes.

The Party created the *yangbanxi* for four main reasons. The first was to show audiences how harsh life was under the feudal government of old China and that anyone who wanted to return to the past was an enemy of the proletarian triumvirate.<sup>7</sup> In a July 1964 speech to the "Forum of Theatrical Workers Participating in the Festival of Peking Opera on Contemporary Themes," Jiang Qing laid the groundwork for the *yangbanxi* by announcing that feudal themes were henceforth unacceptable in stage productions except as foils to contrast past miseries with present happiness.<sup>8</sup> Second, in that same 1964 address, Jiang declared that one of the purposes "in producing operas on revolutionary contemporary themes is mainly to exalt the positive characters," thereby giving the average citizen a model of behavior for emulation.<sup>9</sup> Third, because many of the workers and peasants endured hunger and hardship during the Mao years, the "Hollywood magic" of the operas allowed the citizenry to fantasize that their sufferings were for the sake of building an egalitarian paradise for the future where everyone was happy and well-fed.<sup>10</sup> Fourth, once a production was canonized as a *yangbanxi*, it served as a template for future works, hence it was a "model" opera.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> *Yang Ban Xi*, 0:12:45 to 0:13:10.

<sup>8</sup> Martin Ebon, ed., *Five Chinese Communist Plays* (New York: John Day Company, 1975), 3.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 5; Clark, "Model Theatrical Works," 171.

<sup>10</sup> *Yang Ban Xi*, 0:7:30 to 0:8:20.

<sup>11</sup> Ludden, "Making Politics Serve Music," 154.

Like other propaganda, the *yangbanxi* adhered to the doctrines expounded by Mao in his 1942 Talks in Yan'an that art and literature were not to be enjoyed for their own sake, but that their purpose was to fortify the revolution.<sup>12</sup> The operas and ballets were certainly artistic, but the true creativity of the *yangbanxi* lies in how the acting, dancing, and singing were all been subsumed into the political purposes of the CCP. The stage productions also follow the doctrine of the Three Prominences by keeping the audience's attention trained on the protagonists through artful choreography, cinematography, costuming, and spotlighting.<sup>13</sup>

The doctrine of the Three Prominences applied specifically to art, but the driving theory behind it influenced reality as well. The best characters were given prominence on stage, and in real life only the best communists were permitted to participate in the best theatres. When Anchee Min was cast as the title role in the opera *Red Azalea*,<sup>14</sup> one of her supervisors proclaimed that great acting was "not a matter of acting technique. It is a matter of who has more feelings for Chairman Mao. We need a real Communist to play a Communist."<sup>15</sup> Because sensual pleasure was bourgeois, sexual purity and political purity became the same thing. Min and the other girls hired by the studio were

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<sup>12</sup> Clark, "Model Theatrical Works," 168; Bai Di, "Feminism in the Revolutionary Model Ballets *The White-Haired Girl* and *The Red Detachment of Women*," in King, 189; Ebon, *Five Chinese Communist Plays*, xii; Ludden, "Making Politics Serve Music," 154; Ludden, "The Transformation of Beijing Opera," 148; Min, *Red Azalea*, 261; Roberts, *Maoist Model Theatre*, 3; Xing, "The 'Broken' and the 'Breakthroughs,'" 364; Richard F. S. Yang, "Behind the Bamboo Curtain: What the Communists Did to the Peking Opera," *Educational Theatre Journal* 21, no. 1 (1969): 62.

<sup>13</sup> Clark, "Model Theatrical Works," 185; Du, "From Taboo to Open Discussion," 134; Roberts, *Maoist Model Theatre*, 14, 27, 40.

<sup>14</sup> *Red Azalea* was never completed because Mao died during filming and Jiang Qing was arrested the following month.

<sup>15</sup> Min, *Red Azalea*, 152, 161, 199.

subjected to a medical examination to verify their virginity.<sup>16</sup> In 1971, just before Li Cunxin turned eleven, talent scouts from the May Seventh Performing Arts University came to his village in Shandong. They selected Li because he had the flexibility of a danseur, but even more important was the political investigation into his family background to determine his peasant lineage.<sup>17</sup> Even the name of Li's new school pointed to the Three Prominences since it was named for a speech delivered by Jiang Qing on 7 May 1970 when she instructed artists and academics to keep all focus on the worker-peasant-soldier triumvirate.<sup>18</sup>

Some of the stories which became *yangbanxi*, such as *The White-Haired Girl* and *The Red Lantern*, had already been popular since the 1940s although they underwent significant revisions until the films were released in 1970. One such revision was the erasure of romance. The CCP championed class feeling as greater than sexual love, especially since sexual love was individualistic.<sup>19</sup> Familial love is present in the operas, but this is usually between a single parent and child. None of the main characters have living spouses.<sup>20</sup> In some cases, the death of a spouse only accentuates the intended grandeur of class devotion. It is revealed near the end of *Azalea Mountain* that the

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<sup>16</sup> Min, *Red Azalea*, 186.

<sup>17</sup> Li Cunxin, *Mao's Last Dancer* (repr., New York: Penguin, 2010), 105, 108-9.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 125-6.

<sup>19</sup> Du, "From Taboo to Open Discussion," 134; Roberts, *Maoist Model Theatre*, 3, 9.

<sup>20</sup> Min, *Red Azalea*, 72.

husband of the heroine, Ke Xiang, was killed shortly before the drama begins although Ke does not allow her grief to overcome her duty to fight for the peasants.<sup>21</sup>

Although the *yangbanxi* were written for the stage, it was the films that left the widest impression. This is because mobile projection teams with electric generators travelled to all corners of China showing compulsorily attended screenings all the way to the remotest villages.<sup>22</sup> Even during the social upheavals and factional battles of the Cultural Revolution, the dissemination of the *yangbanxi* continued unabated.<sup>23</sup> From his own rural commune in the mountains above Qingdao,<sup>24</sup> Li Cunxin recalled the powerful excitement in the village during the day before the monthly screening. He would weep from the emotions conveyed in the movies, and because of the lessons he learned from the films. He recalled that after each show, “my devotion to Mao and his ideology was greatly intensified. I wanted to be a revolutionary hero! Another child of Mao!”<sup>25</sup>

Li was given his chance to be a revolutionary hero as a principal ballet danseur. Ballet started in France and later found patronage in the Russian court during the nineteenth-century. After the Bolshevik revolution, the Soviet Union continued to support the Bolshoi and its unique style.<sup>26</sup> After the CCP won the civil war in 1949, the

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<sup>21</sup> *Dujuan Shan* [Azalea Mountain], directed by Xie Tieli (Beijing Dianyong Zhipianchang, 1974), 1:26:35 to 1:27:20, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CScPKnl3DOA>. Of all the revolutionary operatic musical scores, *Azalea Mountain* is widely acknowledged as one of the greatest. See Ludden, “The Transformation of Beijing Opera,” 153.

<sup>22</sup> Clark, “Model Theatrical Works,” 184; Roberts, *Maoist Model Theatre*, 2; *Yang Ban Xi*, 0:54:40 to 0:55:20.

<sup>23</sup> Clark, “Model Theatrical Works,” 179.

<sup>24</sup> The capital city of Shandong province.

<sup>25</sup> Li, *Mao's Last Dancer*, 102.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 134; Roberts, *Maoist Model Theatre*, 120-1.

Party selected several dancers to train in Moscow and to bring ballet with them back to China. Following Mao's command to "make foreign things serve China," it was Zhou Enlai who first proposed a new Chinese style instead of the traditional balletic stories of fairies and princesses.<sup>27</sup> The Beijing Ballet School responded by choreographing *The Red Detachment of Women* based on the 1961 film, which they performed in 1964.<sup>28</sup> That same year, *The White-Haired Girl* was also turned into a ballet, although neither were granted "model" status until 1966.<sup>29</sup>

There is no speaking in the Chinese ballets and there are only a few choral songs. For the two ballets in the original eight *yangbanxi*, audiences would have already been familiar with the characters and plot, but Jiang Qing specifically directed the major dance companies to incorporate elements of Beijing Opera movement into the choreography although many dancers found it difficult to incorporate the crisp movements of the operas into the graceful movements of the ballets—of course, no one challenged her.<sup>30</sup> Adding the opera movements to the ballet served the dual purpose of inventing a Chinese style, but the various poses, steps, and arm movements of the Beijing opera are each endowed with a specific statement about that character's traits and intentions. By using this coded body language, Chinese audiences were able to interpret deeper meaning from the ballets.<sup>31</sup> Despite an ignorance of the meaning in Beijing opera movements, *The Red*

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<sup>27</sup> Ebon, *Five Chinese Communist Plays*, 125.

<sup>28</sup> Roberts, *Maoist Model Theatre*, 120-2.

<sup>29</sup> Clark, "Model Theatrical Works," 170.

<sup>30</sup> Li, *Mao's Last Dancer*, 159.

<sup>31</sup> Ebon, *Five Chinese Communist Plays*, 127-8.



*Detachment of Women* found acclaim among receptive international audiences, including a competitive festival in Venice.<sup>32</sup> During his historic visit to Beijing, Richard Nixon was given a live performance in February 1972. A month afterward, the ballet was broadcast on national television in the United States, and critics enjoyed the dancing despite the political messages.<sup>33</sup>

Rosemary Roberts considers another unique aspect of Chinese ballet. Traditionally, the ballerina and danseur both perform feats of agility and strength, but it is the danseur's responsibility to augment the beauty of the ballerina and to provide support through various lifts and holds. Ballerinas do not lift danseurs or other ballerinas, and danseurs do not lift or hold other men. In *yangbanxi*, however, "both male and female dancers support, lift, push, propel and fight other dancers." Even so, Roberts explains that there is still a gendered component to the kinesics of Chinese ballet because the lifts, pushes, and holds are all contingent on the class status of the characters. For example, any man can lift a woman, any woman can lift another woman, and women can lift a villainous man, but nobody lifts or holds a righteous man. In this way, "the *yangbanxi* implicitly link the female with the counterrevolutionary while conversely, the negative characters are feminized by being choreographed with steps and movements otherwise performed only by women and never by revolutionary men."<sup>34</sup>

The Chinese politics of the Cultural Revolution present another gendered problem with ballet. By its nature, ballet movement is about aesthetics and grace, displayed most

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<sup>32</sup> *Yang Ban Xi*, 0:9:00.

<sup>33</sup> Ebon, *Five Chinese Communist Plays*, 128.

<sup>34</sup> Roberts, *Maoist Model Theatre*, 131-3.

prominently in the pas de deux. In a society where beauty and sensuality were criminalized, the Party needed to find a way for men and women to dance together in a way that conveyed class love sans romance. They did this by increasing the number of solos and ensemble numbers while keeping pas de deux to a minimum, and, during the few duets in *yangbanxi*, the dancers literally keep their partners at arm's length.<sup>35</sup>

While Western dancers typically wear some costume variation over a leotard, the CRG tried to desexualize the *yangbanxi* ballets by removing the leotard entirely, and replacing it with baggier peasant clothing and army uniforms. Even so, the costumes were not entirely shapeless and still accentuated the body's curves and angles, thereby introducing an erotic element.<sup>36</sup> Indeed, Xu Yihui recalled that *The Red Detachment of Women* was his favorite show because, as a pubescent boy in a sexually starved nation, he enjoyed seeing the female soldiers wearing knee-high socks and tight uniforms.<sup>37</sup> Xu was not alone. As part of the CCP's poster campaigns, the government sold still photographs from the *yangbanxi*, and many young men kept images near their bedsides of Wu Qinghua or Xi'er striking operatic poses, thereby creating a sexual fantasy masquerading as orthodoxy.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Roberts, *Maoist Model Theatre*, 134-5. An excellent example of a *yangbanxi* pas de deux is found in the opening scene of *The White-Haired Girl*. Xi'er conveys a sense of class devotion by presenting a sickle to Wang Dachun. As they dance, they will both offer stability to each other, but only by briefly holding the other's shoulder, forearm, wrist, or hand. See *Bai Mao Nü* [The White-Haired Girl], produced by Shanghai Shi Wudao Xuexiao [the Shanghai City School of Dance] (Shanghai Dianying Zhipianchang, 1971), 0:11:45 to 0:14:00, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wLhsanxL0dM>.

<sup>36</sup> Roberts, *Maoist Model Theatre*, 102.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 110; *Yang Ban Xi*, 0:16:30 to 0:17:30.

<sup>38</sup> Clark, "Model Theatrical Works," 184.

Despite their celebrity, the life of a government performer was not easy. A dancer's training schedule included excruciating stretching exercises, classes in opera movement, acrobatics, and folk dancing. Moreover, because aspiring performers were expected to use their art as a weapon in service to the revolution, they were required to study the writings and artistic philosophies of Mao and Jiang Qing more than "all other subjects combined." And even though Li Cunxin and his fellow performers were selected as children to live away from home, they were expected not to cry—especially the boys—since "crying was a sign of weakness," and weakness in a boy is offensive to his yang.<sup>39</sup>

One of the friendships Li made at the May Seventh school was a boy selected to study music. When Li asked him what instrument he played, the boy responded that his teachers had not yet assigned him one. He had had no previous experience, but he was chosen to study music because of his long fingers and peasant background.<sup>40</sup> Four of the *yangbanxi* (two symphonies and two piano compositions) were purely musical, and music played a central role in all seventeen productions. The most famous symphony was first performed on National Day in 1965 and was based on the earlier revolutionary opera *Shajiabang*, but the symphonies were soon upstaged by the operas and ballets which were more popular.<sup>41</sup> Old Beijing opera uses traditional Chinese music theory,

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<sup>39</sup> Li, *Mao's Last Dancer*, 127, 155, 159. See also Xing Jin, *Shanghai Tango: A Memoir* (London: Atlantic Books, 2005), 18-9.

<sup>40</sup> Li, *Mao's Last Dancer*, 149.

<sup>41</sup> Clark, "Model Theatrical Works," 170-1; Di, "Feminism in the Revolutionary Model Ballets," 189.

which employs a pentatonic scale.<sup>42</sup> During the final revisions of the libretto for *The Red Lantern*, Jiang Qing insisted that *L'Internationale*<sup>43</sup> played during the death scene for Li Yuhe and Grandma Li even though the pentatonic instruments of the Beijing opera were unequipped to produce the required sounds. In the end, composer Yu Huiyong solved the problem by adding Western instruments to the orchestra and increasing the number of Chinese instruments to keep from drowning them out and thus losing their distinctive sound.<sup>44</sup>

In light of the fact that the ballet, the symphony, and the piano are all imports to China, it is important to consider why the Party selected Beijing opera for inclusion within the *yangbanxi*. The simple answer is that contemporary Beijing opera has been a popular entertainment in China for the past two centuries.<sup>45</sup> Since it was already liked by the masses, it was an easy step for the party to transform the opera into an enjoyable delivery system for state propaganda.<sup>46</sup> Even though the CCP adopted the opera, they did restructure it in several ways. First, traditional Beijing operas had neither librettists nor

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<sup>42</sup> A pentatonic major scale uses only five notes on the Western seven-tone octave, specifically using only the tonic and the second, third, fifth, and sixth steps of the scale.

<sup>43</sup> *L'Internationale* was adopted by the Second International in 1890 as the global anthem of the socialist movement.

<sup>44</sup> Ludden, "Making Politics Serve Music," 159-60; Ludden, "The Transformation of Beijing Opera," 151. As a sign of solidarity with the global proletariat, *L'Internationale* is played in *yangbanxi* whenever a communist hero is martyred. Examples of Li Yuhe and Grandma Li's execution, and Hong Changqing's execution respectively are found in *Hong Deng Ji* [The Red Lantern], produced by the China Beijing Opera Troupe (Zhongguo Renmin Jiefangjun Bayi Dianying Zhipianchang, 1970), 1:36:50 to 1:38:40, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6JIY8Y5qNL8&t=5751s>; and *Hongse Niangzi Jun* [The Red Detachment of Women], produced by the Chinese Ballet Company (Beijing Dianying Zhipianchang, 1970), 1:33:20 to 1:34:20, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZHTPcs3IQPU>.

<sup>45</sup> Ludden, "The Transformation of Beijing Opera," 145.

<sup>46</sup> Roberts, *Maoist Model Theatre*, 7.

composers. Instead, each opera troupe collectively innovated the libretto and the score during rehearsals. Because the CRG required strict adherence to the Party line, innovation was discouraged and all aspects of the performance were polished to Jiang Qing's satisfaction, which required an approved script.<sup>47</sup>

The second major change to the operas was the reconstruction of the basic character roles.<sup>48</sup> In traditional Beijing opera, there are four main character types, each with specific rules about movement, singing, the use of stage properties, and costumes.<sup>49</sup> Each of the four roles has a variety of subcategories, but generally they are as follows. First is the *sheng* (生). These are the “dignified” male characters who fulfil a role in either the military or the state bureaucracy. Second are the *dan* (旦). These are the female roles. Sometimes women in Beijing opera are warriors, but most often they are the silly young beauty or the aging shrew.<sup>50</sup> Third are the *jing* (净). These are the “larger-than-life male roles” like emperors, generals, Daoist wizards, demons, or gods. The final role is the *chou* (丑). This is the white-faced trickster who japes around the stage for comic relief.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Ludden, “Making Politics Serve Music,” 160; Ludden, “The Transformation of Beijing Opera,” 146.

<sup>48</sup> Xing, “The ‘Broken’ and the ‘Breakthroughs,’” 369.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 367. This thesis does not go into detail about gendered aspects of props or costumes in Beijing opera. For greater analysis, see Rosemary Roberts, “From Zheng Qiang to Jiang Shuiying: The Feminization of a Revolutionary Hero in Maoist Theatre’s *Song of the Dragon River*,” *Asian Theatre Journal* 23, no. 2 (2006): 270; Roberts, *Maoist Model Theatre*, 57-66, 69-72, 85, 92-111, 160-1, 173-5; and Yang, “Behind the Bamboo Curtain,” 65. Jin Xing also recalls a time when her role was to dance across the stage presenting weapons to the men and flowers to the women; see Jin, *Shanghai Tango*, 25.

<sup>50</sup> Roberts, *Maoist Model Theatre*, 40-1.

<sup>51</sup> Xing, “The ‘Broken’ and the ‘Breakthroughs,’” 365-7.

The CCP made four main adjustments to character roles in the *yangbanxi* operas. First, like their European counterparts, female stage roles were most often played by men. The CCP halted this by giving female parts to female actors.<sup>52</sup> Second, one of the *dan* rules for movement was the *suibu* (碎步) which were the short quick steps that made a woman appear to walk with bound feet. Not only did the Party eliminate the practice of foot binding in real life, they also abolished it from the stage so women could move with the same powerful steps as men.<sup>53</sup> Third, because of the Party's distaste for religious superstition and the idolization of feudal culture, all *jing* characters were eliminated.<sup>54</sup> Finally, the character depth explored by traditional characters as they retold historical events and grappled with the human condition were all discarded for the political binarism of yin and yang. The *chou* remained, but he became the white-faced villains in black who elicited the amused derision of the audience, while the *sheng* and *dan* characters metamorphosed into heroic communist models.<sup>55</sup> Despite these radical changes, the operas of the *yangbanxi* were still popular with the citizenry.

The operas were not only popular with the masses but with China's ruling couple.<sup>56</sup> Mao and Jiang were both balletomanes and opera lovers, although Mao loved the performers more than the performances themselves since many of the young women

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<sup>52</sup> Ludden, "The Transformation of Beijing Opera," 146.

<sup>53</sup> Ludden, "Making Politics Serve Music," 159; Roberts, *Maoist Model Theatre*, 66.

<sup>54</sup> Yang, "Behind the Bamboo Curtain," 63.

<sup>55</sup> Roberts, *Maoist Model Theatre*, 9.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

in his harem were chosen from the stage.<sup>57</sup> Indeed, Mao not only met his lovers through the opera, but his wife as well. Before the Japanese invaded Shanghai in 1937, Jiang Qing, who had been training as an actress, fled the city to Yan'an. While she was there, she starred in *On Songhua River*, China's first revolutionary opera. Ostensibly, Mao attended every performance just to see her, and, against the wishes of the other Party leadership, Mao married Jiang in 1938 after a two-month courtship.<sup>58</sup> Ironically, it was also through the opera that Jiang Qing met some of her lovers, sometimes referred to as her "male concubines." Allegedly, these included a famous dancer, an actor, a ping-pong champion, and Qian Haoliang—the opera singer starring as Li Yuhe in *The Red Lantern*.<sup>59</sup>

### **Jiang Qing's Role in *Yangbanxi***

Not only were stage performances central to the propagation of the Cultural Revolution, but it was in fact a play that started all the problems in the first place. In 1961, Wu Han, the Vice Mayor of Beijing, wrote a play entitled *Hai Rui Dismissed from Office*, which told the story of a Ming court Mandarin named Hai Rui who fell from grace after protesting the emperor's unjust policies. Four years later, Jiang Qing interpreted the play as an allegorical attack against Mao who, during the 1959 Lushan

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<sup>57</sup> Dr. Li Zhisui, *The Private Life of Chairman Mao: The Memoirs of Mao's Personal Physician*, trans. Tai Hung-chao (New York: Random House, 1994), 357, 362, 517. See also Roberts, *Maoist Model Theatre*, 90.

<sup>58</sup> Ludden, "The Transformation of Beijing Opera," 147-8; *Yang Ban Xi*, 0:53:25 to 0:54:10.

<sup>59</sup> Jung Chang, *Wild Swans: Three Daughters of China* (repr., New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003), 625; Li, *Mao's Last Dancer*, 227; Roberts, *Maoist Model Theatre*, 88. Roberts supplies the name Qian Haoliang. In the opening film credits for *The Red Lantern*, he is only listed as Hao Liang (浩亮). "Hao" is not a common surname.

Conference, sacked Defense Minister Peng Dehuai after he confronted Mao for his policies during the Great Leap Forward. It was precisely this use of dramatic art which Jiang Qing interpreted as a glorification of the feudal past and as an attack against the Maoist regime.<sup>60</sup> Hence, the ten-year period from 1966 to 1976 was named because it was the Party's attempt to overthrow China's ancient culture through revolution.

Before Jiang Qing officially took the reins of the artistic world in 1964, both Mao and Jiang had indicated frustration that the opera stage was still dominated by "emperors, princes, generals, ministers, scholars and beauties" rather than the proletarian triumvirate.<sup>61</sup> When Jiang finally managed to exert her authority in purging the stage of feudalism, not even Mulan, the great symbol of gender equality herself, was spared. In the original 1961 film version of *The Red Detachment of Women*, the soldiers sing a marching tune with the words "forward, forward! The soldier's burdens are heavy (or 'crucial'). The women's hatred runs deep. Anciently there was Hua Mulan to join the army for her father. Today the women's detachment bears rifles for the people's sake."<sup>62</sup> The movie and marching tune were both popular, but the 1970 film version of the ballet cut the reference to Mulan from the women's march because she was a feudal concept.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Chang, *Wild Swans*, 275; Chang, "Who Gets What," 22; Du, "From Taboo to Open Discussion," 133; Ebon, *Five Chinese Communist Plays*, xii; Mary Ann Farquhar, "Comic Books and Popularization," in *Children's Literature in China: From Lu Xun to Mao Zedong* (New York: East Gate, 1999), 233; John A. Lent and Xu Ying, *Comics Art in China* (Jackson, Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi, 2017), 88; Roberts, *Maoist Model Theatre*, 4; Yang, "Behind the Bamboo Curtain," 65-6.

<sup>61</sup> Ebon, *Five Chinese Communist Plays*, ix, 1-2, 26; Ludden, "Making Politics Serve Music," 154; Ludden, "The Transformation of Beijing Opera," 148.

<sup>62</sup> 向前进向前进 / 战士的责任重 / 妇女的冤仇深 / 古有花木兰替父去从军 / 今有娘子军扛枪为人民。 See "红色娘子军军歌 [The Red Detachment of Women, Marching Song]," Baidu Baike, accessed March 26, 2019, <https://baike.baidu.com/item/红色娘子军军歌/4960369>.

<sup>63</sup> Susan Mann, "Myths of Asian Womanhood," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 59, no. 4 (2000): 855.



Prior to 1964, Jiang Qing had been relatively unknown in China's political circles.<sup>64</sup> However, given her background as an actress and her ferocious political zeal, she edged her way into government by pushing for the establishment of the first eight model works in time for the twenty-fifth anniversary of Mao's 1942 Yan'an Talks.<sup>65</sup> The announcement of the first eight stage productions judged worthy to be *yangbanxi* came in the *People's Daily* on 6 December 1966.<sup>66</sup> Following the actualization of the model works, Jiang Qing was no longer just the first lady of China, she became the "godmother" of the *yangbanxi* with the final say over all aspects of state propaganda. *Yangbanxi* and Jiang Qing—after 1967, to speak of one was to speak of the other.<sup>67</sup>

The Defense Minister Lin Biao had been Mao's right-hand until his death in 1971, but after that, Jiang Qing used her proximity to the Chairman to establish herself and her confederates as the highest level of state power after Mao himself. One of the ways Jiang exercised her new authority was to create model operas that featured women in more prominent roles—*Azalea Mountain* is a good example.<sup>68</sup> Some scholars have applauded Jiang Qing for giving women greater prominence in the *yangbanxi*, and, by extension, a more equal footing in society. However, others have argued that the heroines in Jiang's later work were simply her preemptive attempts to counter the main arguments that her competitors would inevitably raise should she attempt to seize control of the government

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<sup>64</sup> Chang, "Who Gets What," 22.

<sup>65</sup> Clark, "Model Theatrical Works," 174, 177-8.

<sup>66</sup> Di, "Feminism in the Revolutionary Model Ballets," 188. Yawen Ludden claims that the announcement did not come until 1967; see Ludden, "Making Politics Serve Music," 155.

<sup>67</sup> Clark, "Model Theatrical Works," 173-4, 179.

<sup>68</sup> Roberts, *Maoist Model Theatre*, 6.

after Mao died.<sup>69</sup> It is certainly feasible that both hypotheses are true and that Jiang may have inadvertently helped the cause of Chinese feminism even though her motives were probably selfish. In any case, many women at the time expressed admiration for the strong heroines in *yangbanxi* and strove to imitate them.<sup>70</sup>

One of Jiang's greatest assets in generating the model works was the composer Yu Huiyong.<sup>71</sup> Yu joined a musical troupe of the PLA during the Sino-Japanese War and eventually became a professor of Chinese folk music and music theory at the Shanghai Conservatory. Unfortunately, from the onset of the Hundred Flowers campaign in 1956, Yu was accused of being a bourgeois academic capitalist and spent most of the next decade facing imprisonment and degradation, and his suffering intensified during the first few years of the Cultural Revolution.<sup>72</sup> He first met Jiang Qing in June 1965 in Shanghai after she read several of his articles and sought him out, although she did not elevate him until several years later.<sup>73</sup> Jiang became his savior. Not only did she free him from his imprisonment in the "cowshed," but under her patronage, Yu rose to become the Minister of Culture in 1975.<sup>74</sup> Until the end of the Cultural Revolution, the two of them were the guiding genii of the *yangbanxi*. Jiang was the political engine driving the creation of new

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<sup>69</sup> Du, "From Taboo to Open Discussion," 135; Ludden, "The Transformation of Beijing Opera," 144.

<sup>70</sup> Roberts, *Maoist Model Theatre*, 212-3.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>72</sup> Ludden, "Making Politics Serve Music," 155-8.

<sup>73</sup> Ludden, "The Transformation of Beijing Opera," 149.

<sup>74</sup> Ludden, "Making Politics Serve Music," 158.

works with the final say on artistic input, and Yu was the musical virtuoso who applied his knowledge of theory and stagecraft to fashion the minute details of each show.<sup>75</sup>

During the Cultural Revolution, Jiang was praised for creating the *yangbanxi*, which were, within China, universally acclaimed as the greatest works of art ever created. When Mao died, however, both Jiang and her operas were criticized together. Within a month of Mao's passing, Jiang was arrested and her operas disappeared.<sup>76</sup> Not only Jiang, but anyone whom she had favored became a target of retribution for the Cultural Revolution, including Xue Jinghua, the prima ballerina in *The Red Detachment of Women*, and Yu Huiyong.<sup>77</sup> Yu was arrested at nearly the same time as Jiang, and, rather than reliving his experiences during the Great Leap Forward, killed himself the following year by drinking sulfuric acid.<sup>78</sup> Jiang survived until 1991 before she too committed suicide in prison.<sup>79</sup>

### **Female Roles in *Yangbanxi***

As leading characters and as extras, women and men sing, dance, and fight side by side. By freeing women from the traditional attitude that women belonged solely in the home, and by blurring the Confucian lines between men and women, an argument

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<sup>75</sup> Ludden, "Making Politics Serve Music," 153; Ludden, "The Transformation of Beijing Opera," 149.

<sup>76</sup> Di, "Feminism in the Revolutionary Model Ballets," 190.

<sup>77</sup> *Yang Ban Xi*, 0:59:30 to 1:01:00.

<sup>78</sup> Ludden, "Making Politics Serve Music," 165; Ludden, "The Transformation of Beijing Opera," 153.

<sup>79</sup> *Yang Ban Xi*, 1:23:00.

could be made that the model productions were steps forward in the promotion of gender equality.<sup>80</sup> Xi'er and Wu Qinghua, the heroines in the first two ballets, both escape from the homes of brutal landlords and return home to take their revenge after enduring considerable hardships. As her hair turned white, Xi'er demonstrated great strength by surviving alone in the wilderness, and Wu Qinghua became a fearsome warrior under the Party's training. Li Tiemei of *The Red Lantern* witnessed the execution of her family and then successfully delivered important codes to the Communist guerrillas despite great danger from the Japanese. Chang Bao of *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy* was compelled to live as a boy in order to protect her virtue from the Guomindang, but with the PLA she was free to fight the bandits without the need to disguise herself. One of the most impressive heroines is *Azalea Mountain's* Ke Xiang (figure 3.1). Ke not only managed to lead a successful attack against the Guomindang, but she snuck into their stronghold to free captured comrades. Furthermore, Ke had to continually strive against her own subordinates who doubted her decisions because she was not only an outlander but a woman as well.<sup>81</sup>

A deeper analysis, however, reveals that many variations of yin and yang were at play in differentiating men and women. First, as discussed in previous chapters, the Party tried to erase gender, but all they did was politicize it by linking femininity and the bourgeoisie with yin, while masculinity and the proletariat enjoyed the strength of yang.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Di, "Feminism in the Revolutionary Model Ballets," 190-1; Roberts, *Maoist Model Theatre*, 10, 41.

<sup>81</sup> Du, "From Taboo to Open Discussion," 131, 136.

<sup>82</sup> Roberts, *Maoist Model Theatre*, 23.

Anchee Min was cast as the title character in *Red Azalea*, the *yangbanxi* intended to show the strongest female comrade yet, but even so, the studio management instructed her that “Red Azalea (the character) must not be too poignant. Her screen time must yield; meaning the male hero must appear dominant.”<sup>83</sup> She was the strongest political character in the film, and yet she was expected to keep from overbalancing his yang with her yin. Another example is the unpopular 1972 opera version of *The Red Detachment of Women*. The actress cast to play Wu Qinghua looked older than the “baby-faced” actor who played Hong Changqing. One commentator explained that the backwards pairing made “audiences feel uncomfortable” as though “yin and yang had been turned upside down.”<sup>84</sup>

There are four key examples in *yangbanxi* that show how women remained secondary in Maoist society.<sup>85</sup> First, there is a disproportionate ratio of males to females. This critique is difficult to catch, especially since it was progressive of the CCP to include women at all in an artform from which they had been customarily excluded. But the gender ratio needs to be considered first in terms of extras and then in terms of speaking roles. There are female extras in every film version, and, in every case, they

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<sup>83</sup> Min, *Red Azalea*, 311.

<sup>84</sup> Roberts, *Maoist Model Theatre*, 88-9.

<sup>85</sup> There are more examples, such as the use of costumes and props, although these four are the main ones. Rosemary Roberts has conducted a deep analysis of the *yangbanxi* opera *Song of Dragon River*, which had been adapted from a previous version. In the original, the protagonist is a man named Zheng Qiang, but in the model opera, the character has been turned into a woman named Jiang Shuiying. Roberts studies the gender roles of Zheng and Jiang by comparing how the other characters interact with the protagonist when he is a man and how those interactions change after she is made into a woman. The main difference between them is the use of the respectful second-person pronoun “nin” (您) and the use and disuse of formal titles. Roberts concludes that Jiang’s comrades respected her, but they also patronized her and respected her less than Zheng. See Roberts, “From Zheng Qiang to Jiang Shuiying,” 267, 271, 277; and Roberts, *Maoist Model Theatre*, 50, 53-5, 150-1, 162-3, 165, 169.

side with the communists. There is one particular scene in *The Red Detachment of Women* where a troupe of captive serving girls dance for the scopophilic pleasure of the Landlord Nanbatian (as well as the audience).<sup>86</sup> Their dance is followed by another troupe of women in native costume who perform a traditional—and exotic—dance of the Li ethnic group, which is further evidence of the “internal orientalism” discussed in chapter two.<sup>87</sup> These two groups of women are part of the villain’s camp, but it is clear that they are there against their will. The balance of female to male extras appears to be nearly even in the communist groups, although the overall balance tips in favor of men since the extras on the capitalist side are all males.

As for the primary leading characters, the balance appears split nearly down the middle with only a slight preference for males. Nevertheless, there is a much greater number of secondary males with speaking parts in each film—not counting the villains. In general, each film only has two strong females while the remaining communist characters with speaking roles are all men. In ballets, none of the characters have speaking roles (except for the prayer that Mao will live for ten-thousand years), but Wu Qinghua and the detachment commander (who is not given a name) are the only two ballerinas with major dancing parts in *The Red Detachment of Women*, while Xi’er and Aunt Zhang are the two main females in *The White-Haired Girl*; all the other female dancers are extras. Ke Xiang and Grandma Du are the only two females in *Azalea Mountain*, while in *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy*, Chang Bao, the strongest female

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<sup>86</sup> Laura Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” in *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*, ed. Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen (New York: Oxford UP, 1999), 835, 838-9; Roberts, *Maoist Model Theatre*, 71.

<sup>87</sup> A Chinese ethnic minority of Hainan island where the story is set. *Hongse Niangzi Jun*, 0:38:00 to 0:42:00.

character, only plays a minor role herself, and Mother Li is even lesser. *The Red Lantern*, with four speaking female characters has the largest number, but two of them are minor roles leaving only Tiemei and Grandma Li with significant time on stage. All other characters are men.

The second example of how women are secondary in *yangbanxi* is the fact that they are very seldom granted complete authority since there is usually a man in the chain of command above them. In *The Red Detachment of Women*, Wu Qinghua and the detachment commander both take their orders from Hong Changqing.<sup>88</sup> This is best illustrated during the fourth scene which opens to Hong teaching a political class to the women's detachment (including the commander). This implies that the women receive their training and their orders from a man, and that they are not granted the power of their own decision making.<sup>89</sup> In *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy*, when the time comes for the PLA and the peasants to attack the Guomindang stronghold, only Chang Bao is required to ask permission from the Chief of Staff, which he initially denies because she is "too small," before ultimately relenting.<sup>90</sup> Ke Xiang was arguably the most powerful heroine in *yangbanxi*, but her husband was supposed to have been in charge had he not been killed on his way to Azalea Mountain.

Even when Jiang Qing tried to create powerful women in positions of authority over men, social attitudes resisted the change. Despite Mulan's absence from the

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<sup>88</sup> Roberts, *Maoist Model Theatre*, 42.

<sup>89</sup> *Hongse Niangzi Jun*, 0:55:00 to 0:56:45.

<sup>90</sup> *Zhiqu Weihu Shan* [Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy], produced by the Shanghai Opera Company (Beijing Dianying Zhipianchang, 1974), 1:34:45 to 1:35:40, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cjE0LDNycE8>.

Cultural Revolution, audiences did not fail to draw connections between her and the strong characters in *yangbanxi*. However, there is a crucial difference between Mulan and the communist heroines. In most versions, Mulan is depicted as a model of Confucian virtue.<sup>91</sup> She pretended to be a man, thus violating her feminine responsibilities, but only for the sake of fulfilling the higher obligations of filial piety; when the war was over, she returned to a traditional feminine role. In other words, in the Chinese literary tradition, it is appropriate for a woman to suspend her femininity to fulfill a man's role, but only when it is impossible for a man to fulfill that role in the first place, only if that woman conceals her true sex, and only if her masculine role is temporary.<sup>92</sup>

Scholars have argued that the strong women in Jiang Qing's later operas were her attempts to pave the way for a power grab. If that was true, then the deep-rooted tradition of yin and yang had doomed her from the onset because she tried to place women in positions of authority over men.<sup>93</sup> While on an official delegation in Africa, a Party official named Li Guotang viewed *Azalea Mountain* for the first time and complained that "all the heroes in Jiang Qing's *yangbanxi* are women." This was untrue since just under half of the heroes were women, but it reveals the attitude that *yangbanxi* heroines violated their expected roles, and that some men viewed this as a threat to their masculinity. Still other men complained that *yangbanxi* women were "too aggressive" and that they "lacked natural feminine charm." In any case, although many women were

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<sup>91</sup> Roberts, *Maoist Model Theatre*, 45, 195.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 192, 198.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 195.



inspired by the later heroines, characters like Ke Xiang and Fang Haizhen from *On the Docks* were met with hostility by some audiences because they dared to trespass in a man's world without concealing their "shameful" yin.<sup>94</sup>

The third example of how women rank second in *yangbanxi* is how they are questioned and chastised even though males are not. When Ke Xiang arrives at Azalea Mountain, she faces the dual challenge from her subordinates of being an outsider and a woman.<sup>95</sup> In scene three, shortly after Ke arrives in the guerrilla camp, one drunken peasant complains that the Party's representative is a woman. After asking his comrades why any of them should listen to her, they resolve to ignore her.<sup>96</sup> Even Lei Gang, the male protagonist who serves under Ke Xiang, sings a soliloquy questioning whether or not he can trust the leadership of woman although he ultimately decides that he can: "Is the Party representative watching the fire from the other side of the river without risking herself? Is her heart frozen and buried in snow? Will she be frightened senseless at the sound of artillery fire? No!" Then, as though deciding whether or not to trust a woman were harder than combat, Lei muses "why is revolution this difficult."<sup>97</sup> Later, when the guerrillas learn that the Guomindang has captured Grandma Du, Ke tries to convince the camp not to run down the mountain to save her, thus springing the bandits' trap. She

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<sup>94</sup> Roberts, *Maoist Model Theatre*, 212-4. Upon his return to Shanghai, Li Guotang was arrested for making his complaint.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 43-5.

<sup>96</sup> *Dujuan Shan*, 0:25:15 to 0:25:50.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 0:59:00 to 1:00:45. 党代表隔岸观火不许交战 / 难道说她的心冰冷雪寒 / 难道她炮火声中吓破了胆, 吓破了胆? 不! 闹革命为什么这样难?

convinces most, but Lei Gang disregards her orders and is indeed abducted. In their cell, Grandma Du rebukes him for disobeying a direct order.<sup>98</sup>

The fourth reason why women are secondary in model works also explains why communist women are challenged. This is because the *yangbanxi* perpetuate the traditional stereotypes that women are most comfortable in domestic work and that they are ruled by emotion.<sup>99</sup> In *The Red Detachment of Women*, while scouting Nanbatian's manor in preparation for a night assault, Wu Qinghua, overcome with rage for the abuses she suffered from Nanbatian, breaks discipline by shooting at him prematurely, thus giving the attack signal too soon, then, as a consequence for her selfishness, the commander takes Wu's pistol from her.<sup>100</sup> Historically, Chinese society has understood a woman's place as the inner world of the home while a man's place was the outer world of the pastures and battlefields. In that light, the confiscation of Wu's gun is an emasculating reminder that until she is worthy of more yang, she is still only a woman. Wu eventually learns that the interests of the group outweigh personal vendettas, and by internalizing this lesson, she demonstrates to Hong Changqing and the commander that she is again worthy to carry a weapon.<sup>101</sup> However, as though to remind the audience that a woman can never have as much yang as a man, within less than a minute of Wu's rearmament, a male soldier gives his torn uniform to a female soldier who cheerfully sits

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<sup>98</sup> *Dujuan Shan*, 1:05:30, 1:24:20.

<sup>99</sup> Roberts, *Maoist Model Theatre*, 153.

<sup>100</sup> Di, "Feminism in the Revolutionary Model Ballets," 198; *Hongse Niangzi Jun*, 50:20 to 53:30.

<sup>101</sup> *Hongse Niangzi Jun*, 1:00:00 to 1:01:30.

down on the stage to mend it while he teaches another female comrade how to shoot better.<sup>102</sup>

### **Yin and Yang as Good and Evil in *Yangbanxi* Credits**

Like femininity and masculinity, yin and yang also represent the polarization of good and evil in Jiang Qing's revolutionary model works and in Chinese society in general. Quoting a passage from Chairman Mao's *Little Red Book*, Ke Xiang asks her comrades: "Who are our enemies? Who are our friends? This is the primary question of the revolution."<sup>103</sup> In other words, the CCP divided the entire world into two camps with no middle ground. This attitude was not exclusive to China during the Cold War since Senator Joseph McCarthy did the same thing. What makes China unique is how the Party used yin and yang to demarcate the political and moral binaries which added a gendered component to the discourse. So far as can be determined, Rosemary Roberts is the only other Chinese historian to make the connection between the yin of femininity and the yin of bourgeois evil. However, Roberts's analysis focuses on the villains in *yangbanxi* ballet while this thesis argues that the yin-yang paradigm is found in all aspects of propaganda and therefore reflects a widespread prejudice held by the government and citizenry of the PRC. Moreover, Roberts's argument focuses on the feminizing effect of the *yangbanxi* on its villains, while this thesis argues that the villainous elements of propaganda actively harmed the gender parity of femininity. Finally, Roberts makes no attempt to explain *why* the Party chose to link gender to politics through yin and yang.

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<sup>102</sup> Hongse Niangzi Jun, 1:02:20 to 1:02:50.

<sup>103</sup> Dujuan Shan, 0:36:55 to 0:37:20; Mao Zedong, *Mao Zhuxi Yulu* [Quotations from Chairman Mao Zedong] (Beijing: Waiwen Chubanshe, 1966), 10.

This thesis argues that it was the Party's effort to recast China as a strong nation after the Century of Humiliation, which they did by claiming the strength of yang for themselves while assigning the weakness of yin to former governments.<sup>104</sup>

One *yangbanxi* scriptwriter remarked that “people come in two varieties: the beautiful, true, and honest; and the ugly, the mean, and nasty.”<sup>105</sup> The political dichotomy is observed in four prominent ways. The first is visible in each *yangbanxi*'s opening film credits. Since the doctrine of the Three Prominences applies here as well, rather than listing the characters alphabetically or in order of appearance, the credits rank the *dramatis personae* by order of their political orthodoxy. This analysis is even more fruitful if we consider each character as ranked according to their level of yang. Each model works begins by scrolling through the names of the heroes followed by the extras, then, in each case, there is a gap between the good communists and the villains. Additionally, as was found in Chinese comic books, the character names themselves reveal something about their personal traits.

In the credits for *The White-Haired Girl*, as the title character, Xi'er (喜儿, “happy child”) is given top billing. She is followed by her male counterpart Wang Dachun (王大春, “Grand Springtime”). After Wang are the wise old peasant Uncle Zhao (赵大叔), and Yang Bailao (杨白劳 “One Hundred Labors”), Xi'er's father who is murdered in scene one. The last hero included in the credits is Aunt Zhang (张二婶), who helps Xi'er escape from the landlord's manor. As the credits keep rolling, there is a

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<sup>104</sup> Roberts, *Maoist Model Theatre*, 134.

<sup>105</sup> *Yang Ban Xi*, 0:43:00.

gap between Aunt Zhang and the landlord Huang Shiren (黄世仁 “World of Virtue”) and his manservant Mu Renzhi (穆仁智 “Virtue and Wisdom”). Their names may sound righteous, but “*ren*” and “*zhi*” are both two of the five Confucian ethics, as such, their monikers explicitly connect them to the oppression of feudal China. The final character is not even given a name. She is only called *dizhupo* (地主婆 “the landlord’s old wife”). So far as can be determined, she is the only female villain in Chinese propaganda. The fact that Huang comes before Mu implies that the CCP recognized that a grand villain is stronger than his lackey, even if the strength of his yang is only a perverse corruption. But what is most interesting is the landlady.<sup>106</sup> As the only character in *yangbanxi* who embodies the wickedness of both femininity and bourgeois decadence, she is the only character wholly devoid of yang, thus placing her last in the credits.<sup>107</sup>

In *The Red Detachment of Women*, the first name to appear is not the heroine, but her male counterpart and PLA supervisor Hong Changqing (洪常青 “Evergreen”). The protagonist Wu Qinghua (吴清华 “Outstanding and Beautiful”) is only second. This is telling since, even though she is the main character, she is not a flawless communist like Hong until her firearm is returned an hour into the ballet. The unnamed female commander of the women’s detachment follows Wu, and the concluding hero is Xiao Pang (小庞 “Little Tremendous”), Hong’s aide-de-camp. Following precedent, there is a

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<sup>106</sup> Rosemary Roberts maintains that all the villains in *yangbanxi* are males. She does not address the issue of the landlady, even though she is actually more cruel to the servants than Huang Shiren. See Roberts, *Maoist Model Theatre*, 19, 224.

<sup>107</sup> *Bai Mao Nü*, 0:2:00 to 0:3:00.

large gap between Xiao Pang and the landlord villain Nanbatian (南霸天 “The Heavenly Southern Tyrant”) and his manservant Ou Guangsi (区广四 “Wide Number Four”).<sup>108</sup>

The same pattern in the ballets is observed in the model operas. *The Red Lantern* begins with Li Yuhe (李玉和 “Jade Peace”), a strong railroad switchman fighting secretly against the Japanese. His adoptive mother Grandma Li is next, followed by his adopted teenage daughter Tiemei (铁梅 “Iron Plum”). All three of them perform great acts of courage and sacrifice, even to martyrdom, but since Li is a man of incredible strength in the height of his prime, his yang outweighs the women in his family. Next is the “knife-sharpener” (磨刀人). Even though he is a man and therefore more naturally possessive of yang, he follows Grandma Li and Tiemei since, though he shows courage, he risks little and sacrifices nothing. Hui Lian (慧莲 “Intelligent Lotus”) and Aunt Tian (田大婶) are similar to the knife-sharpener, but they follow since they are both women. Again, there is break between the heroes and villains who are led by Hatoyama (鸠山), the Japanese regional commander. The final name is Wang Lianju (王连举).<sup>109</sup> Wang is an interesting case since his placement at the end of the credits indicates that he is worse than Hatoyama, even though he is a loyal communist to the point of shooting himself in the hand so he can misdirect the Japanese police, although he cracks under torture in scene four.<sup>110</sup> His placement at the tail indicates that the only thing worse than a Japanese invader is a Chinese collaborator. This is made explicit during Li’s arrest when

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<sup>108</sup> *Hongse Niangzi Jun*, 0:1:00 to 0:1:15.

<sup>109</sup> *Hong Deng Ji*, 0:1:20 to 0:2:00.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 0:6:20 to 0:6:40, 0:22:20 to 0:23:45.

he confronts Wang and accuses him of being a “shameless traitor” and a “pathetic insect, fearing death.”<sup>111</sup>

The credits for *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy* open with Yang Zirong (杨子荣 “Son of Honor”), the PLA soldier who courageously infiltrates the Guomindang. He is followed by his own commanding officer, the regional chief-of-staff (参谋长), and Li Yongqi (李勇奇 “Extremely Brave”), a courageous peasant who converts to communism and joins the militia. The first woman in the credits is Chang Bao (常宝 “Treasure”). Though she is young, she insists on joining the People’s Militia and therefore precedes her father Chang Liehu (常猎户 “Hunter”) and Mother Li. The standard gap separates the heroes from the Guomindang warlord Zuo Shandiao (座山雕 “Vulture”) who, as with *The Red Lantern*, precedes the turncoat Luan Ping (栾平 “Average”).<sup>112</sup>

The credits for *Azalea Mountain* follow the same pattern, though there are two minor variations. As the highest-ranking communist with the purest background and attitude, Ke Xiang (柯湘 “Xiang River”<sup>113</sup>) appears first. She is followed by Lei Gang (雷刚 “Strong”) and Li Shijian (李石坚 “Solid as a Rock”), two implacable peasants who are eager to learn despite their illiteracy and doubting natures. Next is Mother Du (杜妈妈), a kind and wise grandmother who flawlessly adheres to the Party—even sacrificing

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<sup>111</sup> *Hong Deng Ji*, 0:59:50 to 1:00:15.

<sup>112</sup> *Zhiqu Weihu Shan*, 0:0:35 to 0:1:00.

<sup>113</sup> The Xiang River originates in Guangxi Province and flows through Hunan Province into Dongting Lake. Ke’s name may be a reference to the *Xiang River Review*, a publication founded by Mao in 1919. See Mao Zedong, “*Xiangjiang Pinglun Chuangkan Xuanyan* [Xiang River Review Publication Manifesto], Marxist Internet Archive, accessed March 27, 2019, <https://www.marxists.org/chinese/maozedong/collect/01-005.htm>.

her son to the revolution. She follows Lei and Li only because her age and sex give her less yang than they. She is followed by three minor, but generally good-hearted peasant men: Tian Dajiang (田大江 “Great River”), Zheng Laowan (郑老万 “Old/Wise and Vast”), and Luo Chenghu (罗成虎 “Becomes a Tiger”). The final hero is Du Xiaoshan (杜小山 “Little Mountain”), Mother Du’s impetuous fifteen-year-old grandson whose youth gives him a high feminine voice and demeanor.

The gap between heroes and villains is absent from the credits, but there is still a distinction since the names of the villains are indented to the right. This may be an implied declaration that the two are “rightists,” but in any case, it functions to show that they are distinct from the heroes. The second difference is that Wen Qijiu (温其久) is a secret traitor who continually tries to sabotage the guerrilla base, yet he is an aberration from the previous operas since he precedes the primary villain in the credits. This is Dushe Dan (毒蛇胆 “Viper”), a martial landlord of the Guomindang.<sup>114</sup> Regardless of which of the two the CCP regarded as the greater villain, the point remains that the communist heroes, ranked in the credits according to their political orthodoxy, are separate and prominent over their bourgeois foes.

### Health and Sickness

In her 1964 address to theatrical workers, Jiang Qing expressed her irritation that in the original version of *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy*, the communist heroes all seemed ill while the Guomindang bandits looked like strapping warriors.<sup>115</sup> Since then,

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<sup>114</sup> *Dujuan Shan*, 0:0:50 to 0:1:15.

<sup>115</sup> Ebon, *Five Chinese Communist Plays*, 4-5.



the situation reversed itself so that good communists looked healthy and beautiful, while the villains became ugly, fat, bald, old, sickly, and hunched.<sup>116</sup> To improve the appearance of fitness and strength, actors and dancers were generally tall. When Jin Xing joined her PLA dance troupe, she was granted a waiver for her short stature because her dancing was so good, but she was a rare exception.<sup>117</sup> There were four main techniques for giving the heroes an air of health. First, camera angles were kept low. This served the dual function of providing a forced perspective of height, thus making the heroes appear more imposing, and it caused the actors' faces to appear fuller. Since Chinese peasants were historically the first to starve, it was a pleasant fantasy to portray farmers with round cheeks.<sup>118</sup>

The second method of indicating the health of individual communists, and, by extension, the Party, was by having the heroes cow their enemies by performing feats of strength. In *The Red Lantern*, once Hatoyama has Li Yuhe in custody, he orders his minions to take Li to the dungeon for questioning. As two guards step forward to seize him, Li hurls them backward with the command to "step away." His intention is not to fight them, but once they have been repelled, he calmly straightens his coat and walks to the dungeon on his own terms. After he is taken away, an unwillingly impressed Hatoyama muses to himself "how amazing! Why are communists so much harder than steel?" When Li is brought back into Hatoyama's study, he has been roughed up, but

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<sup>116</sup> Roberts, *Maoist Model Theatre*, 87, 249-50, 257.

<sup>117</sup> Jin, *Shanghai Tango*, 16-7.

<sup>118</sup> *Yang Ban Xi*, 0:5:25 to 0:7:25.

mentally and physically he is still stronger than his captors.<sup>119</sup> Shortly thereafter, as the guards are leading the Li family to their execution, Hatoyama offers Li Yuhe one last opportunity to save their lives in exchange for the secret codes. Spinning around to glare down at Hatoyama, Li's voice becomes thunderous and echoey as he shouts "Hatoyama! The Chinese people and the Chinese Communist Party are too many for you to ever kill! I exhort you to carefully consider your own dire fate!" In response, Hatoyama murmurs "how intimidating!"<sup>120</sup>

Li's muscular stature makes him appear threatening, but even despite Ke Xiang's slender build, her self-assured manner frightens an entire troop of villains. When she makes her first appearance in the village market, she is draped in chains and surrounded by the Viper's guards. They have superior numbers and bayonets, but they continually shy away from her, giving the impression that it is she who is in control.<sup>121</sup> Likewise, when the PLA is training in the snowy mountains of Manchuria, with no impression that they are feeling the chill, the chief-of-staff asks his men if they are tired, to which they emphatically respond in the negative.<sup>122</sup> By contrast, the Vulture and his men first appear clutching fur cloaks and shivering with the cold.<sup>123</sup> The implication is that the villains cling to the cold yin of the sick past while the Party looks forward to the warm yang of a healthy future.

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<sup>119</sup> *Hong Deng Ji*, 1:04:00 to 1:06:00. 好厉害呀！共产党人，为什么比钢铁还要硬？

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:37:45 to 1:38:15. Li: 鸠山！中国人民，中国共产党人，是杀不完的！我要你，仔细想一想你们的下场！Hatoyama: 太可怕了！

<sup>121</sup> *Dujuan Shan*, 0:16:50 to 0:21:30.

<sup>122</sup> *Zhiyu Weihu Shan*, 0:1:10 to 0:2:05.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 0:4:30 to 0:6:30.

The third method of conveying the health of the Party was through laughter. The villains' faces are generally frozen into scowls and sneers, and on the rare occasion that they do laugh, it is a dark chuckle at someone else's expense. On the other hand, the heroes frequently smile or throw their heads back and guffaw for the joy of belonging to the revolution. For the first half of the film, the peasant Li Yongqi seldom smiles because he has been under the thumb of the Guomindang. However, when the PLA chief-of-staff sings to him about the glories of the revolution, Li's face becomes transfigured at the first mention of "Chairman Mao." From then on, except for the moments of confrontation with the Guomindang when all the heroes' faces become stern, Li and his comrades are continually grinning.<sup>124</sup>

Despite their happiness, however, none of the heroes have deep laugh-lines. In fact, none of them have any wrinkles whatsoever. Although Grandma Li was supposed to be into her sixties, her face is young and smooth. Her gray hair conveys a feeling of age and wisdom, but her taut skin gives the sense that she is young, strong, and healthy despite her age (figure 3.2).<sup>125</sup> Indeed, Gao Yuqian, the actress who plays Grandma Li, was only thirty-seven when she was cast.<sup>126</sup> The same holds true for Mother Du and Mother Li, although Mother Li is the exception to the rule about good communist wellness since her first scene shows her sick and dying.<sup>127</sup> However, she actually underscores the point that the Party symbolizes the yang of good health since it is the

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<sup>124</sup> *Zhiqiu Weihu Shan*, 1:12:40 to 1:16:50.

<sup>125</sup> *Hong Deng Ji*, 0:7:00.

<sup>126</sup> Xing, "The 'Broken' and the 'Breakthroughs,'" 371.

<sup>127</sup> *Dujuan Shan*, 0:3:00.

PLA who, upon meeting her, send for the medic to treat her enough to make an immediate recovery.<sup>128</sup> This demonstrates that not only are the Party and physical health representative of each other, but it is the Party itself which supplies the people with the yang of wellbeing.

In contrast to the heroes, the villains represent the nadir of illness. Despite the fact that the villains are the personification of political yin, they do represent a kind of strength, but that strength is tainted by their other proclivities for selfishness, short-sightedness, cowardice, and sloth.<sup>129</sup> After all, the Guomindang on Tiger Mountain were too strong for a frontal assault, so they could only be taken by strategy.<sup>130</sup> Like the creatures for whom they are named, the Viper and the Vulture are both strong animals despite the fact that they are full of venom and feast on decay. There are two main ways that *yangbanxi* identify the bourgeoisie with sickness.

First, they are fat, old, and bald, which makes them appear lazy, decadent and impotent. The portliest is Hatoyama. Beside his rotundity, he is also short and hairless except for his toothbrush mustache.<sup>131</sup> Nanbatian is prosperously plump, especially in his peach colored Mandarin skirt and panama hat.<sup>132</sup> The Vulture is not fat, but he still looks unhealthy, even resembling his namesake with his bald head, bent neck, baggy jowls and flared black cloak with puffy fur collar.<sup>133</sup> Huang Shiren is not bald, but his hair is

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<sup>128</sup> *Zhiqiu Weihu Shan*, 1:03:00 to 1:18:50.

<sup>129</sup> Roberts, *Maoist Model Theatre*, 234.

<sup>130</sup> *Zhiqiu Weihu Shan*, 38:20.

<sup>131</sup> *Hong Deng Ji*, 18:30.

<sup>132</sup> *Hongse Niangzi Jun*, 8:50.

<sup>133</sup> *Zhiqiu Weihu Shan*, 4:50.

greasy and longer than the sharp haircuts of the PLA. Since men at this time often had similar haircuts regardless of whichever side they fought for, this stylistic choice is based on artistry, not history, which “creates a visual link between the female yin of the revolutionary model women and the evil yin of the landlords.”<sup>134</sup>

The second symbol of illness is the villains’ pale complexions. While the heroes all have rosy cheeks, the villains have sickly pallid faces, almost like they stuck their heads in a sack of flour (figures 3.3 and 3.4). This is the case for every villain except for spies and traitors—although they still usually wear the standard black of an enemy. There are two examples that best demonstrate this. The first is the landlady in *The White-Haired Girl*. A serving woman massages the old lady, but when the servant falls asleep, her mistress stabs her cruelly with a hairpin. The servant’s countenance is sad in her bondage, but her skin has a ruddy glow. The landlady, on the other hand, is not only extremely white, but hers is also the only face in *yangbanxi* crisscrossed by wrinkles.<sup>135</sup> The second example is from *The Red Lantern*, just before the Japanese torture Wang Lianju, when Hatoyama and three of his underlings are questioning Wang to discover where the secret codes are. Wang, who has not yet turned traitor at this point, does not have a healthy glow, but nor is he as pale as the other four men who all have ghastly white faces and crimson lips which makes them look like demons.<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> Roberts, *Maoist Model Theatre*, 238.

<sup>135</sup> *Bai Mao Nü*, 0:30:30 to 0:31:30.

<sup>136</sup> *Hong Deng Ji*, 0:23:00 to 0:23:26.

In traditional Chinese opera, the two traits of the clownish *chou* character are that he always has a white face and he very rarely speaks or sings.<sup>137</sup> The enemies in model operas do a great deal of speaking, but only two brief arias in the five identified *yangbanxi* are sung by villains. The first, sung in Hatoyama's raspy croak is a threat against Wang Lianju.<sup>138</sup> The other is the traitor Wen Qijiu's attempt to trick Lei Gang into thinking that Ke Xiang, as a woman, is a poor leader for the rebels on Azalea Mountain.<sup>139</sup> Whether this is intentional or not, audiences familiar with the customary rules of Beijing opera would have noticed a connection between the white-faced jesters of the past and the fools of the present who fought against the Party.

### **Lighting and Shadows**

Boiled down to their most simple forms, yang and yin represent "light" and "darkness." The film studios and lighting technicians used the brightness of the stage to make political statements about the actions in the drama. There are different lighting scenarios in *yangbanxi* and each one illuminates the scene and its connection to moral yin and yang. The first are acts in which all the players are righteous proletarians. In every case, the scene is brilliantly lit. The second are scenes where all the players except for one or two are good communists. Usually this is a scene where the one villain on stage is a traitor or spy. In these cases, the stage is still illuminated—though perhaps slightly dimmer—but the villain's costume is generally black. This identifies him with the

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<sup>137</sup> Roberts, *Maoist Model Theatre*, 239.

<sup>138</sup> *Hong Deng Ji*, 0:20:20 to 0:21:00.

<sup>139</sup> *Dujuan Shan*, 0:56:00 to 0:57:05.

counterrevolution and it distinguishes him from the heroes. The third are scenes where all the players are enemies. In these, the stage lighting is extremely dim. In some cases, were it not for their white faces, the black costumes of the villains would make them completely disappear. The fourth are scenes where everyone is a villain except for one or two valiant communists who are there either as spies or prisoners. In these cases, the stage is still gloomy, but, following the Three Prominences, the heroes are all under a bright spotlight. The final category of stage lighting are the transitional phases. Usually these take place at dawn or dusk. If the action take place at dawn, then it is either a scene where the villains exeunt and are followed onstage by the heroes, or the action takes place during a battle. In the latter case, the rising sun symbolizes the rising Communist Party. If the action occurs at dusk, then the stage generally falls from the communists to the capitalists, although this is rare. Below are analyzed examples from the five included *yangbanxi*.

In the opening scene of *The White-Haired Girl*, even though the stage is full of peasants, they are each draped in chains and carrying heavy burdens for Huang Shiren. As such, the lighting is dark to indicate Huang's control over their lives. The home of Xi'er and her father is well-lit, but it is dark and snowing outside since it is during this scene that Huang kidnaps Xi'er and murders Yang Bailao.<sup>140</sup> After Huang and his men take Xi'er away, one of the older male dancers stops Wang Dachun from grabbing a hatchet and chasing after them. He directs him to the Eighth Route Army, indicated by holding up a red cloth with *balujun* (八路军) written in golden characters. At this

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<sup>140</sup> *Bai Mao Nü*, 0:3:30 to 0:25:00.

moment, the morning sky begins to lighten while the cloth is passed around to each of the dancers who treat it with great reverence, but none more so than Wang.<sup>141</sup>

The next two scenes take place in the shadows. The first is set in the Huang family manor and the second takes place after Xi'er escapes and is chased into the mountains. Wherever she is, she is brightly illuminated, especially when her clothing and hair both turn ragged and white.<sup>142</sup> The very first scene where the stage is brightly illuminated takes place as Wang Dachun and his PLA unit come home to liberate Yangge village. The peasants and soldiers all train and dance together, although there is a moment of sadness when Aunt Zhao, believing that Xi'er is dead, gives Wang the sad news.<sup>143</sup>

Except for Xi'er, the stage goes dark again as the happy scene gives way to her sneaking food from two of Huang's men in a Buddhist temple. When Wang enters and chases the bandits away, he recognizes her and follows her into a nearby cave. As Wang and the peasants enter the cave to save her, the morning sunlight begins to stream inside and the peasants joyfully sing that "the sun is a symbol of the Communist Party."<sup>144</sup> This is significant since the word for "sun" (*taiyang* 太阳) literally means "the ultimate yang." In other words, they are making an explicit connection between metaphysical yang and the CCP. The final scene takes place on a bright stage. The peasants march in carrying banners that read "punish the evil traitor Huang Shiren," who is himself slapped by Xi'er

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<sup>141</sup> *Bai Mao Nü*, 0:25:00 to 0:28:30.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, 0:28:30 to 0:57:00.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, 0:57:00 to 1:07:30.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:12:30 to 1:23:10.



and dragged offstage for execution (figure 3.5). At the sound of gunfire, the peasants all jubilantly shout “ten-thousand years to Chairman Mao! Ten-thousand years to the Communist Party! Ten-thousand years to Chairman Mao! Ten and again ten-thousand years!” At this point, the stage is its brightest yet, and all prominence is given to the red sun rising slowly in the distance (figure 3.6).<sup>145</sup>

*The Red Detachment of Women* opens in darkness save for Wu Qinghua who, under a spotlight, is chained to a post in the home of Nanbatian. She manages to escape from the manor and flees into a palm grove. Nanbatian’s lackeys chase her carrying paper lanterns, but as if to demonstrate their wicked yin, the lanterns provide no substantial light. She is eventually saved by Hong Changqing and Xiao Pang who give her directions to the women’s encampment.<sup>146</sup> Scene two opens on a bright scene in the communist base. The joyful peasants dance and train under trees with red leaves and everyone is happy. When Wu Qinghua staggers into camp, she is welcomed with open arms. When she places her face against the fabric of the red flag, she weeps with joy.<sup>147</sup> When scene three opens in the “bandits lair,” the stage lighting returns to black. The villains are enjoying a feast, but the only people under the spotlight are Hong Changqing, who enters the party disguised as a business man, and Wu Qinghua who remains in the courtyard to spy. When Wu prematurely fires at Nanbatian, the women’s detachment

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<sup>145</sup> *Bai Mao Nü*, 1:23:30 to 1:31:20. There is no denouement for the old landlady.

<sup>146</sup> *Hongse Niangzi Jun*, 0:1:20 to 0:20:40.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, 0:20:45 to 0:34:45.

rushes on stage to secure the mansion, but the landlord escapes. Even so, throughout the battle, as more heroes enter, the brighter the lights get until dawn tinges the horizon.<sup>148</sup>

Scene four opens at dawn in the communist camp. Hong leads the women in a political seminar before they break for military training. By the time Wu proves that she is again worthy to carry a pistol, the day is fully bright.<sup>149</sup> The next scene is a battle between the women's detachment and the Guomindang, so it takes place that night in semi-darkness. The backdrop is black, but a red light shines on the heroes as they fight. The communists win the battle, but Hong Changqing is captured in near-total darkness except for the flickering lightning on his face.<sup>150</sup> Scene six begins in darkness at the Guomindang's last bastion (figure 3.7). When Hong Changqing is brought in under guard, a spotlight shines on him alone. Nanbatian gives Hong the chance to sign a pledge disavowing the revolution, but Hong refuses and is executed by burning alive.<sup>151</sup> The final scene takes place a few hours later as dawn turns the sky a light pink. The women's detachment runs onto the stage and fights the enemy while all throughout the battle, the sky gradually brightens into day.

The lighting for *The Red Lantern* is even more simple since it does not use transitional illumination. The action takes place primarily in the Li home, which is always well-lit,<sup>152</sup> outside in Longtan Village, where it is daytime, but overcast because

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<sup>148</sup> *Hongse Niangzi Jun*, 0:34:45 to 0:53:45.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, 0:55:00 to 1:11:45.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:11:45 to 1:25:00.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:25:00 to 1:34:20.

<sup>152</sup> *Hong Deng Ji*, 0:7:00.

of the Japanese occupation;<sup>153</sup> or in the Japanese compound and prison yard, where it is usually dark and gloomy.<sup>154</sup> The final scene is the brightest, and this is because it is the final battle which takes place in the guerrilla mountain base.<sup>155</sup> The lantern itself is an important symbol of the party. Not only is it the means by which the guerrillas are able to recognize each other, but Grandma Li teaches Tiemei that “this red lantern has illuminated the path for us poor people these past few years. It shines upon the way that us workers must tread!” In other words, the light of the lantern symbolizes the yang of the CCP.<sup>156</sup>

*Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy* follows the same pattern. What is most interesting are the transitional scenes and the moments when Yang Zirong is undercover with the Guomindang. Whenever Yang is with the Vulture and his men in their cave, they are always in darkness, but he is brightly spotlighted (figure 3.8).<sup>157</sup> In scene eight, the Vulture is plotting with one of his men on the mountainside in the middle of the night. As they walk offstage, however, dawn begins to brighten the sky as Yang Zirong enters and sings that “the light of Mao Zedong Thought will shine forever.”<sup>158</sup> The last transitions occur after Yang has laid the groundwork for the army to attack. As the PLA

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<sup>153</sup> *Hong Deng Ji*, 0:13:50.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, 0:18:30. The one exception to this is when Hatoyama invites Li Yuhe to dinner in his study as a pretext for arresting him (0:53:20).

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:46:55 to 1:51:40.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, 0:26:30 to 0:26:45. 这盏红灯，多少年来照着咱们穷人的脚步走，它照着咱们工人的脚步走哇！

<sup>157</sup> *Zhiyu Weihu Shan*, 0:51:40, 1:43:50.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:18:50 to 1:23:43. 毛泽东思想永放光芒。

skis toward Tiger Mountain, the sky gradually grows slightly dimmer, but when they charge into the Vulture's lair, which had previously been gloomy, the cave glows with a red light until the army defeats the bandits and captures Zuo Shandiao.<sup>159</sup>

*Azalea Mountain* follows the same template, but there is one moment where the transitional lighting occurs at twilight instead of sunrise. Scene five begins in the early evening but grows steadily darker as the traitor Wen Qijiu enters and tries to poison Lei Gang against Ke Xiang. In this case, the interplay of light and dark is both literal and metaphorical as Lei struggles to make up his own mind.<sup>160</sup> Furthermore, there are several metaphorical references linking the yang of light to the yang of the Party. In the opening scene, Lei Gang sings that "the Party is the brilliant lamp which points the way."<sup>161</sup> Later, while Tian Dajiang lays dying from a gunshot wound, a choir sings "[your] radiance illuminates the land," thus demonstrating that yang comes from the revolutionary martyrs and the Communist Party.<sup>162</sup>

## Fire and Ice

The *yangbanxi* use fire and ice in ways similar to how they use light and darkness. After all, hot and cold are two other characteristics of yang and yin, but fire has certain qualities that light does not. The model works use fire in three ways, either metaphorically or literally, as a beacon, a weapon, and as a purifier. As a beacon, the

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<sup>159</sup> *Zhiqu Weihu Shan*, 1:39:25 to 1:43:45, 1:53:45 to 1:58:20.

<sup>160</sup> *Dujuan Shan*, 0:54:00 to 0:58:15.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, 0:11:10.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:41:05 to 1:41:40.

yang of fire functions the same as for light. It demonstrates the power of the Party, but it also summons the global proletariat to join the revolution. Grandma Li wonders “how long can heaven and earth be shrouded in darkness? Surely the revolution’s fire must break forth!”<sup>163</sup> Later, from his confinement in the prison yard, Li Yuhe echoes that sentiment by proclaiming a vision that “the red flag of the revolution has been raised high” and “the fires of anti-Japanese resistance will set the prairies ablaze... New China shines upon the human race with the glory of the sun.”<sup>164</sup>

For the Party, fire is also a potent weapon used in pushing the revolution forward. While singing about his responsibility to capture Tiger Mountain, Yang Zirong proclaims that in “making a goal to be like the foolish old man who moved the mountains, [I] can overcome unconquerable barriers; with a red heart like fire, [I] can become the sharpest sword!”<sup>165</sup> Yang’s chief-of-staff also ponders how “the revolution is like a raging fire that cannot be stopped” no matter how much the enemy fights against them.<sup>166</sup> After the peasants and the Eighth Route Army kill Huang Shiren, they celebrate by building a fire and consigning to it the remnants of their feudal past such as a placard from the “Hall of Good Karma” (*jishan tang* 积善堂) and a sign reading “Peace Preservation Association” (*weichi hui* 维持会).<sup>167</sup> The last thing to burn is the “human purchasing contract” Huang

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<sup>163</sup> *Hong Deng Ji*, 0:8:05 to 0:8:40. 看你昏天黑地能多久? 革命的火焰一定要大放光芒!

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:21:30 to 1:23:05. 我看到革命的红旗高举起, 抗日的烽火已燎原。新中国如朝阳光照人间。

<sup>165</sup> *Zhiyu Weihu Shan*, 0:41:35 to 0:42:00. 立下愚公移山志能破万重困难关, 一颗红心似火焰化作利剑斩凶顽。

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*, 0:28:05 to 0:28:15. 革命的烈焰势不可当。

<sup>167</sup> A puppet organization established by the Japanese.

Shiren used in act one to buy Xi'er (*mai shen qi* 卖身契).<sup>168</sup> Yang, then, is not just a source of light and heat, it is also the broom that sweeps away the fragments of feudalism and imperialism.

If the communists can use fire as a weapon, however, then it can also be used against them. As a trick to lure the guerrillas from the mountain, the Viper ignites a bonfire visible for miles, captures Mother Du, and threatens to burn her alive.<sup>169</sup> Ke Xiang and her militia successfully rescue Mother Du, but even if they had not, the characters in *yangbanxi* display a strange eagerness to pass through fire. Thus, for a communist, fire is not something to actively seek, but should it come, it represents purification. After suffering interrogation without revealing the secret codes, Li Yuhe sings to Hatoyama that “even if you torture me to death, what fear does gold have for the smelter’s fire? You want me to lower my head, but I will never submit!”<sup>170</sup> While telling her comrades about the horrors of old China, Ke Xiang reveals that her entire family, who had all worked as miners for a cruel capitalist, were all killed in a conflagration.<sup>171</sup> The most dramatic example is Hong Changqing, who, after refusing Nanbatian’s offer to disavow the revolution in exchange for freedom, climbs willingly onto his funeral pyre. While *L’Internationale* plays in the background, the stage and its occupants darken except for Hong standing erect in the center of the flames.<sup>172</sup> In other words, death by

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<sup>168</sup> *Bai Mao Nü*, 1:32:00 to 1:33:35.

<sup>169</sup> *Dujuan Shan*, 1:01:05 to 1:10:05.

<sup>170</sup> *Hong Deng Ji*, 1:06:00 to 1:06:20. 任你毒刑来摧残，真金哪怕烈火炼，要我低头难上难！

<sup>171</sup> *Dujuan Shan*, 0:29:25 to 0:30:00.

<sup>172</sup> *Hongse Niangzi Jun*, 1:33:00 to 1:34:20.

fire is not a tragedy, it is a purification through yang—a cherished martyr sacrificing himself on the altar of the revolution (figure 3.9).

The majesty of fire is even further emphasized in the *yangbanxi* by references to ice, which is itself closely connected to sickness. Singing metaphorically about the severe cold of the Manchurian winter (the Guomindang), Yang Zirong asserts that he resists the chill because his heart is oriented toward the sun (the ultimate yang, or the Party).<sup>173</sup> When Tian Dajiang joins Ke Xiang’s rebels, she gives him a gift of money and clothes to keep him from hunger and cold. He is amazed because he has worked and suffered for so many years, but no one had ever before cared if he was hungry or cold.<sup>174</sup> Shortly thereafter, Li Shijian sings that “even though the snows are melting and the spring thunders are sounding, the only thing to fear is the spring chill and heavy frost.”<sup>175</sup> In other words, the coming of spring is inevitable, but there may still be some moments of intense cold. In all cases of hot and cold, the connection to yin and yang is not accidental. Yang, as heat and light, always represents the strength of the revolution, even when that power is directed against the communists themselves. Yet even then, that yang is always preferable to the icy yin of feudalism and the Guomindang.

## Conclusion

The CCP created the model stage productions during the Cultural Revolution with the intention that they would be the sharpest tool for honing the minds and the behaviors

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<sup>173</sup> *Zhiqiu Weihu Shan*, 1:25:20 to 1:25:50. 抗严寒化冰雪我胸有朝阳。

<sup>174</sup> *Dujuan Shan*, 042:30 to 0:43:25.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*, 0:46:40 to 0:46:55. 虽然是冰消雪化春雷响，只怕春寒有严霜。

of the people. These Beijing operas, ballets, and musical compositions were created for four main purposes. First, they served to “remind” the population how miserable life was for the workers and peasants under the imperial system. Second, they offered exemplary models of behavior for people to follow. Third, they offered a glimpse into a perfect world that the people could hope for if they only endured. And fourth, the *yangbanxi* functioned as templates for additional works to come.

No one was more influential on the model works than Mao’s wife, Jiang Qing. Jiang entered the political world of propaganda in 1964 after her husband commissioned her to purge the stage of persisting feudal elements, which she set to with a passion. As a former actress herself, and as the head of the CRG, Jiang had total control over all aspects of the artistic world, including the private lives of her actors, singers, dancers, writers, and musicians. And yet despite her cleverness, Jiang lacked the theoretical knowledge to bring her visions to fruition. As a result, she conscripted master composer Yu Huiyong. Jiang turned out to be Yu’s salvation and his doom by freeing him from the torment of the Red Guards, although both were arrested after the Cultural Revolution, and both of them killed themselves in prison.

At the time, Jiang and Yu’s creations were appreciated as propaganda, but also for their artistic value. However, despite Jiang’s intention to create more and more powerful roles for women, thereby giving them a more equal footing in Chinese society, the *yangbanxi* helped to cement old prejudices by building upon the foundation of yin-yang binarism in terms of gender and as politics. True, women were more powerful, but they were also outnumbered by the males on the stage. Furthermore, even the strongest females frequently served under the stewardship of a more powerful man. When they did



not, they were doubted, questioned, and patronized by their subordinates, which should have been unusual since men of corresponding rank in other *yangbanxi* never faced the same level of internal division. The struggles faced by the female characters in the model works were caused by the reinforcement of the traditional stereotypes that women—despite their strength—were more subject to emotion and domesticity than males.

The political binaries of yin and yang are also highlighted in *yangbanxi* in four main ways. First, the credits are listed according to political orthodoxy so that characters with the most yang are named first while those with the most yin are named last. Second, the communists all appear in top shape while the villains are all sickly, bald, old, and overweight. Third, in nearly every scene, the stage lighting reflected the political nature of the characters on stage. In other words, the more communists there were, then the brighter the lights; the more villains there were, then the dimmer the set. Finally, the *yangbanxi* each employ strategic literal and metaphorical references to fire and ice which underscore the dichotomies between the yang of dogmatic virtue and the yin of political malevolence.

After the Cultural Revolution ended in 1976, the model works all disappeared until a growing sense of nostalgia brought them back in the 1990s and they are still popular in China today.<sup>176</sup> It is true that Jiang Qing was a severe woman, and that crossing her could get someone arrested or killed.<sup>177</sup> However, it should be recognized that her creations did in fact generate some benefits. Contemporary Chinese composers

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<sup>176</sup> Di, “Feminism in the Revolutionary Model Ballets,” 201; Ludden, “Making Politics Serve Music,” 152-3; Ludden, “The Transformation of Beijing Opera,” 156.

<sup>177</sup> *Yang Ban Xi*, 0:37:25.

all recognize Yu Huiyong's innovations which exerted a powerful influence on the trajectory of successive generations of musicians.<sup>178</sup> Deng Xiaoping referred to the *yangbanxi* as "a single flower blossoming," but were it not for Jiang Qing, China may have spent many years without even that.<sup>179</sup> Performed live or viewed as films, the model works were seen in factories, schools, and rural villages. Disregarding Jiang Qing's many shortcomings and the otherwise cultural famine that she created, it was still she who took art, in some form, to all corners of China.<sup>180</sup> Some, including Jin Xing, have expressed a deep admiration for her as a spurned wife who sublimated her energy into the creation of something beautiful.<sup>181</sup>

Darkness is generally understood as the absence of light. However, the *yangbanxi* demonstrate that the Party understood yin not simply as an absence, but as a reified concept that exercises a corrupted power of its own which must yield to yang. As light drives away the darkness, the political struggle between the "strong" Communist Party and the "weak" counterrevolution was played out on the theatrical stage. Even in examples where gender is not directly apparent, the yin-yang cosmology in the model works reinforced a sexual hierarchy by implicitly linking femininity with evil since both traits are qualities of yin. By contrast, the *yangbanxi* each exalt masculinity as the sexual apex by equating the male yang with perfect political correctness.

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<sup>178</sup> Ludden, "Making Politics Serve Music," 166.

<sup>179</sup> Farquhar, "Comic Books and Popularization," 238.

<sup>180</sup> Ludden, "The Transformation of Beijing Opera," 155.

<sup>181</sup> Jin, *Shanghai Tango*, 195.

## CHAPTER V

## CONCLUSION: BEYOND THE BINARY

Ever since Chairman Mao declared the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, it has become the tradition for his successors to commemorate National Day on 1 October with a military parade past Tiananmen. As the president inspects the troops, he shouts to them “*tongzhimen hao!*” and “*tongzhimen xinkule!*” which mean respectively “greetings comrades” and “comrades, you have suffered so much.” However, the Chinese word for “comrade” (*tongzhi* 同志) has changed its meaning since the end of the Cold War. Considering each syllable in turn, *tong-zhi* literally means “same goal” or, if rendered more colloquially, “someone with the same ideals as myself.” However, beginning at a 1989 LGBT film festival in Hong Kong, the word *tongzhi* became associated with the Chinese gay community.<sup>1</sup> The transformation came so rapidly that many Western students of Mandarin learn that *tongzhi* means “gay” before they learn that it also means “comrade.” During the Mao years, anyone caught participating in homosexual behavior was punished for the crime of “hooliganism” (*liumang zui* 流氓罪) and relegated to the black social classes under the category of “bad elements” (*huai fenzi* 坏分子).<sup>2</sup> This final chapter will recapitulate the arguments made in this thesis by

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<sup>1</sup> Jin Cao and Xinlei Lu, “A Preliminary Exploration of the Gay Movement in Mainland China: Legacy, Transition, Opportunity, and the New Media,” *Signs* 39, no. 4 (2014): 843; Amy Qin, “‘Comrade’ Xi and a Title Turned Gay,” *New York Times* (New York City, NY), Nov. 16, 2016.

<sup>2</sup> Bei Tong, *Beijing Comrades*, trans. Scott E. Meyers (New York: The Feminist Press, 2016), 45; Shana Ye, “A Reparative Return to ‘Queer Socialism’: Male Same-Sex Desire in the Cultural Revolution,” in *Sexuality in China: Histories of Power and Pleasure*, ed. Howard Chiang (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2018), 148; Tiantian Zheng, *Tongzhi Living: Men Attracted to Men in Postsocialist China* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), 42.

examining the social roles of China's modern "comrades" in the decades after Mao.

People who practice homosexual behavior fall outside of the CCP's yin-yang binary, but it is precisely *because* homosexuality and other non-binary sexual groups fall outside of the dichotomy that their inclusion in this study demonstrates the cultural resilience of *yin* and *yang* as sexual descriptors. Furthermore, because gender during the Mao era was constructed as a binary, the Chinese response to the gay community provides further demonstration that the Party reinterpreted yin and yang as categories of power and not merely of sexuality.

In the *Yellow Emperor's Classic of Medicine*,<sup>3</sup> the Yellow Emperor declared that "the principle of Yin and Yang is the foundation of the entire universe. It underlies everything in creation."<sup>4</sup> This has been a guiding philosophical truism for at least the past two millennia. However, many Western scholars generally tend to treat yin-yang cosmology in one of two ways. Either they dismiss it entirely as a "Four Olds" casualty of the Cultural Revolution, or else they treat it like an ontological oddity that somehow survived the Mao era, but whose importance is minimal. I argue that yin-yang cosmology did not only survive despite the CCP, but that they actually propagated it, and that as a cosmological paradigm, yin and yang represent both gender norms and political values. Were this not the case, then we would not expect to find contemporary ideas of sexuality framed in these terms.<sup>5</sup> And yet we do.

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<sup>3</sup> A medical text most likely written during the Warring States Period (475 to 221 BCE).

<sup>4</sup> Patricia Buckley Ebrey, ed., *Chinese Civilizations: A Sourcebook*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: The Free Press, 1993), 77.

<sup>5</sup> Rosemary Roberts, *Maoist Model Theatre: The Semiotics of Gender and Sexuality in the Chinese Cultural Revolution, 1966-1976* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2010), 262.

Chairman Mao himself, thinking that absorbing the yin of vaginal secretions would be the medicine to recalibrate his waning yang, gave copies of the Daoist text *Classic of the Plain Girl's Secret Way* to the women in his harem so they would know how to perform.<sup>6</sup> In 2013, many men, regardless of their sexual orientation, admitted that even though using condoms prevented the spread of disease, they preferred not to use prophylactics because they also barred the sharing of yang and yin energies.<sup>7</sup> These examples illustrate the potency of yin and yang as modern concepts, but an analysis of gay communities in China is necessary to see how yin and yang also function as denominations of power.

While Li Cunxin was studying ballet at the May Seventh School during the Cultural Revolution, his Chinese folk-dance instructor was a lively and enthusiastic man named Teacher Chen. Then, one day, Chen's demeanor became taciturn and disconsolate until, a short time later, he disappeared entirely. Li later learned that Teacher Chen had been discovered engaging in homosexuality and was subsequently moved to a swine farm for hard labor and reeducation. When he eventually returned to the school a year later, he was forbidden to teach, so he worked by scrubbing the communal toilets.<sup>8</sup>

Throughout China's history, there have been many documented cases of men practicing homosexuality, which the ancient Chinese saw as a pattern of behavior—like a hobby—rather than as a category of identity.<sup>9</sup> However, following the collapse of the

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<sup>6</sup> Dr. Li Zhisui, *The Private Life of Chairman Mao: The Memoirs of Mao's Personal Physician*, trans. Tai Hung-chao (New York: Random House, 1994), 358.

<sup>7</sup> Zheng, *Tongzhi Living*, 178.

<sup>8</sup> Cunxin Li, *Mao's Last Dancer* (repr., New York: Penguin, 2010), 187.

<sup>9</sup> See Bret Hinsch, *Passions of the Cut Sleeve* (Berkeley: UC Press, 1992). Framing sexuality as an identity is a recent Western phenomenon. Until the twentieth century, the West understood

Qing Dynasty, the New Culture Movement of the early twentieth century sought to incorporate Western scientific thinking as a way of strengthening China and countering the weaknesses and errors of the past. Unfortunately, this included the West's medical pathologization of homosexuality.<sup>10</sup> Once Chinese society recast same-sex behavior as a sickness, it was an easy step for the Maoist regime to reclassify it as the "opposite of manliness" and as a remnant of bourgeois imperialism needing political correction.<sup>11</sup>

Today, as nearly thirty nations have sanctioned same-sex unions, the subject of gay marriage has become a lively debate in Chinese-language academic circles. Zhang Xianglong, a philosophy professor at Sun Yat-sen University in Guangdong, published an essay entitled "How Should Confucianism View the Legalization of Same-sex Marriage?" His findings were that Chinese native philosophy has never praised homosexuality as the Greeks did, nor has China actively persecuted homosexuals as the Christians have. Instead, he argues, Confucianism and contemporary Chinese society should take a tolerant stance toward gay people without recognizing gay marriages. Zhang offers four reasons for his conclusion. First, gay marriages will be harmful to the couples' parents since they cannot expect grandchildren. He quotes Mencius' teaching that there are three ways to be unfilial and that not producing offspring is the worst.<sup>12</sup>

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homosexuality in the same way as China. See George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World 1890-1940* (New York: Basic Books, 1994).

<sup>10</sup> Hinsch, *Passions of the Cut Sleeve*, 137, 165-6.

<sup>11</sup> Cao and Lu, "A Preliminary Exploration of the Gay Movement in Mainland China," 842; Roberts, *Maoist Model Theatre*, 232.

<sup>12</sup> Xianglong Zhang, "Rujia Hui Ruhe Kandai Tongxinglian Hunyin de Hefahua," *Zhongwai Yixue Zhexue* [The International Journal of Chinese & Comparative Philosophy of Medicine] 16, no. 2 (2018): 67. 不孝有三，无后为大。 See also Li, *Mao's Last Dancer*, 4.

Incidentally, this is happening to many straight men since the One Child Policy has resulted in a smaller population of women than men who, unable to find a partner, are classified as *guanggun* (光棍 “bare branches”). Second, Zhang argues that adopted children of gay couples will be harmed by their parents’ influence which will prohibit the child from integrating into society.<sup>13</sup> Third, by legalizing gay marriage, Zhang claims that society is making it easier to lure people into gay relationships who otherwise would not.<sup>14</sup> His last argument is the most compelling. Paraphrasing a quote from the *Classic of Changes*, Zhang states that “yin and yang are the complementary forces driving the creation of new life. Therefore, matrimony is best if reserved for the naturally ordered structure of heterosexual relationships.”<sup>15</sup> Professor Wu Fei of Peking University’s Philosophy Department published another article in the same issue with Professor Zhang wherein he paraphrased Zhang’s argument before adding his own amen.<sup>16</sup>

Professor Chen Zhiwei of Xi’an University did not disagree with Zhang’s conclusion, but he did counter several of Zhang’s premises, such as the fact that in a modern world, even if every human couple were gay, children could still be born in laboratories.<sup>17</sup> Chen also counters Zhang’s theory of yin and yang by arguing that each

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<sup>13</sup> Zhang, “Rujia Hui Ruhe Kandai Tongxinglian Hunyin de Hefahua,” 68.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 69.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 70.

<sup>16</sup> Fei Wu, “Ye Tan Tongxinglian yu Hunyin [On Homosexuality and Same-sex Marriage],” *Zhongwai Yixue Zhexue* [The International Journal of Chinese & Comparative Philosophy of Medicine] 16, no. 2 (2018): 76.

<sup>17</sup> Zhiwei Chen, “Rujia Guannian yu Xiandai Tongxing Hunyin de Kenengxing: Jian ji Women Duidai Chuantong de Taidu [Confucian Ideas and the Possibility of Same-sex Marriage: Our Attitude toward Traditions],” *Zhongwai Yixue Zhexue* [The International Journal of Chinese & Comparative Philosophy of Medicine] 16, no. 2 (2018): 94.

essence contains within itself a small measure of its opposite. As such, even same-sex couples (which Chen describes as yin-yin and yang-yang) will participate in both natural forces. Chen's argument is encouraging, but he does not advocate for gay marriage, rather, by playing devil's advocate, he is arguing the futility of employing ancient metaethics for contemporary problems.<sup>18</sup>

Outside of academic circles, the debate over homosexuality becomes a referendum on masculine identity. In imperial China, regardless of personal taste, the dominant insertive male was the one with the higher rank and he was generally the elder.<sup>19</sup> Considering sex as a system of power, this further demonstrates that yin-yang cosmology is the hierarchical network for determining the structure of that power. Many twenty-first century Chinese still think of homosexuality as a social immorality that imperils national security. Because women are expected to be passive and submissive, many Chinese men see contemporary *tongzhi* as "fake women" who forsake their yang in favor of yin. Should China become too overbalanced with too much yin, then the whole country is at risk since a strong nation "requires building a strong manhood and sharpening male gender roles."<sup>20</sup> However, because the familial pressure to produce heirs is so great, especially for people who grew up as single children, many gay people claim that even if marriage equality were legalized, they would still choose to hide their orientation and sire children.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Chen, "Rujia Guannian yu Xiandai Tongxing Hunyin de Kenengxing," 94-5.

<sup>19</sup> Cao and Lu, "A Preliminary Exploration of the Gay Movement in Mainland China," 840-1.

<sup>20</sup> Zheng, *Tongzhi Living*, 72.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 142.



Further examples of enforced masculinity have found their way into the Western media. In April 2018, the popular Chinese social media platform Weibo announced a ban on “offensive” content like pornography, violence, and homosexual themes. The resultant uproar caused them to partially reverse the ban, which some saw as a signal of positive change in China, but others remain less optimistic.<sup>22</sup> In January 2019, Chinese media censors began blurring the earlobes of male celebrities if they appeared for interviews with pierced ears. Grace Leung, a professor of communications in Hong Kong commented that “China is still a strong patriarchal society” that has “a distinctive male and female hierarchy in many local communities. Seeing men wearing earrings, in many traditional men’s point of view, is a deteriorating of their social status and respect.”<sup>23</sup>

Finally, in March 2019, Chinese movie fans expressed disappointment that the state media censors cut three minutes worth of crucial scenes from *Bohemian Rhapsody*, a film about the British rock band Queen, whose lead singer, Freddie Mercury, came out as gay, and died in 1991 from complications arising from HIV/AIDS. Censors cut the scenes when Freddie comes out to his fiancée, when he meets his lover, Jim Hutton, and when the band records a music video dressed as drag queens. Censors did not cut the scene when Freddie confesses to his bandmates that he has contracted AIDS, but they did silence the audio and cut the subtitles. Moreover, when Rami Malek, the actor who

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<sup>22</sup> Javier Hernandez and Zoe Mou, “Chinese Social Media Site Reverses Gay Content Ban After Uproar,” *New York Times* (New York City, NY), Apr. 16, 2018.

<sup>23</sup> Joshua Berlinger and Nanlin Fang, “Why is China Blurring Men’s Ears?,” Cable New Network, January 18, 2019, accessed January 19, 2019, <https://www.cnn.com/2019/01/18/asia/china-mens-earrings-blurred-intl/index.html>.

played Freddie Mercury, gave his acceptance speech at the Academy Awards for Best Actor, he said “we made a film about a gay man, an immigrant, who lived his life just unapologetically himself,” but when his speech was rebroadcast in China, censors replaced “gay man” with “special group.”<sup>24</sup> China declassified homosexuality as a mental illness in 2001, but each of these cases demonstrates that there is still a clear attack on the gay community, which I argue is generated as a strike in favor of traditional yang masculinity.

The intense struggle for some individuals who find themselves outside of the yin-yang binary is further demonstrated by intersex and transgender individuals. When transgender celebrity Jin Xing was nine, she was selected to join a PLA dance troupe despite her mother’s protestations that “he will be neither a singer nor a dancer. It is no career for a boy.”<sup>25</sup> Jin became a nationally renowned dancer, even attaining the rank of colonel in the PLA.<sup>26</sup> However, although getting a sex-change operation was more taboo than homosexuality, Jin came out as a woman in the early 1990s. Her family and friends tried to dissuade her. Her mother first insisted that she would rather have a gay child than a transgender child.<sup>27</sup> And before Jin underwent sexual reassignment surgery in 1995, her friends insisted that no man would want her because men want a “natural woman,” not a “fake woman.”<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Tiffany May and Claire Fu, “Beijing’s Cuts to ‘Rhapsody’ Incense Fans,” *New York Times* (New York City, NY), Mar. 26, 2019.

<sup>25</sup> Xing Jin, *Shanghai Tango: A Memoir* (London: Atlantic Books, 2005), 14.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 140.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 62, 138.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 145.

The state also tried to discourage her. Before allowing her to receive the surgery, Jin was required to take a psychological evaluation. If the test indicated that she was only 60% feminine, then she was still a man. If only 75%, then she would be expected to participate in “re-masculinization” therapy. Only someone who was at least 80% feminine, according to the evaluation, would be allowed to change their sex.<sup>29</sup> After breast augmentation and facial electrolysis, Jin’s doctor asked her again if she had truly made up her mind about proceeding with the final operation to remove the penis. Jin’s response was that “I would be neither a man nor a woman. It’s all or nothing.”<sup>30</sup> Jin Xing is an example of someone who falls outside of the yin-yang binary while trying to articulate a place for herself within it.

Howard Chiang has documented a number of people who appeared in the Taiwanese media in the decades immediately after the civil war such as Xie Jianshun, discussed in chapter one.<sup>31</sup> Some of them were intersex (described as yin-yang people 阴阳人), one was a woman with two uteri, and one was a male farmer who found himself pregnant.<sup>32</sup> Although the Taiwanese press approached these individuals with the same paradigm as did the PRC, the openness of the Chinese media allowed for a discussion of

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<sup>29</sup> Jin, *Shanghai Tango*, 4, 5.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 118.

<sup>31</sup> Howard Chiang, *After Eunuchs: Science, Medicine, and the Transformation of Sex in Modern China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), 239; and Howard Chiang, “Gender Transformations in Sinophone Taiwan,” *Positions: East Asia Cultures Critique* 25, no. 2 (2017): 527-30.

<sup>32</sup> Chiang, “Gender Transformations in Sinophone Taiwan,” 532-4, 536.

sexual phenomena which facilitated the understanding that the lines between yin and yang were less rigid than first thought.<sup>33</sup>

Initially, however, the idea of yang in a woman or yin in a man caused significant bewilderment and disdain. One nineteen-year-old man named Lü Jinde enjoyed cross-dressing (*nanban nüzuang* 男扮女装), but the newspapers described him as “an immoral, confusing, and gender ambiguous persona that provokes disgust.”<sup>34</sup> Twenty-three-year-old Ding Bengde endured similar excoriation when the papers discussed her dressing in men’s clothes as a “male impersonating freak” and as a “female cross-dressing freak.”<sup>35</sup> The PRC tried to encourage women to take on yang, but this ran into the literary tradition which held that a woman could only pretend to be a man if duty required. These Taiwanese examples evince the underlying attitude that any directional movement between yang and yin was undesirable.

As we have shown, the gender hierarchies and structures of power in China are generally based on conceptions of yin-yang cosmology, the structures of which are visible in state propaganda. In chapter two we showed how posters provide the theoretical framework in the doctrine of the Three Prominences. This required that if multiple characters are pictured, then communists should be given prominence; if all the characters pictured are communists, then only the best communists should be the most visible; if all the characters depicted are great communists, then the most prominent should be the ultimate hero. The intention behind the Three Prominences was to

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<sup>33</sup> Chiang, “Gender Transformations in Sinophone Taiwan,” 538.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 530-1. 不伦不类非男非女的样子，叫人看了要呕吐。

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 531-2.

highlight political orthodoxy, but it also served to deepen class differences and gender inequalities. This is observed most clearly in posters that glorify the worker-peasant-soldier triumvirate. Not only do the men outnumber the women, the most prominent character is not the woman, who is usually drawn as a peasant—the least important group in Marx’s articulation of the proletarian revolution.

The ultimate hero given greatest prominence in CCP posters was always Chairman Mao. Not only was he shown as the exemplary model of communism, but by the Cultural Revolution, the Party was actively promoting Mao’s personality cult, thereby transforming him from a man into a god. Wherever he went, the crowds shouted the traditional imperial prayer that their leader would live for ten-thousand years. In his posters, Mao’s haloed personage is radiant and untouchable. There were also propaganda posters that glorified the tier of Party cadres just under Mao, though never to the same extent as the Chairman, and there were posters that praised the revolutionary martyrs like Lei Feng. These men were held up as examples of right behavior and were esteemed as saints in the Mao cult. In terms of Western religious structure, the Chinese Communist religion had scriptures, hymns, prayers, talismans, and an omnipotent deity presiding over a fraternity of lesser gods and martyred saints. The only thing missing was a pantheon of corresponding goddesses. The implication is that women, as the bearers of yin, regardless of their individual qualities, were fundamentally unworthy to assume leadership in the Maoist priesthood or to be worshipped in the cult of yang.

Propaganda posters also illustrate the erasure of yin from the public sphere. Women were encouraged to “doff femininity” and take up the strength of yang. To accomplish this, women began wearing men’s clothing, performing men’s traditional

occupations, and behaving like uncouth men. Some argue that this made men and women equal, and to some degree this is true; but in trying to free women from the weakness of yin, the Party only made yin itself—and therefore women in general—even more subjected to yang. This is further highlighted by what is missing from CCP posters. There are accounts of men cooking, sewing, and tending children, but there are no images of men performing these tasks. I argue that this is because there were social expectations that women customarily tended to the domestic chores which made those tasks “women’s work.” By showing a man performing a duty beneath the dignity of his yang, that poster would have constituted an attack on Chinese masculinity and the Communist Party.

The final example of yin-yang cosmology in posters is observed in the Party’s Orientalizing treatment of China’s ethnic and religious minorities. There are fifty-six recognized ethnicities in China, but only one of them, the Han, wields significant political power. As such, CCP posters depict the Han as a calm embodiment of masculine yang; while the other fifty-five minorities are shown to varying degrees as an exotic “feminine” other. This is done by rarely giving prominence to minority characters except in images with only other minorities; by dressing minority peoples in colors other than the ideal red, thus symbolizing that they do not directly partake in the Party’s yang; by depicting them as slaves to religious superstitions; and by depicting the women as hyperfeminine sex-objects and the men as hypermasculine barbarians. All these practices combine to illustrate the minorities with a feminine yin that wants and needs the Party’s guiding masculine hand to tame them and lead the way to civilization. Even today, the PRC is incarcerating millions of Uighurs and cataloging their DNA, irises, facial scans, finger prints, and voices, all under the guise of a “free health check,” although many human

rights groups say that this is the PRC's way of making the Uighurs more subservient to Beijing.<sup>36</sup>

Chapter three explored the history of comic book printing in China during the late nineteenth century and into the twentieth. Because comic books were difficult to buy but inexpensive and easy to rent, the CCP and the Guomindang both recognized their effectiveness at increasing literacy rates and propagating new ideas. As such, when the CCP won the war in 1949, the comic book industry was selected as one of the first targets for nationalization. Because nationalization was a process that took nearly ten years to complete, the comic books published during this time represented an ideological hybridity of traditional and revolutionary concepts, especially in terms of gender. By the start of the Cultural Revolution in 1966, comic publishers were all forced to close their doors until 1971. After that, comics followed the same political formula and did not display much imagination.

Nevertheless, regardless of whenever a comic book was published, it still clung to the yin-yang paradigm as the expression of sexuality and political correctness. Of the early comics, none is more recognizable than Hua Mulan. Mulan eventually faced literary banishment as a feudal remnant, but during the initial years after 1949, she simultaneously embodied the pinnacle of Confucian femininity and Communist masculinity.

Comic books also reinforced the idea that the yin of femininity was a handicap. Sometimes this was physical, as demonstrated by Guo Junqing when she contracted "women's disease," and Aunt Yao, who caught a spy despite her bound feet. Sometimes

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<sup>36</sup> Sui-Lee Wee, "American DNA Expertise Helps Beijing Crack Down," *New York Times* (New York City, NY), Feb. 22, 2019.

the handicap was the social stigma against women. This was encountered by the heroines of the March Eighth Machine Station who confronted a man that thought they were too weak to dig a well; by the “twelve sisters” of Wafang Tai who criticized a man that thought they were too weak to build a dam; by Tian Yun, who decided to learn how to use a plow despite a class enemy’s superstitious belief that if a woman worked the field she would invite calamity; and by the title character in *The New Sister-in-Law*, who chose to work in the fields on her wedding day rather than perpetuate feudal traditions.

Comic books also reveal how youth can be a quality of yang while age can be a quality of yin. Age is certainly respected in Chinese culture as a sign of wisdom and experience, but, for the CCP, it is generally preferable for age to yield to the strength of youth. The youthful heroes in comic books are not only stronger and more agile than the old enfeebled villains, they also symbolize the rising generation of successors to the revolution. All of China’s leaders since Deng Xiaoping have elected to dye their gray hair black. This promotes a sense of uniformity, but it also projects the combined benefits of aged wisdom with the yang of youthful vigor.<sup>37</sup>

Furthermore, women in comic books can be righteous enough to merit the greatest prominence, but they are still never granted ultimate status. All the villains in comic books are men and all the heroines remain under the authority of a more powerful man. This indicates that while women are fundamentally good, they are also thought incapable of demonstrating the yang of great strength in either direction. A villain can be capable of some strength even if their yang is corrupted by selfishness and laziness. But

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<sup>37</sup> Javier Hernandez, “Xi Goes Where Others Didn’t Dare to Go: Gray,” *New York Times* (New York City, NY), Mar. 7, 2019.



since women are creatures of yin, the comics of the CCP imply that women are not capable of outstanding strength for good or ill.

Finally, chapter four explored the history of Chinese stage performances and the creation of the “model” status. After a discussion of Jiang Qing and her role in creating the *yangbanxi*, the chapter identified two ballets and three Beijing operas for deeper analysis regarding gender and yin-yang cosmology. Although the operas did much in promoting gender equality, such as creating strong female roles, there were four main examples in *yangbanxi* that determine the lesser status of women. These are the imbalanced ratios between the sexes; the fact that women are recurrently under the control of a stronger man; the common questioning and chastisement of female characters; and the perpetuation of domestic stereotypes.

There are also four predominant phenomena which validate the political differentiation of yin and yang in *yangbanxi*. The first is found in the credits which list the cast by order of political orthodoxy: main heroes first, then lesser heroes, then villains. Second, the heroes are all in excellent health and are generally happy whereas the villains are sickly, weak, and scowling. Third, the lighting defines the politics for each scene and for each character. If the scene is full of heroes, then the stage is brightly lit; if the stage is full of villains, then the stage is gloomy and dark; if a hero is surrounded by villains, then the stage is dark, but he is under a spotlight. Finally, the *yangbanxi* make strategic use of fire as either a beacon, a weapon, or as a purifier. As a beacon, whether as a prop or as a spoken metaphor, fire serves in the same capacity as the stage lighting to distinguish communism from capitalism. As a weapon, fire is a tool for fighting the bourgeoisie and for destroying feudal remnants. Finally, as a purifying

agent, fire represents the idea that even if someone must die for the revolution, their death is like the steel that is tempered in flame, or the burning altar whereby someone offers their life to Mao and the Party.

In discussing why certain jobs in the United States, such as nursing, are considered “feminine,” psychologist Jennifer Bosson argues that stereotypical attitudes about gendered employment are driven not by misogyny or homophobia, but by a man’s fear that his masculinity—so hard to establish, so easy to lose—is under attack.<sup>38</sup> If this is true, then American and Chinese conceptions of femininity and masculinity are similar to each other inasmuch as no one can be robbed of their femininity; on the other hand, masculinity is like a delicate flower that shrinks from direct sunlight and withers in the frost. Despite the Party’s projection of strength, each of the propaganda platforms in this thesis were tools for establishing norms of proper behavior, and the state’s efforts to protect the Party’s fragile yang from the “insidious” yin energy of foreigners, capitalists, imperialists, individualists, landlords, artists, intellectuals, homosexuals, women, and any other element deemed to belong to the bourgeoisie. It was for these reasons why sexuality was criminalized and why sensuality became a way for individuals to resist state totalitarianism.<sup>39</sup>

It was from Tiananmen that Mao announced the ascendant yang of the Chinese Communist Party by declaring that the Chinese people had “stood up” and ended the

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<sup>38</sup> “Why More Men Don’t Get Into the Field of Nursing,” hosted by Shankar Vedantam, *Morning Edition*, on NPR, October 2, 2018, <https://www.npr.org/2018/10/02/653570048/why-more-men-dont-get-into-the-field-of-nursing>.

<sup>39</sup> Lanlan Du, “From Taboo to Open Discussion: Discourses of Sexuality in *Azalea Mountain* and *Red Azalea*,” *Comparative Literature Studies* 52, no. 1 (2015): 134, 139. For more examples of how sexuality was marginalized and criminalized, see Ji-li Jiang, *Red Scarf Girl: A Memoir of the Cultural Revolution* (New York: HarperCollins, 1997), 49, 165, 202.

Century of Humiliation. China blamed its humiliation at the hands of foreigners on the presence of too much yin. However, since 1949, China's humiliations have been self-inflicted by the presence of too much yang. Forty years later, in 1989, it was from Tiananmen that Deng Xiaoping and the CCP told their enemies in the student democracy protests to "sit down." Mao's successors have continually upheld his dichotomous policies, both in terms of gender and in terms of politics, although—as Joan Scott explained—gender and political power are bound up together too tightly to distinguish them.<sup>40</sup> The Party's binary expression of good and evil, male and female, yang and yin, does not cohere with the new Western model of gender as a spectrum, and that sexuality holds no fixed universal meaning.<sup>41</sup>

The Party, however, would not need to redefine its socially constructed gender differentiation if it would recognize that yin and yang both contain a portion of the other. Yin and yang do not need to stand as binaries, but as the ends of a spectrum whereby someone may have more yin than another of the same sex. However, if the Party were to do this without decoupling yin and yang from wickedness and orthodoxy, it would require a public recognition that the party is not wholly blameless since "the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being. And who is willing to destroy a piece of his own heart?"<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," 1072.

<sup>41</sup> Du, "From Taboo to Open Discussion," 131.

<sup>42</sup> Aleksandr I. Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago 1918-1956: An Experiment in Literary Investigation*, vol. 1, trans. Thomas P. Whitney (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), 168.

## ILLUSTRATIONS 1

*Posters*

**Figure 1.1** Minority group practices military tactics. Published 1975.

Source: University of Westminster, Chinese Poster Collection.



**Figure 1.2** Mobilized general population.

Caption: Published by the Beijing Military District Headquarters, 1972.

Source: Stanford University, East Asia Library, Chinese Poster Collection.



**Figure 1.3** Four women performing “modern” jobs: an electrician, a barefoot doctor, a tractor driver, a woman birthing piglets.

Caption: Wide open land (where we can accomplish much). Anci County. Artist Lei Jinchi.

Source: Stanford University, East Asia Library, Chinese Pictorial Magazines and Art Education Materials, 1950s-1970s Box 5, *Hebei Worker-Peasant-Soldier Pictorial* 1972 issue 9.





**Figure 1.4** A female tractor driver gives a demonstration to rural peasants.

Source: Stanford University, East Asia Library, Chinese Pictorial Magazines and Art Education Materials, 1950s-1970s Box 1, *Yan'an Pictorial* 1974 issue 3.



**Figure 1.5** A female electrician. Note the Mao badge on her left shoulder.

Title: Lofty aspirations reach the sky, 1973.

Source: University of Westminster, Chinese Poster Collection.





**Figure 1.6** Four hanging scrolls depicting female laborers.

Source: *Chinese Propaganda Posters*, Taschen, pages 551-2.



**Figure 1.7** Mao stands beside Stalin, Lenin, Engels, and Marx. Beneath them are the Forbidden City and the words “ten thousand years to Chairman Mao.” Artist: Wang Zhao Da.

Caption: Mao Zedong Thought is the modern pinnacle of Marxism-Leninism.

Source: *Art and China's Revolution*, page 21.



**Figure 1.8** Man holding the works Mao Zedong. Mushroom cloud in the background. Published 1971.

Caption: Let philosophy become the sharpest weapon in the hands of the masses.

Source: University of Westminster, Chinese Poster Collection.





**Figure 1.9** Triumvirate poster. Worker, soldier, barefoot doctor.

Caption: People's air defense chart.

Sub-caption: Published by the office of the leadership of capital city people's air defense. 1970.

Source: Stanford University, East Asia Library, Chinese Collections, posters.



**Figure 1.10** Triumvirate poster. The peasant holds *The Selected Works of Mao Zedong*.

Caption: We must liberate Taiwan!

Source: University of Westminster, Chinese Poster Collection.



**Figure 1.11** Triumvirate poster. The peasant holds *The Quotations of Chairman Mao*. The worker holds *The Constitution of the Chinese Communist Party*. The Soldier holds *The Selected Works of Mao Zedong*. Published 1971.

Caption: The Party organization should be composed of proletarian advanced elements. They should be the vanguard leading the proletariat and the revolutionary masses with youthful vigor in the struggle against our class enemies.

Source: *Chinese Propaganda Posters*, Taschen, page 454.





**Figure 1.12** Triumvirate poster. The peasant holds *The Selected Works of Mao Zedong*.

Caption: Unite for a greater victory!

Source: Stanford University, East Asia Library, Chinese Pictorial Magazines and Art Education Materials, 1950s-1970s Box 1, *Yan'an Pictorial* 1974 issue 12.



**Figure 1.13** Triumvirate poster. The worker holds *The Selected Works of Mao Zedong*. The woman is a Red Guard, not a soldier.

Source: Stanford University, East Asia Library, Chinese Collections, posters.





**Figure 1.14** The masses criticize a class enemy, late 1960s.

Source: "A bad element is publicly criticized," *Chinese Political Posters*, Taschen, 131.



**Figure 1.15** Mother and daughter in a sea of flower petals. Tiananmen Huabiao in the top-left corner. Published 1959.

Caption: Ten thousand years to Chairman Mao.

Source: University of Westminster, Chinese Poster Collection.

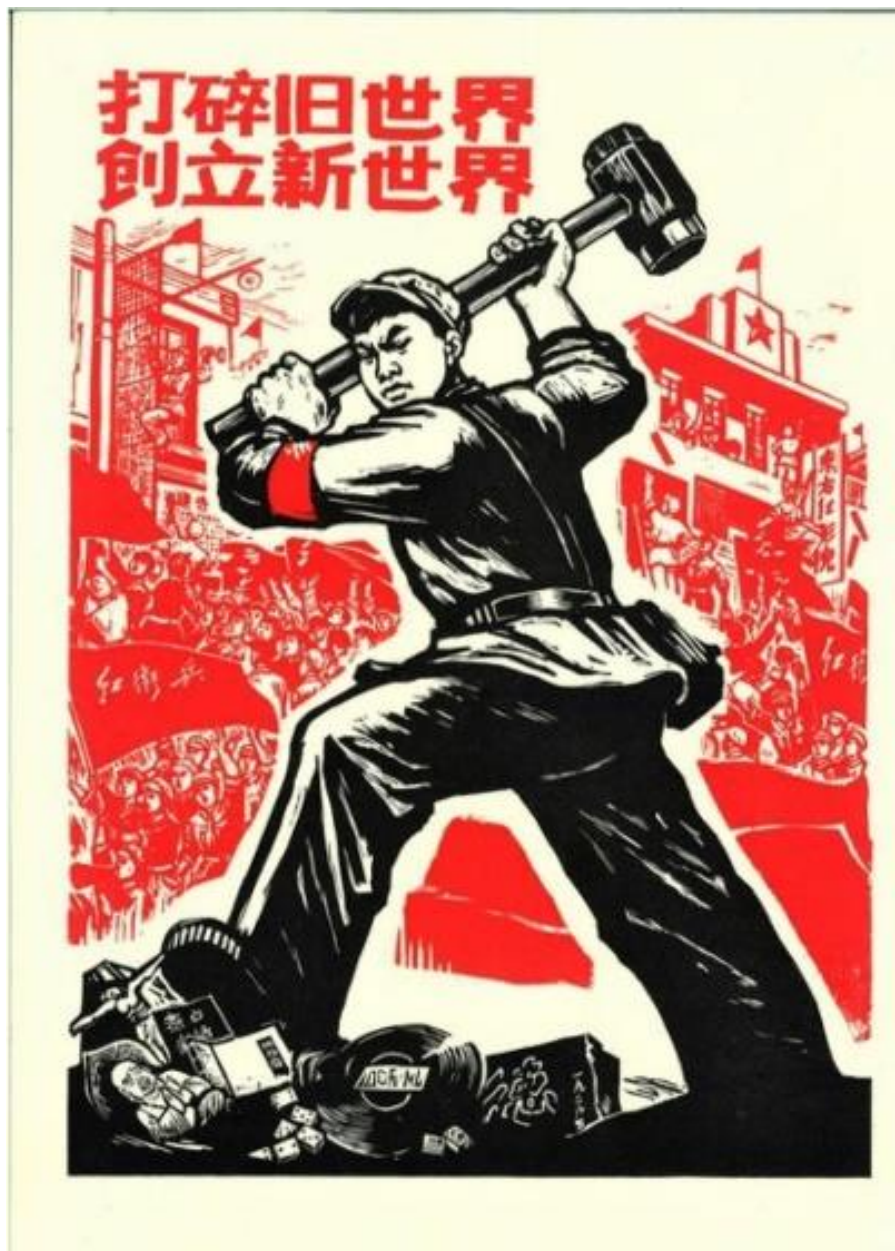


**Figure 1.16** Mao and Jiang Qing are surrounded by actors, artists, dancers, and musicians. Jiang's book is titled "Mao Zedong's Discussions on Literature and Art."

Caption: The Unconquerable Mao Zedong Thought Illuminates the Revolutionary Art Stage.

Source: *Art in Turmoil*, page 8.

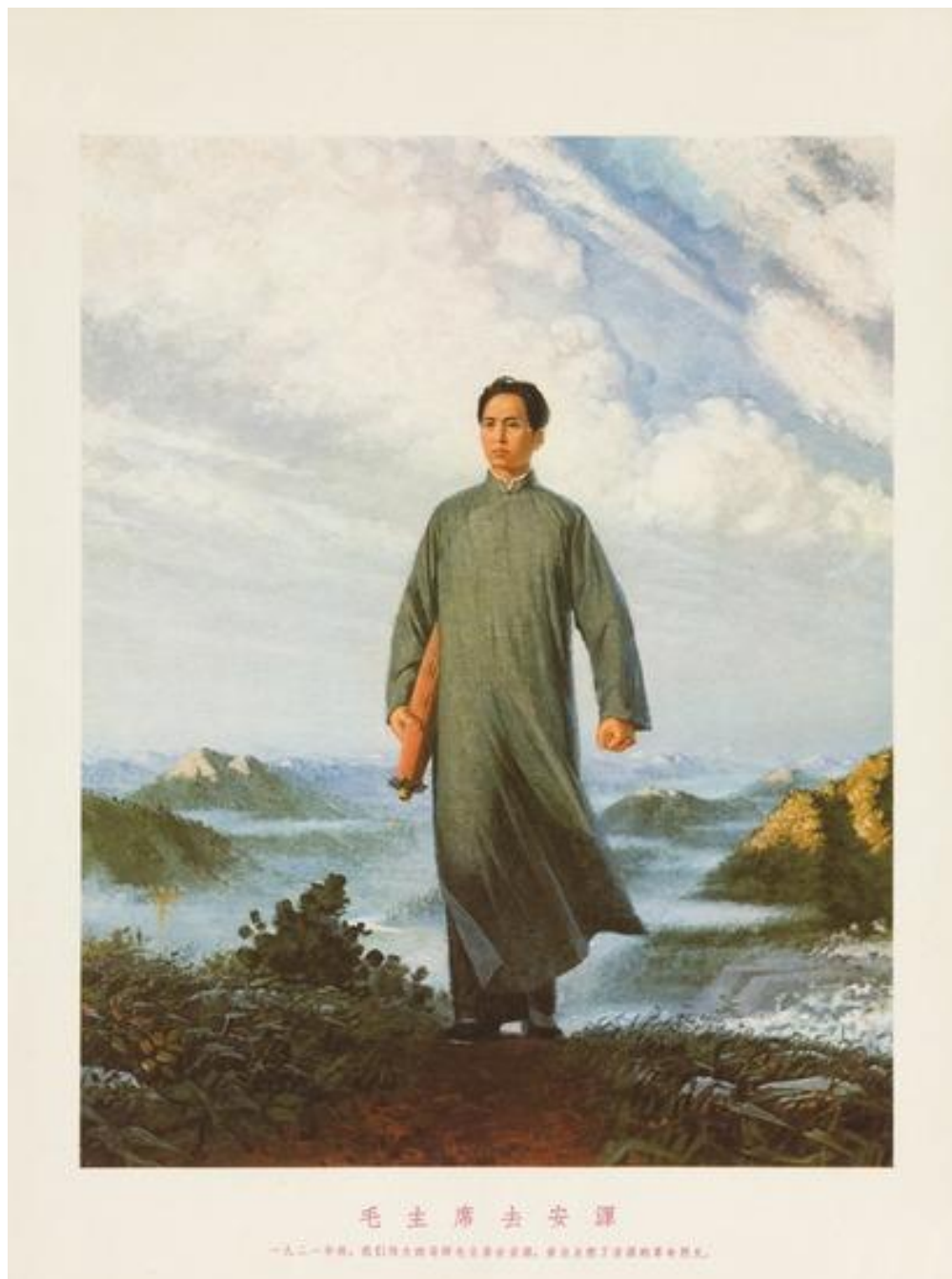




**Figure 1.17** A Red Guard uses a sledge hammer to shatter a music record (symbolizing capitalist music and bourgeois decadence), dice (symbolizing gambling and vice), and religious symbols, including a buddha and a crucifix.

Caption: Destroy the Old World; Build a New World!

Source: University of Westminster, Chinese Poster Collection.



**Figure 1.18** “Chairman Mao Goes to Anyuan” by Liu Chunhua, 1968.

Sub-caption: 一九二一年秋，我们伟大得导师毛主席去安源，亲自点燃了安源的革命烈火. In the autumn of 1921, our great leader Chairman Mao went to Anyuan to spark the flames of revolution.

Source: University of Westminster, Chinese Poster Collection.

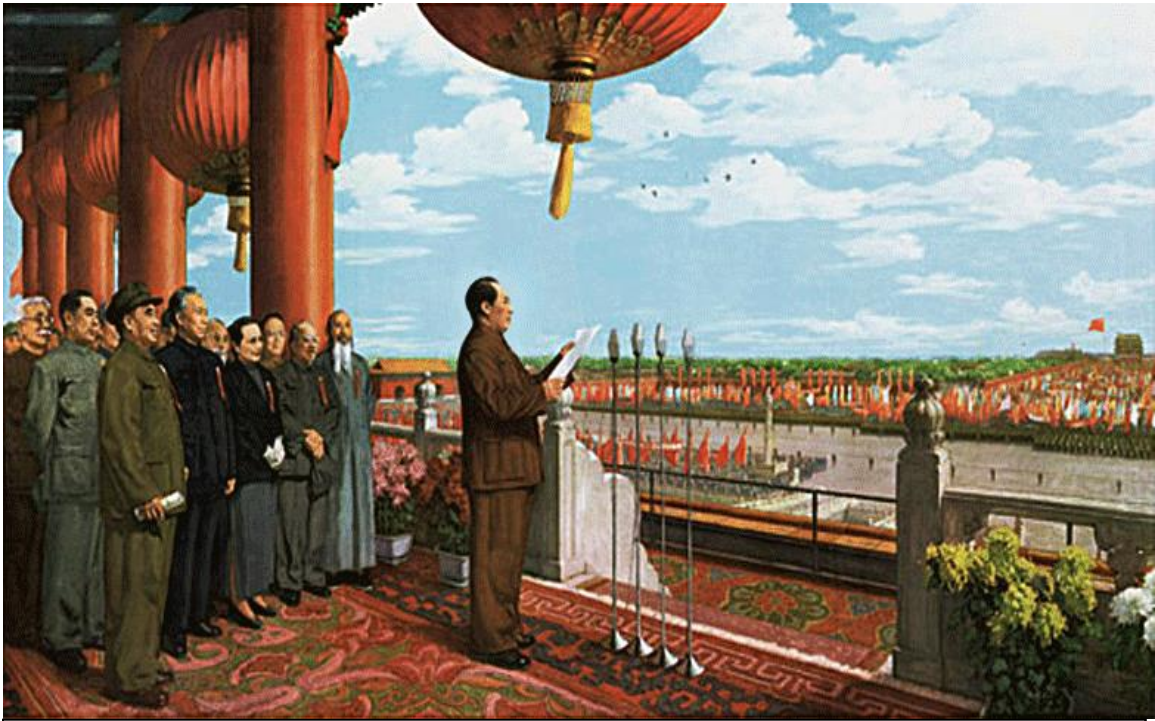


**Figure 1.19** A minority woman in costume sings into a microphone. The backdrop shows the doves of peace, the hammer and sickle, and Lei Feng. Published 1981.

Caption: The Party is like a mother to me.

Source: University of Westminster, Chinese Poster Collection.





**Figure 1.20** Chairman Mao stands atop Tiananmen gate on 1 October 1949 to declare the founding of the People's Republic of China and an end to the Century of Humiliation.

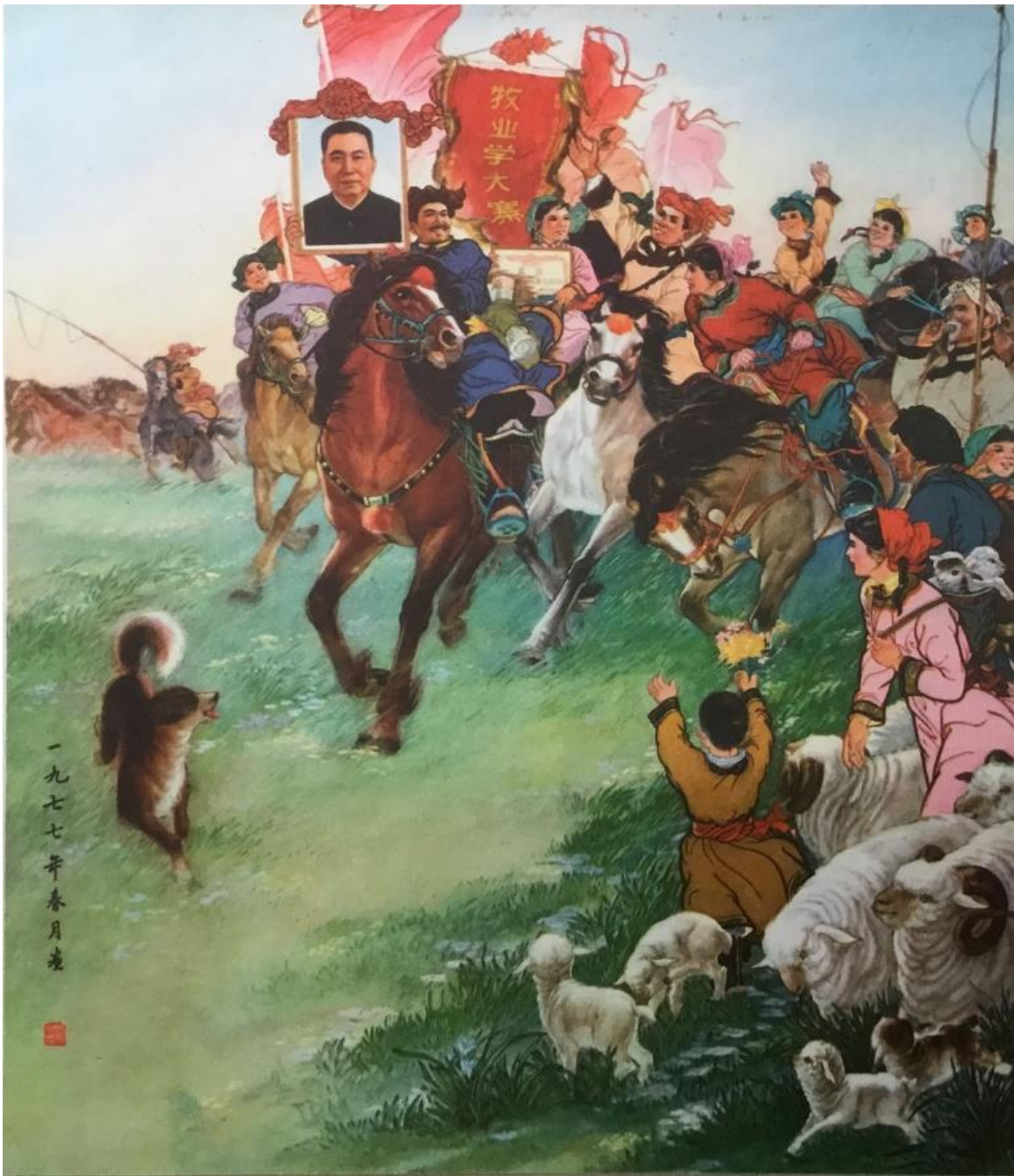
Title: "The Founding of the Nation," by Dong Xiwen, 1953.

Source: *Art and China's Revolution*, page 61.



**Figure 1.21** From left to right: Jiang Qing, Chen Boda, Zhou Enlai, Kang Sheng, Mao Zedong, Lin Biao. Artist: Shen Yaoding. Title: *Long Live the Victory of Chairman Mao's Proletarian Revolutionary Line*, 1968.

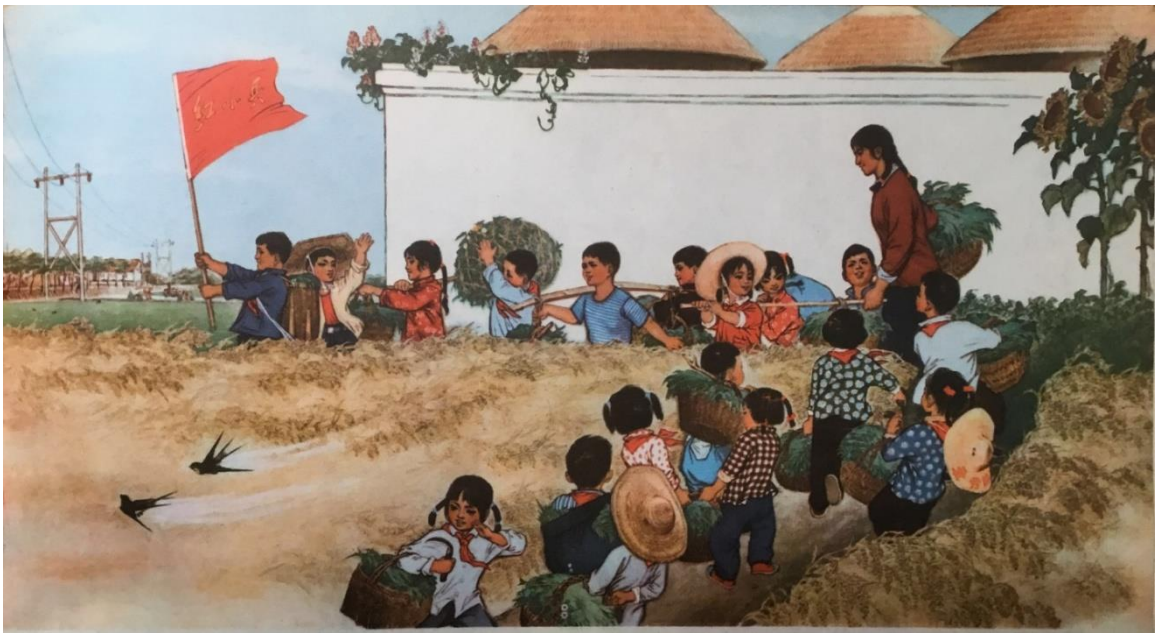
Source: *Art and China's Revolution*, page 43.



**Figure 1.22** A nomadic minority group joyfully celebrates Mao's successor, Hua Guofeng. The banner reads: "Study agriculture from Dazhai." Painted in 1977.

Source: Stanford University, East Asia Library, Chinese Pictorial Magazines and Art Education Materials, 1950s-1970s Box 5, *Hebei Worker-Peasant-Soldier Pictorial* 1977 issue 12.





**Figure 1.23** A female nursery leader in a village commune. The boy's banner reads "little red guards."

Source: Stanford University, East Asia Library, Chinese Pictorial Magazines and Art Education Materials, 1950s-1970s Box 1, *Yan'an Pictorial* 1974 issue 6.



**Figure 1.24** China's ethnic minorities in native dress with linked arms in front of Tiananmen Gate. The Han triumvirate is in the center. Published 1975.

Caption: Ten thousand years to the great unity of the ethnic groups of the entire country!

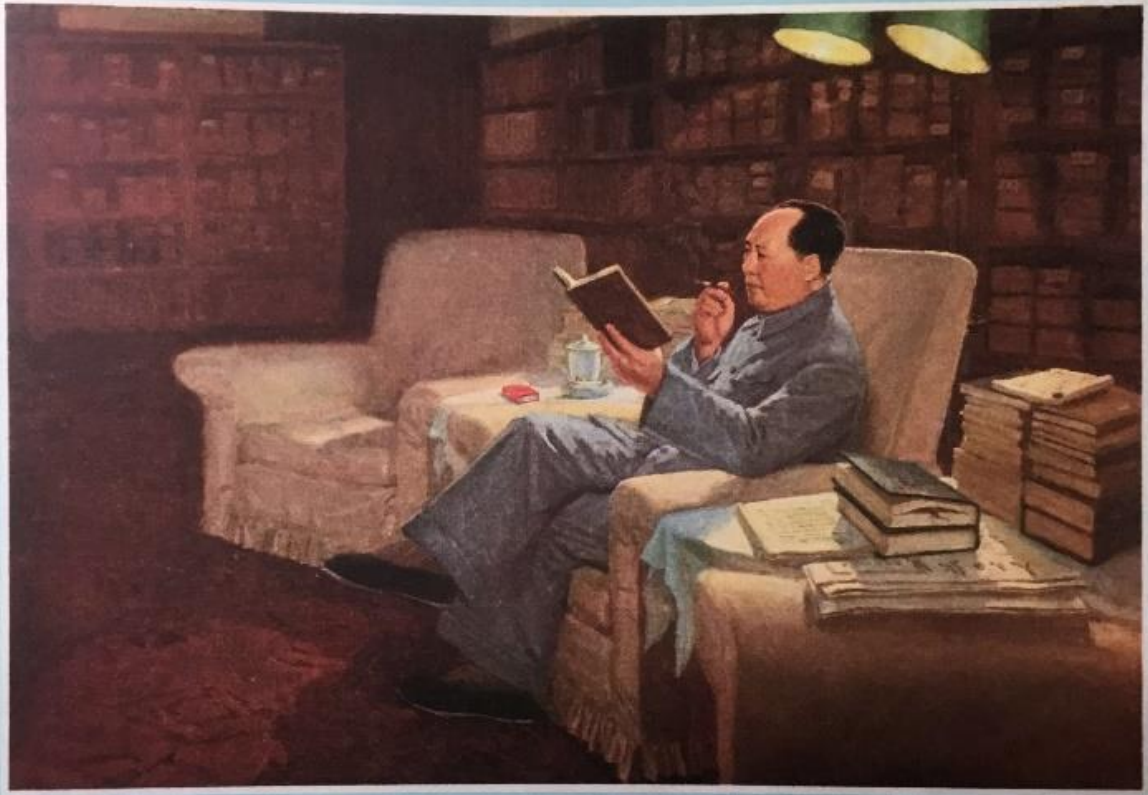
Source: University of Westminster, Chinese Poster Collection.



**Figure 1.25** Chairman Mao greets an adoring crowd in Tiananmen Square.

Caption: The Great Leader Chairman Mao Reviews the Red Guards. (From the art series “Ten Thousand Years to the Victory of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution”).

Source: *Art and China's Revolution*, page 2.



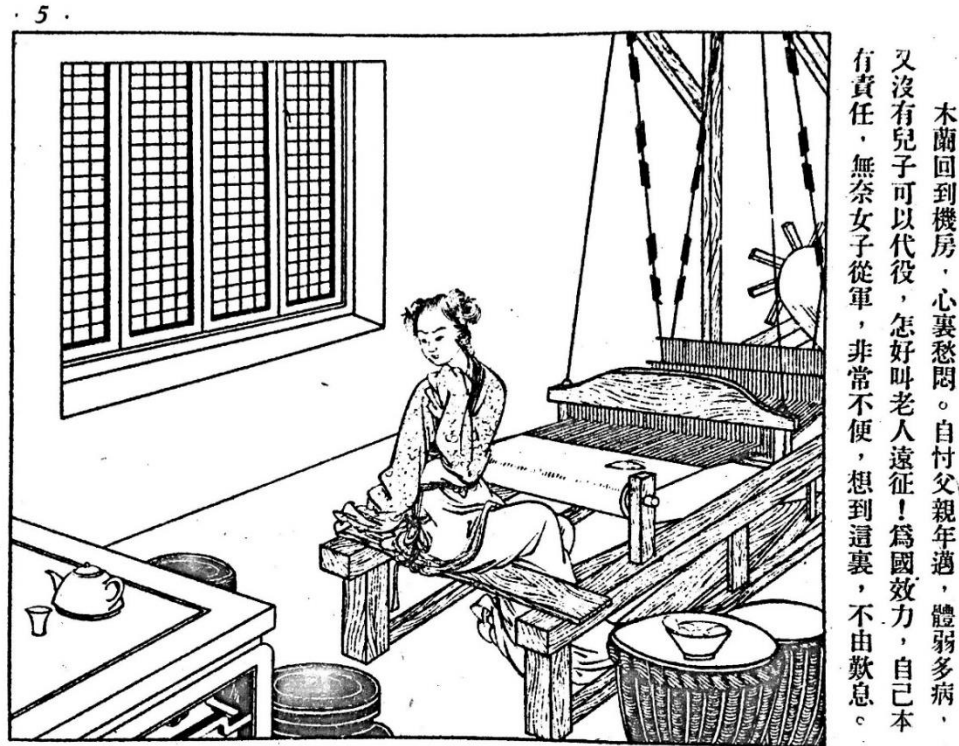
**Figure 1.26** Chairman Mao studying late into the night. A scholar is greater than a man of brute strength.

Source: Stanford University, East Asia Library, Chinese Pictorial Magazines and Art Education Materials, 1950s-1970s Box 1, *Yan'an Pictorial* 1974 issue 9.



## ILLUSTRATIONS 2

## Comic Books

**Figure 2.1**

Source: Shuhui Wang, *Mulan Congjun [Mulan Joins the Army]* (Beijing: Xinhua Shudian [New China Bookstore], 1950), 5. Stanford University, East Asian Library, Special Collections Archive, book number 5793 1136.

Translation: Mulan returned to the weaving room in low spirits. She contemplated her father's age and poor health and how he had no son able to take his place. How could they call an old person to battle! To serve the nation was a primary responsibility, but it was inappropriate for a woman to enlist. When she thought of this, she could not help but sigh.

· 11 ·



花老準備酒筵，給木蘭送行。席間木蘭父母，放心不下，唯恐女子上陣，不能殺敵。木蘭便在席前舞劍，表演武藝。果然武技出眾，英勇非常，木蘭父母放心不提。

**Figure 2.2**

Source: Shuhui Wang, *Mulan Congjun [Mulan Joins the Army]* (Beijing: Xinhua Shudian [New China Bookstore], 1950), 11. Stanford University, East Asian Library, Special Collections Archive, book number 5793 1136.

Translation: Old Hua prepared a feast for Mulan's send-off. Mulan's parents were anxious all throughout the dinner, fearing that a woman in battle would be unable to slay the enemy. Mulan then performed the sword dance to demonstrate her martial talents. Indeed, her skills were outstanding, and she was very brave. Mulan's parents were eased.

· 45 ·



花老無奈，只得喚木蘭出見。木蘭身着衫裙，走上堂來。賀帥仍然說要見木棧將軍，花老說「就是她」，賀帥辨視良久，這才爽然若失，有如大夢初醒。

**Figure 2.3**

Source: Shuhui Wang, *Mulan Congjun [Mulan Joins the Army]* (Beijing: Xinhua Shudian [New China Bookstore], 1950), 45. Stanford University, East Asian Library, Special Collections Archive, book number 5793 1136.

Translation: Old Hua had no choice. All he could do was call for Mulan. Wearing her blouse and skirt, Mulan walked into the hall. Commander He said that he still wanted to see general Mudi; old Hua said: "that's her." Commander He looked discerningly at her for a long time and was completely at a loss. It was as though he were waking from a dream.

(The End of the Story).



(十五) 等她率領戰士第二次衝上去的時候，忽然覺得眼前發黑，一陣冷顫，全身酸軟無力，倒在地上，原是月經提前到了。

**Figure 2.4**

Source: Min Zhao, "Xin Hua Mulan [The New Hua Mulan]," in *Dang he Renmin de Hao Nüer: Ding Youjun [The Good Daughter of the Party and the People: Ding Youjun]* (Tianjin, China: Zhongguo Xin Minzhu Zhuyi Qingnian Tuan Tianjin Shi Gongzuo Weiyuan Hui [The Tianjin City Workers Committee of the Chinese New Democracy Youth League], 1951), 15. Stanford University, East Asian Library, Special Collections Archive, book number 5793 5607.

Translation: As she was waiting to lead her soldiers in the second charge, she suddenly felt her eyes go dark, she felt a cold shiver, her entire went achy and weak, and she fell to the ground; it turned out that her period had come early.





5、晚上，姑娘们共同学习毛主席著作，亲切地读着：“时代不同了，男女都一样。男同志能办到的事情，女同志也能办得到。”她们狠批了刘少奇一类骗子散布的“妇女无用”论，决心打出甜水井。

**Figure 2.5**

“‘San Ba’ Jitai [The ‘March Eighth’ Machine Station],” *Hebei Gong-Nong-Bing Huakan* [Hebei Worker-Peasant-Soldier Pictorial] (1972, issue 9): 5. Stanford University, East Asia Library, Special Collections, Chinese Pictorial Magazines and Art Education Materials 1950s-1970s, Box 5, 河北工农兵画刊 [The Hebei Worker-Peasant-Soldier Pictorial].

Translation: In the evening, the girls studied together the works of Chairman Mao, they closely read: “times have changed, men and women are the same. What men comrades can accomplish, women comrades can also accomplish.” They resolutely criticized the lies spread by Liu Shaoqi and his ilk that “women are useless,” and resolved that they would finish the well.



5 天气一天比一天冷，姑娘们冒着寒风越干越猛。这时一个阶级敌人龟缩在一旁消极怠工，并吹冷风说：“干这活儿，男子汉都够呛哩，你们妇女……”

**Figure 2.6**

Source: “Wafang Tai ‘Shi Er Jiemei’ [The ‘Twelve Sisters’ of Wafang Tai],” *Hebei Gong-Nong-Bing Huakan* [Hebei Worker-Peasant-Soldier Pictorial] (1973, issue 5): 5. Stanford University, East Asia Library, Special Collections, Chinese Pictorial Magazines and Art Education Materials 1950s-1970s, Box 5, 河北工农兵画刊 [The Hebei Worker-Peasant-Soldier Pictorial].

Translation: The weather turned colder by the day, but the maidens braved the cold winds and became more valiant the more they worked. At this time, a class enemy started slacking off to the side and blew cold wind (made disparaging remarks): “this kind of work is hard enough for tough men, you women...”



6 在大队党支部的领导下，“十二姐妹”同广大社员群众一起，狠狠批判了阶级敌人破坏修建水库的罪行。在实际斗争中他们的阶级斗争、路线斗争觉悟不断提高。

**Figure 2.7**

Source: “Wafang Tai ‘Shi Er Jiemei’ [The ‘Twelve Sisters’ of Wafang Tai],” *Hebei Gong-Nong-Bing Huakan* [Hebei Worker-Peasant-Soldier Pictorial] (1973, issue 5): 6. Stanford University, East Asia Library, Special Collections, Chinese Pictorial Magazines and Art Education Materials 1950s-1970s, Box 5, 河北工农兵画刊 [The Hebei Worker-Peasant-Soldier Pictorial].

Translation: Under the leadership of the production team’s Party branch, the “twelve sisters” united with the masses of the commune and fiercely criticized the class enemy’s crime of trying to wreck the construction of the reservoir. Through the midst of real conflict, their understanding of class struggle and the struggle to hold the right political line were increasingly improved.





10. 吃完早饭，嫂嫂就要和我上地治虫，妈妈拉住嫂嫂疼爱地说：“不能去！哪有刚过门的媳妇，就上地的道理？”“妈，我去看看就回来！”嫂嫂说完拉着我的手跑出了院子。

**Figure 2.8**

Source: Chongzhi Zhou, “Xin Saosao [New Sister-in-Law],” *Yan’an Huakan* [Yan’an Pictorial] (1974, issue 3): frame 10. Stanford University, East Asia Library, Special Collections, Chinese Pictorial Magazines and Art Education Materials 1950s-1970s, Box 1, 延安画刊 [The Yan’an Pictorial].

Translation: After eating breakfast, sister-in-law and I were just about to go to the fields to spray for bugs when mama took a hold of sister-in-law and said with tender affection: “you cannot go! Where is the logic of a new bride going to work in the fields?” “Ma, I’ll just go and take a look and then come right back!” When sister-in-law finished saying this, she grabbed my hand and we ran out into the courtyard.

\*Note, this “tender affection” is itself drastically different from traditional Chinese relationships between mothers and daughters-in-law. Mothers typically enjoyed absolute control over their daughters-in-law, who became their virtual slaves.

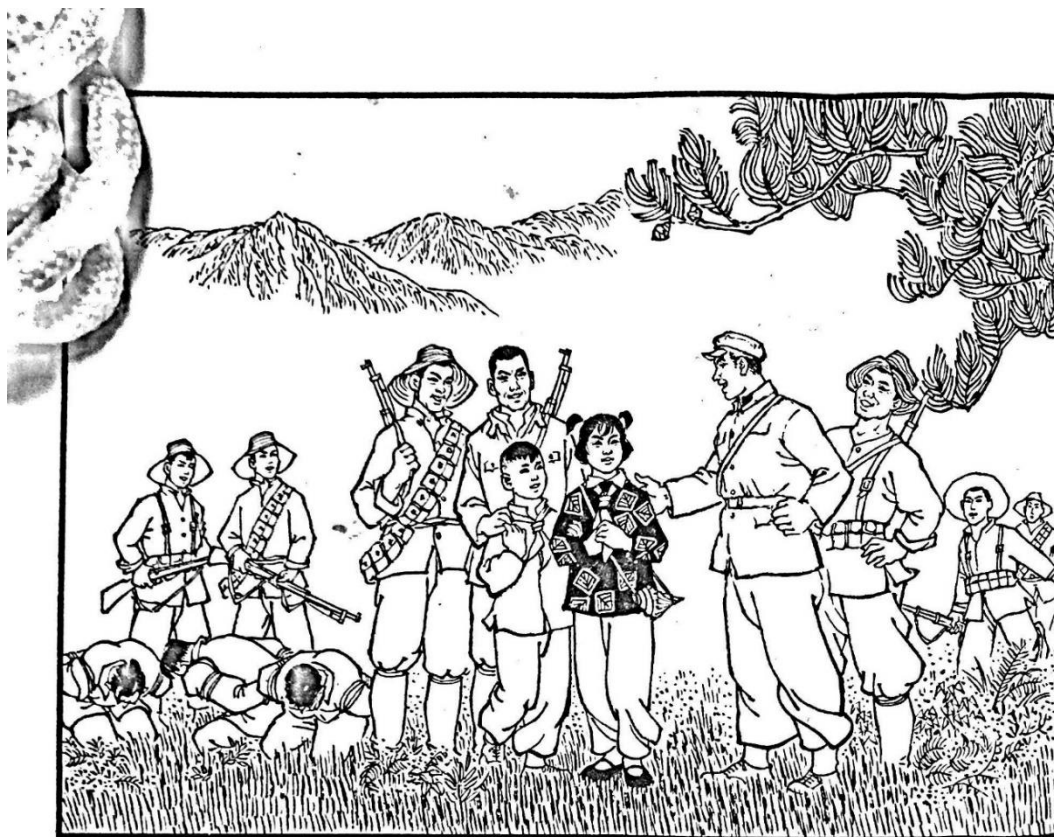


5、后来，她被调到一个战备工程工地劳动。由于她坚持用阶级分析的观点看待一切，及时发现了一个挑拨离间、破坏工程建设的坏分子，和群众一起同他进行了坚决斗争。经工程指挥部审查，把这个坏家伙清除了出去。

**Figure 2.9**

Source: Dexi Zhang et al., “Zhuangli de Qingchun [Glorious Youth],” *Hebei Gong-Nong-Bing Huakan [Hebei Worker-Peasant-Soldier Pictorial]* (1973, issue 3): 5. Stanford University, East Asia Library, Special Collections, Chinese Pictorial Magazines and Art Education Materials 1950s-1970s, Box 5, 河北工农兵画刊 [The Hebei Worker-Peasant-Soldier Pictorial].

Translation: Afterward, she was transferred to work in a military preparedness engineering worksite. Because she persisted in perceiving everything in terms of class analysis, she discovered just in time that a bad element was trying to foment dissension and destroy the engineering project. Together with the masses, [she] carried out a determined struggle against him. After an examination by the engineering command headquarters, this wicked fellow was eliminated.



( 82 ) 张排长把红领巾给小红重新戴上。大家赞扬小红真不愧为毛主席教导出来的好孩子,红色的革命接班人,英雄的东海小哨兵!

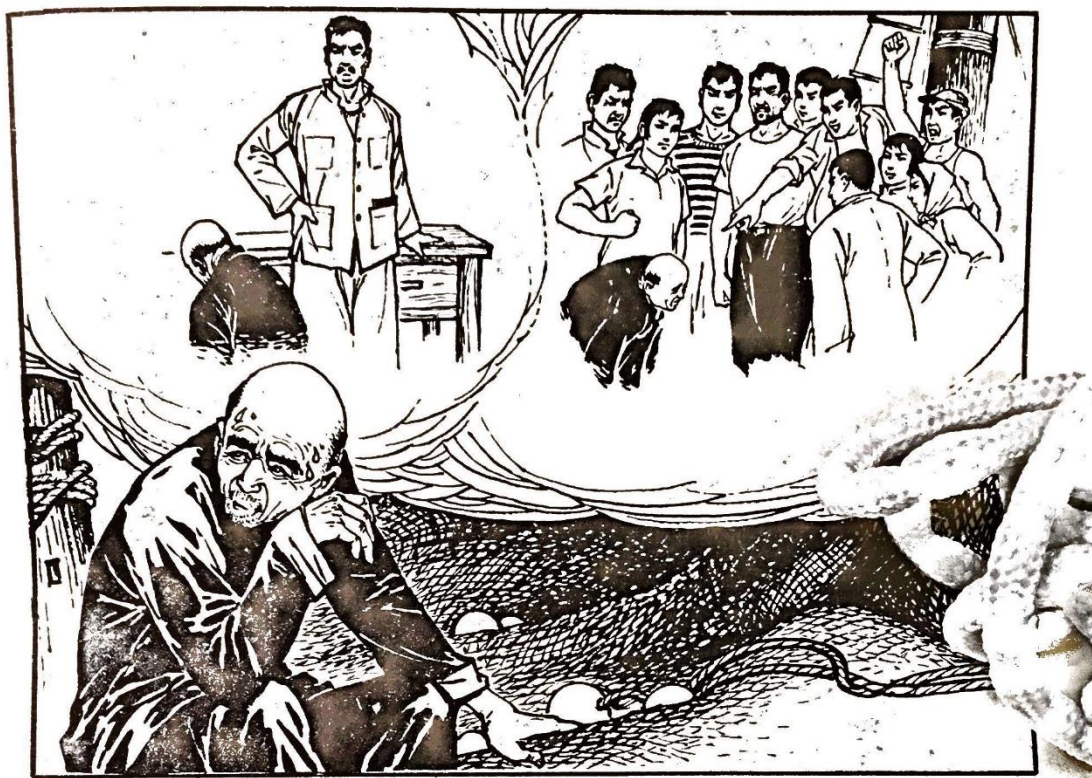
**Figure 2.10**

Source: *Donghai Xiao Shaobing [The Young Sentry of the East China Sea]* (Shanghai: Shanghai People's Publishing House, 1974), 82. Stanford University, East Asian Library, Special Collections Archive, book number 5793 3357.

Translation: Platoon Leader Zhang gave the red scarf back to Xiaohong [and she] put it back on. Everyone praised Xiaohong as someone that was truly worthy to be called a good child of Chairman Mao's instruction, a red successor to the revolution, and a heroic young sentry of the East China Sea!

\*Note the three spies in the bottom left. Xiaohong is wearing dark colors in this comic book, but this only gives her greater prominence. Furthermore, the spies cannot be wearing dark colors since they are impersonating the PLA.



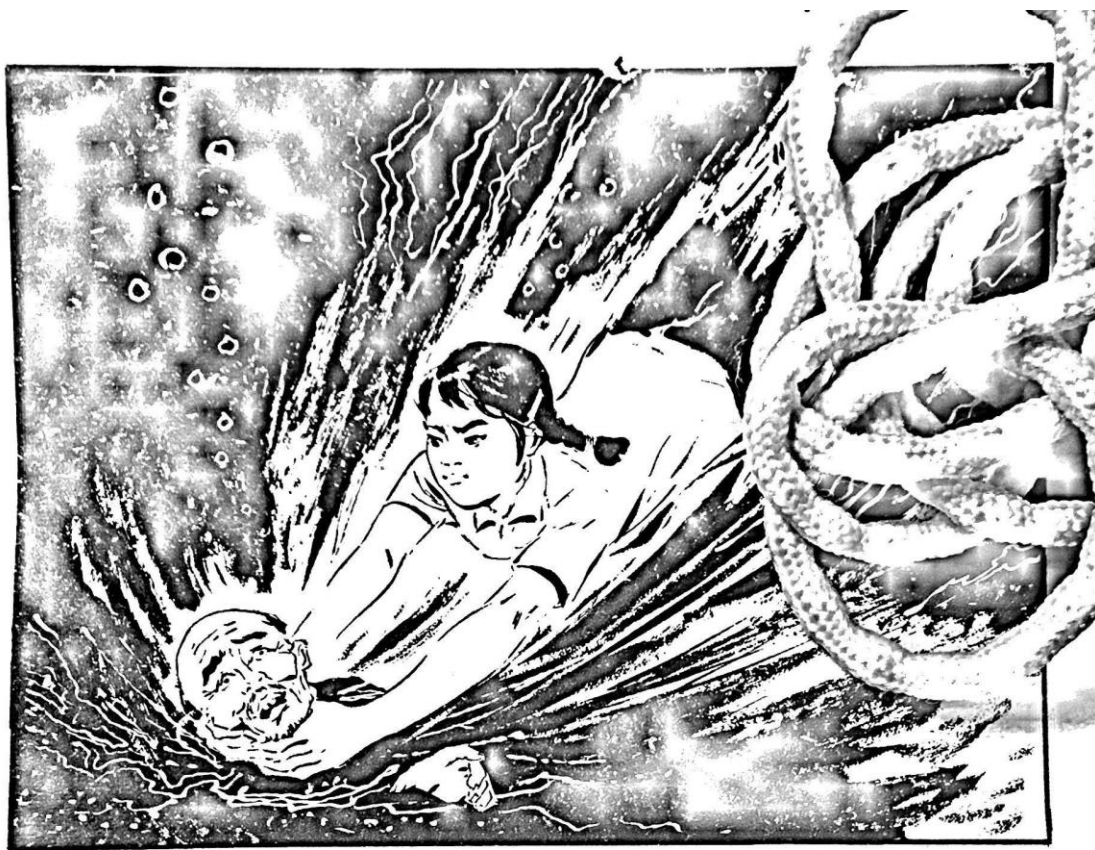


91 这时，陈乌佬想起割烂网的故事，党支部查问他的历史，这次破坏活动又被群众发现……，不禁又怕又恨。

**Figure 2.11**

Source: Haiwen Zhu, *Haiying [Haiying]* (Beijing: People's Fine Art Publishing House, 1975), 91.

Translation: At this time, Chen Wulao thought of the time when he had accidentally cut up the old nets, and how the Party branch had examined his background. Now that this time his destructive activities had been again discovered by the masses..., he was overcome with both fear and hate.



109 眼看狡猾的陈乌佬就要潜水越境，海英从后面猛扑过去，双手掐住他的脖子，使劲压下水里。

**Figure 2.12**

Source: Haiwen Zhu, *Haiying* [*Haiying*] (Beijing: People's Fine Art Publishing House, 1975), 109.

Translation: In a moment, the sly Chen Wulao was about to swim across the national border, but Haiying pounced on him from behind and grabbed him by the neck with both hands. She exerted all her strength in pushing him down into the water.



## ILLUSTRATIONS 3

Yangbanxi *Still Frames***Figure 3.1**

Ke Xiang challenging the Viper and the Guomindang surrounded by villagers. Yin and yang are represented as political power in this image. The Viper is armed and Ke is in chains, but she stands over him dressed in white (the color of yang) while he cowers away dressed in black (the color of yin).

Source: *Dujuan Shan*, 0:22:21.



**Figure 3.2**

Tiemei and Grandma Li holding the red lantern as Tiemei sings about their responsibility to the revolution.

Source: *Hong Deng Ji*, 0:53:05.



**Figure 3.3**

Grandma Li stands prominently spotlighted in center stage despite her imprisonment. Hatoyama stands in the background. Note his pale face and toothbrush mustache, reminiscent of Adolph Hitler.

Source: *Hong Deng Ji*, 1:15:18.



**Figure 3.4**

Yang Zirong of the PLA infiltrating the Vulture's Guomindang stronghold and surrounded by the Vulture's men. Only he is spotlighted. Note the villains' pale faces "bourgeois" mustaches, and made-up scowl lines.

Source: *Zhiqu Weihu Shan*, 0:53:35.



**Figure 3.5**

The PLA and the peasants have captured Huang Shiren and Mu Renzhi. Wang Dachun is just about to execute them.

Source: *Bai Mao Nü*, 1:27:47.





**Figure 3.6**

After killing the landlord Huang Shiren, the peasants celebrate the rising red sun, symbolizing Chairman Mao and the Communist Party.

Source: *Bai Mao Nü*, 1:30:35.



**Figure 3.7**

Landlord Nanbatian and his servant Ou Guangsi. Because they are the only characters on stage, the lighting is kept to a minimum.

Source: *Hongse Niangzi Jun*, 1:27:37.



**Figure 3.8**

Yang Zirong of the PLA infiltrates the Vulture's Guomindang stronghold. Only he is spotlighted. Note the vulture statue above Zuo Shandiao on his throne.

Source: *Zhiqu Weihu Shan*, 0:53:07.





**Figure 3.9**

Hong Changqing raises a fist as he burns alive surrounded by Nanbatian's henchmen.

Source: *Hongse Niangzi Jun*, 1:34:03.

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