

ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis: CHINA'S SMILING FACE TO THE WORLD:
BEIJING'S ENGLISH-LANGUAGE
MAGAZINES IN THE FIRST DECADE OF
THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC

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In the 1950s, the People's Republic of China produced several English-language magazines to inform the outside world of the remarkable transformation of newly reunified China into a modern and communist state: *People's China*, begun in January 1950; *China Reconstructs*, starting in January 1952; and in March 1958, *Peking Review* replaced *People's China*. The magazines were produced by small staffs of Western-educated Chinese and a few experienced foreign journalists. The first two magazines in particular were designed to show the happy, smiling face of a new and better China to an audience of foreign sympathizers, journalists, academics and officials who had little other information about the country after most Western journalists and diplomats had been expelled. This thesis describes how the magazines were organized, discusses key staff members, and analyzes the significance of their coverage of social and cultural issues in the crucial early years of the People's Republic.

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IN THE FIRST DECADE OF THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC

By

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Preface

This project began two years ago with a suggestion from Professor James Z. Gao about thesis topics I might pursue that reflected my interests in Chinese journalism in the communist era and American views of China in that period, yet could be conducted largely using primary sources in English. At first I focused on the *Peking Review*, which began publishing in English in March 1958. Some scholarly work had been done on its later years, but not on its start and initial years. Then came the realization that *Peking Review* was actually preceded by *People's China*, another English-language magazine published by the People's Republic of China begun in 1950 just two months after the nation's formal founding. I remember clearly the day in the late fall of 2003 when I picked up a box containing three rolls of microfilm with the entire eight years of *People's China*, and original hard copies of most of the first two years of *Peking Review* from 1958 and 1959. I was astounded not only with my good fortune, but I was actually allowed to walk out of the University of Maryland library with this precious cargo in hand. This allowed me to make my own copies of the microfilm and the early issues, and opened up a new window on the first decade of the People's Republic.

After spending many months with these magazines and then reading their own internal histories and memoirs from early editors and writers, I am struck how much I have learned about the magazines and 1950s China. I am also aware how little I know about some aspects of the magazines, particularly the mechanisms of direction and control. From conversations with many Chinese journalists over the last 12 years, I know the topic of ultimate political control and how it operates in Chinese news organizations is usually discussed in only the vaguest of terms with outsiders. This thesis is dependent

on the fragile memories of aging editors, who have their own biases and recollections that sometimes differ from published accounts. The published histories by *Peking Review* and *China Reconstructs*, which began publishing in 1952, also have contradictory accounts on some points, and there is no published history at all of the defunct *People's China*. The professors who have read drafts of this work have raised important questions, some of which I have been able to answer, but answering the others will require more research in Beijing and elsewhere. I deliberately narrowed my study of the content of the magazines to social and cultural issues that were important but not the prime focus of the magazines, which published thousands of articles on a wide range of topics in more than 16,000 pages during the period discussed here. With such a vast scope, there is always more to be learned and explored.

I want to thank the people who helped in this initial exploration. First of all, Professor Gao, who helped me find an engaging and important subject that I could pursue despite my severe limitations in Chinese. From our very first conversation in the summer of 2002 in which we identified common interests in Chinese history, he has helped a longtime journalist navigate the unfamiliar channels of graduate school. Thanks to the other members of my advisory committee, Professors Andrea Goldman and Lisa Mar, who brought their own insights and wide reading to the text. I wish I had had the time to pursue all the avenues of additional research Professor Goldman suggested. My gratitude goes as well to Professor C. Ron Lilley who read parts of the text, and earlier introduced me to a sophisticated understanding of Korean history. This thesis does not deal with the magazines' profuse coverage of the Korean War from 1950 to 1953, but because of Professor Lilley, the larger context of Korea enveloping the magazines' early years was

not a mystery to me. Thanks as well to Professor Marlene Mayo for introducing me to ancient and modern Japan. No student can understand twentieth century China without coming to grips with Japan's long and incomprehensibly brutal involvement in that history.

And thanks to my friends and collaborators in Beijing, to the staff at *Beijing Review* and *China Today* for the histories they supplied. Thanks to my old friend Zhu Yu, who goes by Ruby, a retired foreign liaison official for the All-China Journalists Association, and my guide and translator. Without his good offices and familiarity with the foreign affairs protocol of Chinese journalism organizations, I would not have known about and been able to interview Lin Wusun, who provided key information about the early days of *Peking Review*. Thanks most of all to Zhang Yan, retired deputy editor of *China Today*. Before I set up the interview, I knew about his work at *China Reconstructs*, the earlier name of *China Today*, but I had not known of his important role as the founding managing editor of *People's China*. This would be a very different work without the information he provided. I regret that I did not get to meet his old friend and colleague Israel Epstein, who died several weeks before my scheduled interview.

I would also thank all the faceless librarians who aided me in this project particularly those at the Center for Research Libraries who sent me the microfilm of original copies of the magazine.

It is a tradition in closing for writers of theses and monographs to thank their spouses. I now understand why. For my wife, Maureen Kelley, this thesis has been "the other woman" and she will be happy when it has left my life. Without her support and forbearance, this study and this degree could not have been completed.

Contents

Preface	i
Introduction: China's Windows to the World	1
1 The Magazines: Background, Content, Audience and Staff.....	11
2 The Social Side of Liberation: Women, Marriage, Children	39
3 The New Face and Voice of China's Language, Culture and Arts.....	91
4 Political Problems and a New Magazine	140
5 Conclusion	166
Bibliography	184

Introduction: China's Windows to the World

Exactly three months after Mao Zedong officially proclaimed the founding of the People's Republic of China on October 1, 1949, the leadership of the newly reunified nation, despite immense tasks ahead of consolidating political control and reviving the flattened economy, launched an English-language magazine called *People's China*.

In its first issue, the twice-a-month magazine proclaimed: "This is a journal dedicated to cementing unity and friendship between the Chinese people and the progressive people of all lands and to the cause of lasting peace and people's democracy." With so much else to accomplish in the rebuilding of the economy and the political consolidation of power, the creation of a new magazine in English, under the direct leadership of aides to Premier Zhou Enlai, including Qiao Guanhua (Chiao Kuanhua), listed as its chief editor, may seem an odd distraction from the priority tasks at hand. Yet in fact, this and the other publications in English, Japanese, and other major languages were direct continuations of outreach to foreigners in publicity and publications from the late 1930s. In the case of *People's China*, the effort was directed by the same small staff that had produced the fortnightly *China Digest* in English from a Hong Kong office from 1946 to 1949, and the new magazine started with the same small list of several thousand subscribers to *China Digest*.¹

Rather than a distraction, the presentation of New China to the world in its own voice was not a diversion of energy at all, but a core mission of the leadership. These longtime nationalist fighters, who had survived and overcome the Japanese invaders and

¹ Zhang Yan, interview by the author, tape recording, Beijing, 14 June 2005. Qiao is first listed as editor in PC, July 1, 1950, 1.

then won a civil war against fellow countrymen backed by the United States and other Western powers, were committed to restoring China's place as a significant player on the world stage and to counteract the waves of negative stories in the West that accompanied their rise to power. China's leaders were also reaching out for international support and friendship at a time when the United States was seeking to further isolate them politically and economically.

As a core mission of the CCP leadership, even though the staff and budget was small, as was the readership, like all crucial dealings with foreigners, the magazines came under the direct control of the Central Committee and foreign affairs apparatus.

From January 1950 to December 1957, more than 200 issues of the magazine, comprising more than 8,000 pages, would be sent around the globe.

Other Magazines

In January 1951, a monthly magazine, *China Pictorial*, would begin publishing in English, but unlike *People's China*, it was begun being distributed in Chinese to domestic readers in July 1950, as well as in Mongolian, Tibetan, Uighur and Russian, later adding editions in five other languages. As its name implies, *China Pictorial* was heavily photographic and the articles were short. Unlike *People's China*, the magazine was simply a re-plating of a publication designed for internal consumption, with the captions and articles translated from the Chinese. The articles and photos were not re-edited to match the tastes and attitudes of a foreign audience, a circumstance the former managing editor of *People's China* called, with unusual bluntness, "really stupid."² Turning bimonthly in 1959, *China Pictorial* folded in 1969. Little information is available in

² Ibid.

English about the publication or its circulation and neither its editors nor writers were given bylines. Despite the editor's comment, the subject matter chosen for the Chinese audience is strikingly similar to what is served up to foreign readers at the same time periods, with many topics and the points of view on those topics *China Pictorial* chooses to highlight duplicated in the magazines designed exclusively for foreign subscribers.

In 1952, another English language magazine, *China Reconstructs*, this one glossy and in color, would be launched by Soong Ching Ling and the China Welfare Institute. Soong, also known in English as Madame Sun Yat-sen, the widow of the founding president of the Republic of China, had been specifically urged to start the publication by Premier Zhou, emphasizing her own interest in women and children. American educated, she was a lifelong socialist revolutionary who throughout her life played multiple roles, but was particularly valued for her ability to foster China's relations with foreigners.

These publications were followed by other smaller specialty publications on literature and sports, periodicals often promoted in *People's China* and *China Reconstructs*. And at the end of 1957, the fortnightly *People's China* in English would fold, though its Japanese edition would continue, and it would be succeeded in March 1958 by a weekly magazine, *Peking Review*. The new magazine was larger, more frequent, more serious and more ideological than its predecessor, even though produced by much of the same staff. Again, Premier Zhou played a key role in its development, with even more direct involvement than with the earlier efforts or at least better documented engagement. The closing of the more conversational *People's China*, with its broader range of writing styles, subject matter and reportage from the field, also reflected the ideological shifts that occurred in 1957 and the greater political control of

the period, as did the content of *China Reconstructs*. Both the *Review*, called *Beijing Review* since January 1979, and *China Reconstructs*, called *China Today* since 1990, continue as official publications to this day in a half-dozen languages.

Throughout the 1950s, the bulk of the many photos in these publications showed smiling workers, peasants, women, children, teachers, artists and officials, often in large groups of smiling faces. The same kind of photos dominated *China Pictorial*, published largely for consumption at home. These repeated images reinforced one of the principal messages of these magazines: New China is happy, Old China was sad.

Accurate Images

How accurate were the images portrayed?

The magazines discussed in this thesis are heavily laden with official news and “propaganda,” so that many people can easily dismiss them as such, but they also include reportage of the vast social and cultural impact of “liberation” on individual lives and communities over the next decade, coverage generally not available outside China due to the exclusion of most foreigners. These reports and photos on societal and cultural changes in *People’s China* and *China Reconstructs* reveal a different, softer side of New China, in contrast to the strident tone and sharp rhetoric of the more political, anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist articles, speeches and other documents directed to the outside world. The term “softer” is used in the Western journalistic sense of “hard” news — breaking events, politics, economics, manufacturing, agriculture, military, foreign policy etc. — as opposed to “soft” news about women, family life, children, culture and the arts. In many cases, this softer news is told by the magazines’ correspondents in the style of “reportage,” a personalized form of literary storytelling common in Chinese publications

in the 1930s and 1940s that combines observation, description, and dialogue in a way that borrows from the techniques of fiction writing.³

Official political and economic news, policy and opinion make up the bulk of the content in *People's China* and *Peking Review*, but it is this “softer” side of the People’s Republic that the magazines, particularly *China Reconstructs*, *China Pictorial*, and to a lesser extent, *People's China* present, that we will examine in this thesis. Was China’s smiling face real or a mask or a little of both?

We will pay particular attention to how the publications present the improving role and status of women and children in Chinese society, the changes in marriage and family life, the increasing presence of women in the workforce, and the ascendancy of a new popular culture, building on traditional folk culture but scrubbed of any lingering “feudal” or “semi-colonial” attitudes. The coverage also celebrates China’s ancient heritage in language, literature and the arts, but with a certain ambivalence about its past. The magazines will not always portray developments in these areas as without tensions, problems or difficulties, though positive outcomes are always expected or presumed.

What image did these magazines try to convey, how did these presentations change over time, what may have caused these changes in emphasis or presentation, and how did they reflect the changing environment of the PRC? How real were all these developments? Are the articles describing them credible and do they correspond to what later research has shown to be fact in this era?

³ Treated in Chang-tai Hung, *War and Popular Culture: Resistance in Modern China, 1937-1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994); Charles A. Laughlin, *Chinese Reportage: The Aesthetics of Historical Experience* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002).

This thesis proposes that there is underlying truth and credible reportage in these magazines and that they accurately depict many significant aspects of social change in the early and mid-1950s. This proposition will be supported by not only an examination of their content in black-and-white, but also by looking at the editors and writers who actually produced the magazines, their background and training. To be sure, all the personnel were committed socialists, if not members of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), but even the English-speaking Chinese staff were educated in the Western tradition, were usually experienced in the West, and familiar with its standards of journalism. Until 1957, most of what staff reporters published in *People's China* and *China Reconstructs* was written in English from the start, not in Chinese, though the large amount of the material from outside contributors, such as government officials, academics and domestic publications like *People's Daily* undoubtedly had to be translated. The staff used the help of English-speaking foreigners with long experience as journalists to polish the magazines for foreign audiences. The foreigners were overseen by university-educated Chinese, but they worked side-by-side on the small staffs, often sharing the same offices.

The thesis will also show that the ostensibly non-political portrayal of family life, women, marriage, children, language, culture, and the arts were part of an overall transformation of Chinese society being engineered by the CCP. No aspect of social and cultural life, no matter how intimate or light-hearted, was completely outside the realm of Communist Party politics, though the party influence ranged from mild to extreme and varied from place to place, depending on conditions at the time. This applied to gender

relations, the care of children, the language to be used in public discourse, and the songs, pictures and dances used to celebrate the New Year.

Unstudied Impact

This thesis will not try to assess the objective impact of these magazines on their readers in the West, Asia and the developing world. Such an assessment is problematic even for publications that are influential and widely read, yet there is no question that even at their most robust, the circulations of the publications were modest, perhaps 200,000 for all of them combined, perhaps much less.

However, these were the only Chinese publications available in the West, when they were available at all after the embargo of Chinese goods in 1951. They were the only Chinese voice counterbalancing the flood of attack and negative publicity in the Western press, particularly after the outbreak of the Korean War. In fact, the magazines themselves will often reference anti-Chinese news reports, articles, commentaries and propaganda campaigns in the United States and other publications.

While their circulation may have been small, and while they may have been read mainly in university libraries and government offices, the readers were often influential academics, journalists, and government officials. For many scholars, *People's China* was the only direct resource they had in Chinese or English, and references to it show up in journal articles and monographs of the period as the source for official translations in English of important Chinese documents and speeches, as well as other aspects of the PRC. For China watchers in Hong Kong, particularly excluded Western journalists starved for direct sources, they were an additional resource supplementing the Xinhua News Agency's daily dispatches in English and the *Survey of China Mainland Press*

produced several times a week by the Press Monitoring Unit of the U.S. Consulate in Hong Kong.

Scholars of the 1950s may have prized the copies of *People's China* or *China Reconstructs* that may have snuck through the embargo, but later scholars studying Chinese publications have almost exclusively focused on *Peking Review*, and then only in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s.⁴ Based on extensive research, there seem to be no scholarly articles or studies of *People's China*. Of the eight academic studies of *Peking Review* — two journal articles, one dissertation, five master's theses — a majority use the quantifying technique known as content analysis from the field of communications studies, and make no mention of other publications.⁵ Professor Robert Terrell's long

⁴ For instance, in 1970, Daniel Tretiak, a senior political analyst with the Advanced Studies Group of Westinghouse Electric Corporation, prepared a conference report that analyzed China's foreign policy, turning inward in 1966 and then turning outward in 1969, entirely based on the contents of *Peking Review*. Daniel Tretiak, "Is China Preparing to 'Turn Out'?: Changes in Chinese Levels of Attention to the International Environment," *Asian Survey*, 11, no. 3 (March 1971), 219-237.

⁵ Chang, Chi-chung, *Communist China's External Propaganda to the United States of America, 1968-1981: A Content Analysis of Peking Review* (Master's thesis, Ames, Iowa: Iowa State University, 1982); Bruce Holbrook, *Mainland China's External Propaganda Values 1958-1974: A Content Analysis of the Peking Review* (Ph.D. diss., University of Texas at Austin, 1976); Bruce Holbrook, *Themes and Geographical Referents of Red China's Propagandist Peking Review: 1965-1967* (Master's thesis in journalism and communications, University of Florida, 1969); Liang Lih-kae, *Magazine Propaganda Of The People's Republican Of China: A Content Analysis Of Peking Review, China Pictorial, And China Reconstructs, 1969, 1974, And 1978* (Master's thesis in journalism, Mount Pleasant, Mich.: Central Michigan University, 1979); C.A. Oliphant, "The Image of the United States Projected by the Peking Review," *Journalism Quarterly*, XLI (Summer 1964), 416-420; Kristina Ross, *The Beijing Review's Reportage of Events at Tiananmen Square in Spring 1989* (Master's thesis, University of Missouri, 1992); Wang, Chi-rong, *Communist China's External Propaganda, 1966-1981: a content analysis of China Reconstructs*, (Master's thesis, University of Texas at Austin, 1982); Wu Hsiao-ming, *The image of the United States projected by the Beijing Review, 1972-1989: a content analysis*, (Master's thesis, University of Texas at Austin, 1989).

article on the history of *Beijing Review* from 1958, makes no mention of *People's China*, and in an interview, Terrell said he and the staff members he spoke with in the 1980s were unaware that another publication preceded *Peking Review*, even though much of the early staff had transferred from *People's China* (PC), and some PC veterans had leadership roles in the succeeding publications.⁶ (A 1998 history of *Beijing Review*, produced by the staff on its fortieth anniversary and written in Chinese, includes several references to *People's China* and its role as predecessor.)⁷

This ignorance of *People's China* and the early days of *China Reconstructs* can largely be explained by their unavailability for scholarly research in U.S. libraries, even though scholarly journals and monographs through the 1980s widely cite these magazines. *Peking Review* as well does not start showing up in the collection of all but a few research libraries until 1964. This thesis is an opportunity to rectify that lack of attention and to return to a time when New China was still very fresh, and its politics and its magazines for foreigners were more open and less controlled.

This study is also an opportunity to survey a dynamic and evolutionary period in the early days of the People's Republic from a new perspective – how the crucial 1950s were depicted to foreigners. The CCP was moving China from the chaos of civil war and the collaboration of New Democracy through a difficult period of governmental formation, transitional capitalism and democratic alliances into “socialist construction,”

⁶ Robert L. Terrell, “The First 25 Years of the Beijing Review, an Official Propaganda Organ of the Communist Party of the People's Republic of China,” *Gazette*, 37, (1986), 191-219; Robert L. Terrell, interview with the author, December 17, 2003.

⁷ Beijing Review, *Zhongguo zhichuang shijie zhiyou: Beijing zhoubao de fazhan licheng*, (China's Window to the World: The Development of the Beijing Review), (Beijing: Beijing Zhoubao, 1998).

representing the firm control of a collectivized economy and a party-dominated society and culture. Month by month, the magazine editors and writers, living through it themselves with exhilaration and optimism, tell this exciting story as it unfolds, missteps and all, with undiluted hope in the eventual outcome, but no certainty of its success or even its exact path.

Chapter 1: The Magazines: Background, Content, Audience and Staff

The foreign-language magazines and news service of the 1950s are a continuation of the efforts to inform and influence foreigners, particularly Western journalists and intellectuals that began in Yan'an in the late 1930s. These efforts included the cultivation and, in some cases, manipulation of American writers such as Edgar Snow and Anna Louise Strong.¹ These public relations efforts under the direction of Zhou Enlai and some of his closest aides intensified in Chongqing in the early 1940s when the Communists (CCP) and Guomindang (GMD) had competing public relations operations. In general, the Western journalists were impressed with Zhou and his aides, particularly his attractive press secretary Gung Peng, and generally despised many of the Nationalists they were forced to work with.² In 1944, a number of foreign correspondents were permitted to visit the CCP's Yan'an headquarters, including Israel Epstein, and they came away with strongly favorable impressions of Mao, the other leaders and the communist effort in general. Mao in particular went out of his way to praise democracy to the correspondents. "We must have democracy in all fields, political, economic, cultural and ideological, in publications and artistic expression."³

¹ Anne-Marie Brady, *Making the Foreign Serve China: Managing Foreigners in the People's Republic* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003) 100.

² Stephen R. MacKinnon, and Oris Friesen, *China Reporting: An Oral History of American Journalism in the 1930s and 1940s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 80-81.

³ Israel Epstein, *My China Eye: Memoirs of a Jew and Journalist* (San Francisco: Long River Press, 2005), 190. Mao's interpretation of democracy generally meant participation of the masses, not the selection of the leadership by the masses.

The end of the war against Japan meant the formal end of the United Front with the Nationalists and the start of a new civil war between the two sides. The absence of Western reporters in the Communist-controlled sectors of the country and the strict control and censorship of reports by journalists by the Nanjing government heightened the need for continuing direct communication with Western journalists, intellectuals and sympathizers. In 1946, during the brief period of Zhou's residence in Shanghai, his aides, under the direction of Gung Peng, began an English magazine, called *New China Weekly* with a small staff that included the 24-year-old Zhang Yan, who would become the managing editor of *People's China*. The GMD forced the weekly to close after only three issues.⁴ In 1947, Zhang and the small staff moved to Hong Kong where they began publishing *China Digest*, under the direction of Gung Peng and her husband, Qiao Guanhua, who had been sent there by Zhou to take charge of the Xinhua (New China) News Agency.⁵ *China Digest* was published twice a month until the end of 1949.

In this same time period in another part of the foreign propaganda apparatus, American Sidney Rittenberg Sr. had become an editor and polisher for Radio Yan'an. Its voice broadcasts in English reached the foreign journalists in Nanjing and Beijing, and its Morse code transmissions reached around the world.⁶ In London, these broadcasts were monitored by staff of the Xinhua News Agency, which would then pass along the stories and communiqués from the Chinese Communist leadership to international wire services,

⁴ Zhang Yan, Interview by the author, tape recording, Beijing, 14 June 2005.

⁵ Han Suyin, *Eldest Son: Zhou Enlai and the Making of Modern China, 1898-1976* (New York: Kodansha America, 1995), 196-197.

⁶ Sidney Rittenberg Sr. and Amanda Bennett, *The Man Who Stayed Behind* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 80-82.

news agencies and newspapers across the globe.⁷ The London staff was organized and directed by Jack Chen, who would return to China and become part of the original staffs of *People's China* and *Peking Review*.

In late 1949, as a permanent bureaucracy for the new communist government was being established in Beijing, the staff of *China Digest* and others doing foreign propaganda work were moved to the capital. The first issue of *People's China* is dated January 1, 1950. Addressing its readers directly, as it would often do during the next eight years, the editors, in an unsigned full-page statement, explained their intentions:

... [W]e shall do our utmost to inform our readers about the political, economic and cultural activities of this country in order that the friends of new China may follow the progress being made in the gigantic work of national construction....

The readers we have in mind are the whole of progressive mankind, i.e., the ordinary people of all lands, irrespective of nationality, race, colour and belief. They are innately good internationalists for they know from their own experiences that all labouring people form one big family....

We believe that this journal can make a useful contribution to the consolidation of unity between the Chinese people and the people of the great U.S.S.R. and of our fellow People's Democracies ... We believe that this journal can make a useful contribution to the strengthening of the friendly ties between the Chinese people and the progressive, open-minded people of the capitalist countries, whose struggle is our struggle just as our struggle is theirs ... [and] make a useful contribution to the struggles of our fellow Asians....

In short, this journal is intended as a forum of truth and a clearing house of actual revolutionary experiences.

Our Chinese People's Republic is still young. Therefore, the multitude of problems now confronting our people cannot be solved overnight. We are bound to encounter difficulties, and when we do so, this journal shall not hesitate to state them honestly so that others may profit by our experiences.⁸

Thus, the explicitly targeted audience of *People's China* is “the friends of new China,” “progressive mankind,” “ordinary people,” “good internationalists,” fellow

⁷ Jack Chen, *Inside the Cultural Revolution* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1975), 47.

⁸ *People's China* (PC), Jan. 1, 1950, 3.

communists, and “progressive open-minded people of the capitalist countries” — people in other socialist struggles who could learn from the experience of China. These are the only kind of readers the magazines will acknowledge through the years, printing their letters, asking for their advice. As we will see in chapter 4, the editors and the officials above them at the highest levels of government, including Premier Zhou Enlai, are fully aware that another prime audience of this magazine is the political leaders and high officials of other countries, along with journalists, writers and academics from around the world.

Readers often seem to be on the mind of the editors, who will sometimes adopt a more conversational tone of address and at other times revert to a more ideological harangue, particularly in the midst of a mass national campaign. Over the years, the editors, who do not sign their editorials and who did not list the staff other than the top editor, will tell the readers of new features, new contents, expansion of the magazine, and reduced prices. In the July 1, 1950 issue, the editors let their subscribers know that the journal will increase its size from 28 to 32 pages.

With this additional space at our disposal, we shall be able to meet some of the requests for additional material put forward by readers in reply to our recent questionnaire. Our new articles will include articles on the revolutionary experience of China, short stories and full reports of artistic developments in New China.⁹

In December 1950, “to meet the requests of our readers,” they announce that subscription rates will be reduced to \$3.50 per year (\$27 in 2005 dollars), from the already low price of \$4.00, (about \$31 in 2005 dollars).¹⁰ There are equivalent rate cuts

⁹ PC, June 16, 1950, 14.

¹⁰ Using the inflation calculator at http://www.westegg.com/inflation_ PC, Dec. 16, 1950.

in other currencies, such as a reduction from 20 to 13 rubles for readers in the Soviet Union. In January 1952, with no fanfare, the rate is cut again, to \$2.50 — about \$18 in 2005 dollars. But by this point, due to the embargo by the United States and other Western countries, many readers are unable to receive the magazine at all. A full-page advertisement in September 1951 listing distributors of *People's China* in 17 countries show none at all in the U.S. and only one in Great Britain.¹¹ In 1953, there are distributors listed in 21 countries, but still none in the U.S.¹²

For this price, readers got a fairly slim magazine, though often containing supplements with hefty government reports and documents. And they received the publication in a not very timely fashion by surface mail, a lack of timeliness and immediacy that would ultimately contribute to the publication's demise. In issues of the magazine that managed to evade the U.S. embargo and arrive in the University of Pennsylvania library during this early period, the microfilmed copies bear date stamps almost invariably two months later than the dates of publication.¹³

There could be little mistaking the ideological intentions of the first issue, whose cover is plain type, with the magazine's name repeated in Chinese characters. The top story is "Stalin, Friend of the Chinese People," a 10-year-old tribute written in Yan'an by Mao Zedong. In this and all future issues, the steady diet of the magazine is political, economic and international issues, making up perhaps three-quarters of the content. The topics include: industrialization, agricultural production, and the progress of the

¹¹ PC, Sept. 1, 1951, 32.

¹² PC, June 17, 1953.

¹³ The first six months of the magazine in 1950 were date stamped at Penn on Oct. 4.

government on housing, flood control, power production, and transportation, particularly railroads and bridges. International issues include: relations with the Soviet Union, with many stories depicting Soviet advisers and assistance; relations with the “socialist democracies” of Eastern Europe; ties with India and the non-aligned bloc; and a staple of every issue: fierce attacks on the United States over such matters as Taiwan, Korea, Japan and capitalist imperialism in general. In 1950, just months after the U.S. State Department issued its detailed White Paper on U.S. relations with China, there is particular emphasis on presenting critiques that undermine U.S. policy and credibility. From July 1950 through 1953, there is usually one story related to the Korean War in each issue, often several after the Chinese enter the war. The need for world peace and coverage of world peace conferences and delegations are prevalent topics as well.

Chairman Mao is a permanent fixture of the magazine in both word and image. Few articles make no reference to him, his speeches often are published in their entirety, he is frequently photographed meeting and greeting visiting leaders, and he is constantly pictured with other top Chinese leaders, but also with peasants, workers and children as well. On July 1, 1950, PC runs a color portrait of Mao signed with his calligraphy, clearly intended to be suitable for framing since the page on the other side of the photograph is blank. Similar photos run in each of the following years, except for 1954, when the magazine begins to use fewer illustrations. For May Day 1952, a full page paper-cut of Mao in profile appears. Over the years, there are drawings, woodcuts, and reproductions, presumably in color, of new oil paintings in the “socialist realism” style of scenes from the early revolutionary period for which no photographs exist, such as Mao and his forces

meeting up with Zhu De in the Jinggang mountains in 1928, forming the foundation of the People's Liberation Army.¹⁴

While politics and economics dominate the magazine, as they will throughout its run, even in the first issue we begin finding the kind of articles, photos, cartoons and illustrations that will relieve the tedium of the reports and commentaries from top government officials.

The center spread is always a four-page pictorial, sometimes of official happenings and visiting foreign delegations, but as the magazine evolves and begins to find its own voice and style, the photo spreads become friendly features. Photos, after all, may be staged or posed, but to the reader's eye, are true to life. Even in the second issue, the ten photographs in the center spread on "Workers in New China" depict scores of smiling workers. Smiling women, smiling peasants enjoying themselves at a songfest in the countryside, "peaceful, happy" Tibetans, and dancing minorities are all subjects of pictorials, and most emphatically happy, smiling children are a recurring theme, appearing often over the years.¹⁵ Mass demonstrations, rallies and festivals in Tiananmen Square appear in the first issue, and regularly throughout the year for May Day (International Labor Day), Children's Day (June 1), and National Day (October 1). The happy children and the mass demonstrations are sometimes combined. "Happy children of New China release thousands of doves in Tien An Men Square" says an Oct. 1, 1952 caption. These are similar to the kind of photographs being run in *China Pictorial* for

¹⁴ PC, Nov. 16, 1950, 15. Also, "China's Artists Portray the Revolution," PC, July 16, 1951, 17-20, including Mao lecturing to a small group in 1920; Mao working in his study in Yan'an in 1937; and Mao lecturing in Yan'an.

¹⁵ A songfest in the countryside, PC, Feb. 16, 1956; "peaceful, happy" Tibetans, PC, July 1, 1954; and dancing minorities, PC, Feb. 16, 1957, and elsewhere.

domestic consumption as well, so new China smiles on readers both at home and abroad, despite older communist ideology and Confucian belief that favor images of people depicted in serious ways. New China is happy, smiling, sunny, better; old China, as seen in thousands of photos and newsreels over the previous decades, is dour, frowning, cloudy and backward.¹⁶

After *People's China* switches to cover photographs in 1953, a Sept. 16 cover is described as “a group of happy Shanghai students at their 1953 seaside summer camp.” Perhaps countering a stereotype, the cover two weeks before shows incongruously smiling children lined up for inoculations at a Beijing kindergarten. (In U.S. publications, children getting vaccinated are most frequently depicted as crying or wincing.) The New Year's Day cover of 1956 shows massed Young Pioneers releasing balloons at a Tiananmen Square rally.

Photos are invariably positive, smiling, earnest or at worst, neutral in expression, even in the case of American POWs in Korea, and there are rare depictions of death or destruction, mostly at the hands of imperialist “missionaries.”¹⁷ However, the cartoons are often garish caricatures of monstrous Americans, Nationalists, and their allies. A ghoulis Gen. Douglas MacArthur makes frequent appearances, as does U.S. Secretary of State Dean Acheson. In a reprint of a *People's Daily* cartoon, “Maestro Acheson” with a sword conducts an orchestra of formally dressed Western men playing various weapons,

¹⁶ For example, L. Carrington Goodrich and Nigel Cameron, *The Face of China as seen by photographers and travelers, 1860-1912* (Millerton, N.Y.: Aperture, 1978); and Jonathan Spence and Anping Chin, *The Chinese Century: a photographic history of the last hundred years* (New York: Random House, 1996).

¹⁷ PC, Apr. 16, 1951, 18; Mar. 1, 1952, 21. These two articles depict dying or dead children found in Catholic orphanages.

with Nazi swastikas sprinkled about.¹⁸ The cartoons are often more heavy-handed and political than light-hearted, even when the magazine starts running a full page of them in 1957. No cartoons ever poke fun at China, its leaders or its people.

Culture, embracing all the visual and performing arts, ancient and modern — painting, sculpture, music, song, dance, drama, opera, film as well as literature, science and language — has its own section and special features in every issue of *People's China* from the very first to the very last. First called Cultural World, then Cultural Front, and finally Cultural Life, it is so important as to be worth a separate chapter of this thesis. The publication also uses short stories and poems to get its message across, a feature common to Chinese-language publications in both the republican and the communist eras.

First-Hand Accounts

An important recurring element of *People's China* is the first-hand accounts of conditions in the factories, the countryside or the hutongs of Beijing. From the first issue in which a Mexican labor leader shares his observations, sympathetic foreign visitors recount their “Impressions of New China,” including existentialist philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre in 1955.¹⁹ Brits, Canadians, Czechoslovaks, Romanians, Indians, Pakistanis and others all offer their observations over the years.²⁰ There are even more first-hand

¹⁸ PC, Nov. 1, 1950.

¹⁹ Ibid., 13, “I Have Seen The New China,” Vicente Lombardo Toledano, “Vice-President, World Federation of Trade Unions;” PC, July 16, 1951, 15, by Arthur Clegg, a member of the British delegation; also “My Impressions of New China,” by Dr. James G. Endicott, “chairman of the Canadian Peace Congress” and a former missionary, PC, June 1, 1952, 11; “A Glimpse of New China” by F.C. Weiskopf, novelist and Czechoslovakia’s ambassador to China, reprinted from *People's Literature*; Sartre, PC, November 16, 1955, 9.

accounts from Chinese citizens themselves: “Letter from a Returned Student,” “Letter from a Returned Volunteer” to Korea, a missive “From the Korea Front,” “Cadre’s Land Reform Diary,” “Women Textile Workers,” and “My Life as a Teacher,” among many others.²¹

But the most interesting and compelling accounts of new China come from the magazine’s own writers doing what can only be acknowledged as journalism or what the Chinese refer to as “reportage” — going out into the field, talking to people and relaying their stories back to readers. From the first issue, in which Fu Lien relates a woman’s life “From Beggar To District Leader” to the last issue, in which perennial contributor Jack Chen, “Our Special Correspondent,” chronicles “Nomads’ Two-Way Trail to Socialism,” an account of shepherds in the “Sinkiang Uighur Autonomous Region,” the staff and other writers relate concrete testimony on life as it is lived by the common folk and their local leaders. Sometimes these reports carry only the designation “By Our Correspondent,” other times it is just a name without an affiliation. Consistently over the years we also hear from the foreign-born writers trained as journalists who are helping the Chinese staff write, edit and polish *People’s China*. These include Jack Chen, Israel Epstein and Sidney Shapiro.

The style of the reportage is straightforward and conversational, with little rhetorical flourish. It represents a continuation of the “drastically different” writing style

²⁰ PC Feb. 1, 1952, Romanians; “I Met Muslims in New China” by Ibrahim Jalees of Pakistan, Feb. 2, 1953, 11.

²¹ “Letter from a Returned Student,” PC, Dec. 1, 1950, 26; “Letter from a Returned Volunteer” to Korea, actually three letters, PC, Dec. 16, 1950; “From the Korea Front,” PC, Dec. 1, 1951; “Cadre’s Land Reform Diary,” PC, May 16, June 1, 1952; “Women Textile Workers,” PC, June 16, 1954; and “My Life as a Teacher,” PC, July 1, 1954.

first employed by Chinese correspondents during the Anti-Japanese War. “They used simple language, registered personal observations, recorded statements verbatim to provide a more intimate sense of reality, and, above all, wrote with feeling.”²² More importantly, the style is very much in keeping with the techniques initially advocated by Mao Zedong as part of his reforms of *Liberation Daily* in Yan’an that began as an essential part of the rectification movement initiated by his 1942 talks on literature and art.²³ Writers were directed to write in a clearer, more lively style, and describe the achievements of the people on the grassroots level, showing by these examples that the Party’s policies were not only achievable, but when followed, the people prospered. As Mao was to say in his 1948 talk to the editorial staff of *Shansi-Suiyan Daily*, “Newspapers run by our party should be vivid, clear cut and sharp and should never mutter and mumble. ... A blunt knife draws no blood.”²⁴ Mao’s approach “defined propaganda and journalism for the Chinese Communist Party for the next thirty years.”²⁵

This approach is described in detail in *People’s China* by Liu Zunqi (Liu Tsun-chi), vice-director of the China Information Bureau and the head of the Foreign

²² Chang-tai Hung, *War and Popular Culture: Resistance in Modern China, 1937-1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 164.

²³ Mao Zedong, *Selected Works of Mao Tse-Tung*, Vol. 3 (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1967), 69-98; and Patricia Stranahan, *Molding the Medium: The Chinese Communist Party and the Liberation Daily* (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 1990), 15.

²⁴ Mao Zedong, *Selected Works of Mao Tse-Tung*, Vol. 4, (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1969), 241-45.

²⁵ Stranahan, 16.

Languages Press; he began being listed as top editor of the magazine in January 1953.²⁶

The “Decisions Regarding the Promotion of Press Work” promulgated by the Press Administration of the Central’s People Government April 22, 1950 may have been directed at domestic publications, but the description reflects the sentiments of PC’s inaugural editorial and may have been drafted by some of the same people who wrote that editorial. The document calls on newspapers “to devote prominent space for reporting on the conditions of the people’s labour and in production, publicizing the experiences of success as well as the lessons of error....” Editors and reporters “are required to ‘foster an honest and practical working style of investigation’ and ‘to try to maintain close links with the masses of the people, organizations and cadres.’ ”²⁷ Liu goes on to tell how the press has replaced tedious reports of meetings with

stories on new records set by workers in factories, on how railways and bridges demolished by the KMT have been rebuilt ahead of schedule, on the new measures taken by peasants to exterminate pests in the cotton fields, on how the peasants have carried out a dramatic water conservancy plan ..., how illiteracy has been wiped out in a village after land reform

and so on, a fairly representative rundown of the sorts of fare in *People’s China*, especially toward the back of the publication. Here are found staff reports on model workers, peasants, machinists, women textile workers, etc., and struggling cadres and village leaders as well.

²⁶ PC, Dec. 16, 1950, “The Press in New China,” 8-9. Throughout this text names of people and places will be given in the *pinyin* Romanization now standard in China. But for all but the most common, such Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai, the Wade-Giles transliteration used in all these magazines will be given in parentheses, since that is how readers would find them.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 9.

Editors and Correspondents

The first editor in chief of *People's China* was Qiao Guanhua (Chiao Kuan-hua), director of the international news bureau. He was a close aide to Zhou Enlai in foreign affairs, husband of Gung Peng and in 1974, he became foreign minister. But managing editor Zhang Yan said Qiao “was editor in chief only in name” and had many other foreign affairs duties. “My role was to prepare everything. There were only three of us,” Zhang said.²⁸ “We started from scratch” and “I was in charge of the magazine.”

Regrettably, we do not have much information on how *People's China* was organized or controlled, beyond the interviews conducted for this thesis, a few memoirs, and editorials in the magazine itself. There is considerably more information on *China Reconstructs* and *Peking Review*. We can only speculate on how the direction of *People's China* was set by connecting the few dots available. At the moment, we know the names of only two top editors, Qiao Guanhua and Liu Zunqi. One was an official of the foreign ministry, with many other duties; the other served in the external propaganda department and as head of the Foreign Languages Press, overseeing all the publications for foreigners, including translations of books. Neither man did the day-to-day editing. *People's China* came under the umbrella of the Foreign Languages Press, but its early organizational structure is opaque. Leadership in these early years of the PRC was hierarchical, but diffuse and collective. *People's China* and the Foreign Languages Press would seem to be the responsibility of the foreign ministry, with guidance from the propaganda department. Both these organizations at the time were comparatively small, concentrated in Beijing, employing a substantial number of non-Soviet foreigners in their

²⁸ Zhang interview.

mission to communicate to the outside world. These factors made them extremely sensitive politically and closely watched, but easily controlled and supervised; their closeness to the center of power and their frequent dealings with the offices of the high level officials whose articles they would publish made them keenly aware of the prevailing politics, in addition to a close reading of Xinhua News Agency reports, *People's Daily*, and other party organs.

Zhang was the managing editor who ran the magazine. He was born in 1922 in Sichuan province and in 1945, he graduated from the National Southwest Associate University, the famous war-time amalgamation of Peking, Tsinghua and Nankai universities in Kunming. In 1946, he joined the *Xinhua Weekly* in Shanghai as a translator and editor; after that operation was shut down by the Guomindang, he moved on to Hong Kong, where the staff produced the fortnightly *China Digest*. In 1949, the staff moved to Beijing, and began *People's China*. At the beginning, “we used the same list of our readers from *China Digest* ... several thousand, mainly distributed in the United States,” Zhang said. “It was the only magazine where you could read about China.”

As the magazine grew, so did the staff. “Many were returned students from the western world ... we had many staff writers that were educated in Missouri and many other journalism schools,” Zhang said. (The University of Missouri journalism school had been educating Chinese students since the 1920s; Edgar Snow was a graduate.)

Jack Chen and Israel Epstein

Perhaps the most interesting character to join the staff of *People's China* was Jack Chen, who would also work for *Peking Review*. A prolific writer and illustrator, at 42, he was among the older members of the staff when he returned to Beijing in 1950. He had

been born on the island of Trinidad in the Caribbean of a Creole mother and a Chinese father, whose parents were of the Hakka minority. Photos show his features favored his African ancestry, but he had been connected to the Chinese revolution since its earliest days. His father, Eugene Chen (Chen Youren), a British trained solicitor, served as foreign minister of the republican government twice under Sun Yat-sen. In Wuhan with his father in 1927, he saw first-hand the GMD crackdown on the nascent communists. He went to Moscow with the socialist delegation fleeing the purge, which included his father and Soong Ching Ling. While completing his art training, he began working as a journalist and artist in the Moscow press. His “main job was doing daily cartoons for the *Moscow News*, edited by [Mikhail] Borodin,” who had been Comintern advisor to the Chinese Communists.²⁹ Chen was planning to go back to China when the Japanese attacked in 1937, so he did not return to China until 1946 as a correspondent for a British newspaper. He met in Yan’an with Mao, Zhou and other leaders, and they asked him to return to England to spread the news of the Communist advance in the civil war, heading the Xinhua office in London. In February 1950, at the invitation of these same leaders, he returned to China. Chen’s multinational background and education — he had attended an English boarding school as a boy — and long association with the revolution and the Soviets made him an unusual figure on the Chinese scene. “In China, I was Chinese, outside China, as long as I held my British passport, I was British.” His Chinese name was Chen Yifan (Ch’en I-fan).

He joined the cartoonists section of the Federation of Chinese Artists, but rather than devoting himself to art:

²⁹ Chen, 40-41.

I thought I could be more helpful working on *People's China* ... Coming from London, I knew how desperately necessary it was to inform the rest of the world what the new China was doing and thinking. For quite a time I did no painting and little cartooning or drawing. I was editing, writing, correcting manuscripts, and even doing makeup and proofreading until cadres could be found or trained to take over these jobs.³⁰

His salary was modest — high compared to most cadres, but less than half what was paid foreign advisors. “Like everyone else I was in a state of great elation, even euphoria.”³¹ As time went on, overseas Chinese returned home to assist the revolution, and some joined the staff of *People's China*.

The typists were typing better. The proofreaders were able to take over the job competently. Translators were settling down and producing better work. There was no end of new things to report. New factories were being built every day. An increasing flow of consumer goods was going into the shops. Schools and education were a top priority. ... The future was full of hope.”³²

Chen's first illustration, a terrified-looking eagle emblazoned “Hands Off Korea,” appears in the August 1, 1950 issue, and in the following issue, there is a full-page drawing of a People's Liberation Army Soldier signing a “Stockholm Peace Appeal.” In the September 16 issue, under the headline “People's War in Korea,” Chen gives a four-page first-hand account of the scene in North Korea and the fight against the Americans. This, of course, was written before the September 15 Inchon invasion would have made a visit to Pyongyang impossible, and before that drive to the north would draw the Chinese directly into the war. Other than the occasional illustration, a 1951 article on “New

³⁰ Chen, 53-54. He also says that *People's China* “and its Esperanto edition were the only two foreign-language journals they had.” The magazine, which later makes note of editions in Russian, Japanese, French, and Spanish, makes no reference to an edition in Esperanto, the invented European language which its creators hoped would become a common tongue.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid., 76.

Peking,”³³ a 1952 report from the Peace Conference of the Asian and Pacific region,³⁴ and a 1953 story on “Peking’s Many Stages,”³⁵ Chen’s work is mostly behind the scenes as deputy editor in chief.³⁶ But in June 1955, the magazine begins publishing a five-part series of long articles by Chen, “Sketches From Chekiang,” illustrated by the author as well, that will later be compiled in a 1957 book.³⁷

In 1951, Israel Epstein joined the staff. Already 35, the Polish-born Epstein grew up in China, and had reported from China for a number of left-leaning western publications and wire services. During the Sino-Japanese War, Epstein worked in Hong Kong on the publications of Soong Ching Ling, Sun Yat-sen’s widow, and was interred there during the Japanese occupation. He managed to escape to Chongqing, where he reported for various newspapers, including *The New York Times*, and in 1944, he was among the foreign correspondents who visited Yan’an and met with Mao. In 1947, while living in New York, he published a book *The Unfinished Revolution in China*. When a Communist Chinese delegation came to visit the United Nations in late 1950, Epstein made contact with his old acquaintance Qiao Guanhua. Through that contact, he received

³³ PC, Aug. 1, 1951, 21.

³⁴ PC, Nov. 1, 1952, 20.

³⁵ PC, Jan. 1, 1953, 16.

³⁶ Beijing Review. *Zhongguo zhichuang shijie zhiyou: Beijing zhoubao de fazhan licheng*. (China’s Window to the World: The Development of the Beijing Review), (Beijing: Beijing Zhoubao, 1998), 38.

³⁷ Jack Chen, *New Earth: How the Peasants in One Chinese County Solved the Problem of Poverty* (Peking: New World Press, 1957). To permit its sale in the United States by China Books & Periodicals in Chicago, the preface carries the notice: “A copy of this material has been filed with the Foreign Agents Registration Section, Department of Justice, Washington, D.C.”

an invitation from Soong Ching Ling, now a vice chair of the People's Government, to return to China and help her start *China Reconstructs*.³⁸

That publication would commence in January 1952 as a bimonthly, but Epstein also worked with Zhang on *People's China*, beginning a friendship and professional collaboration that would last for over 50 years. Epstein did little writing for *People's China*, "his main job was polishing," the last stage of editing where native speakers of English (or other languages) "polish" the copy produced by Chinese writers, translators and editors, reviewing it for idiom, grammar, spelling and style.³⁹ Epstein's byline appears only five times in *People's China* over the next six years, and only twice in *China Reconstructs* during this period. But in October 1951, in his first article, he does celebrate his "Return to New China," with comparisons to the GMD days.⁴⁰ The trains are better run, and gone are the class distinctions that had consigned the poor to "filthy third-class wagons." Outside his rail car, the once barren countryside on the way to Beijing from Tianjin, his boyhood home, was now "rich-green with rice." In Tianjin, "I saw great department stores jammed with goods of every description and full of customers of a totally new type — workers and peasants." The gold-tiled palaces of Beijing are now open to the "common folk."

Everywhere there is a sense of buoyancy and activity, different equally from the despair that one often saw in the past and the passive good-nature which foreign visitors used to praise so highly, no doubt comforted by the thought that the Chinese people would tolerate their oppressed state forever. The Chinese people today are not passively accepting fate. They are joyfully remaking it. One can see this joy in the eyes of workers, peasants, intellectuals and even of many people

³⁸ Epstein, *My China Eye*, 237.

³⁹ Zhang interview.

⁴⁰ PC, Oct. 16, 1951, 24-25.

who thought themselves well off in the old society but now know they were only asleep.⁴¹

In his writings, including his 2005 autobiography, Epstein recounts little of his work from those early years, but he does describe the spirit of the times, using words almost exactly like his first impression.⁴² “In those early post-Liberation days, we and our colleagues engaged in foreign-language publicity work for China, regardless of rank or age, worked, learned, and played in close togetherness. Many were the nights we toiled together from dusk to dawn, to get out urgent copy.”⁴³ “As for income in the early 1950s, public servants in China were not on wages, but on the ‘supply system.’ ... Housing and essential furniture came with the job.”⁴⁴

Epstein and Zhang shared an office, and they shared a similar commitment to new China and how to serve the readers — and the truth. “We had a consensus on how to do it... We used to say we must serve the readers with facts and let the readers draw their own conclusions. That’s what we were educated and trained to be as journalists during our university education.” Epstein, too, while a committed socialist and advocate of the new China, saw himself as a committed journalist as well. Explaining his decline of official Chinese help to get to China, he said:

Almost an instinct with me was the independent journalist’s aversion to sponsorship by officials, even the most friendly. Though I had long believed that a journalist should be committed to a cause, my feeling was that this should be by

⁴¹ Ibid., 25.

⁴² Epstein, *My China Eye*, 250.

⁴³ Ibid., 252.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 259.

one's own volition and that one should be judged by one's writing, not who one's sponsors were.⁴⁵

As described by one of those returned Chinese students, Lin Wusun, who worked on *People's China*, both Epstein and Chen “took part directly in the Chinese revolutionary cause for the long term. These two senior editors are not only foreign experts, but also our own comrades.”⁴⁶

Soong Ching Ling

A strong common connection among these two men and these two magazines was Soong Ching Ling herself. A Christian and college-educated in the United States, as were her famous siblings, in 1915 at the age of 21, Soong married the much older Sun Yat-sen, father of the Chinese revolution, first president of the Chinese republic, and founder of the Guomindang Party. She would continue to promote socialist revolution with him until his death in 1925, and through the rest of her long life, she would continue to champion the cause and publish English-language periodicals to advance it, becoming known as the mother of the revolution.⁴⁷ In 1938, she founded the China Defense League, working out of Hong Kong, to mobilize support abroad for the resistance to the Japanese invaders and to bring medical aid and other relief to those fighting as part of the united front, particularly in guerrilla areas. To publicize the struggle of the Chinese people against the Japanese, the league published the *China Defense League Newsletter*, an eight-page biweekly in English for distribution to Westerners, and Soong asked Israel Epstein to be

⁴⁵ Ibid., 245.

⁴⁶ Beijing Review. *Zhongguo zhichuang shijie zhiyou*, 38.

⁴⁷ Israel Epstein, *Woman in World History: Soong Ching Ling (Mme. Sun Yat-sen)* (Beijing: New World Press, 1993), 523. These publications in English included *People's Tribune* (1925-27), *China Forum*, and *Voice of China*.

its editor, which he did until 1941. His future wife, Elsie Fairfax-Cholmeley, also worked with the China Defense League and worked on another news organ in English, the *Far East Bulletin*, edited by Chen Hansheng, a political scientist with a Berlin University Ph.D. who had taught at the University of Washington and the University of Pennsylvania. A decade later all four of them would be involved in the founding of *China Reconstructs*. It was in this period, when the Nationalists were blocking aid to the communist guerrillas and actively fighting them, rather than the Japanese, that Soong came to throw her lot in with the communists, causing a split between her and her siblings — T.V. Soong, a high official in various posts for the Nationalists, and Soong Mei Ling, wife of Chiang Kai-shek.⁴⁸

After the war against Japan was over, the league became the China Welfare Fund, run by Soong in Shanghai. After liberation in 1949, she became one of the six vice chairmen of the People's Government, and the fund became the China Welfare Institute, fully financed by the government but still technically a nongovernmental organization. "The direct business of government ... was not the main part of her activity. More important was her role in people-to-people diplomacy and in publicizing the new China. As always, she wrote copiously, for both Chinese and foreign audiences."⁴⁹

The first work for *People's China* under her byline appeared in the second issue, "The Difference Between Soviet and American Foreign Policies," which also referred to her as Mme. Sun Yat-Sen.⁵⁰ Over the next seven years, more than 20 articles under her name would appear there, as well as many photos of her greeting foreign visitors and

⁴⁸ Epstein, *Woman*; Epstein, *My China Eye*.

⁴⁹ Epstein, *Woman*, 487.

⁵⁰ PC, Jan. 16, 1950, 5.

traveling abroad, making speeches in places like New York, Moscow and New Delhi.

The articles were on serious topics — “New China’s First Year,” “Thirty-Three Years of Progress” — and they focused on themes close to her heart: world peace, the progress of the socialist revolution, welfare work with women and children, and Sun Yat-sen.⁵¹

Though she was bilingual, most, if not all, of the articles in *People’s China* and *China Reconstructs*, as well as the instructions to CR editors, were written in English, “the language in which she expressed herself most easily.”⁵²

It was in her capacity as a longtime ambassador for China to the world, publicist extraordinaire, and head of the nongovernmental China Welfare Institute that Zhou Enlai urged Soong to produce a magazine in English.⁵³ Accounts by the founding editors differ on whether the idea was initiated by Zhou or Soong, his collaborator in foreign affairs, but it is clear from his close involvement from its conception and over the years that Zhou was deeply interested in the magazine Soong would launch. One early staff member said one of the motivations was to break the U.S. blockade and address a magazine directly to ordinary Americans, though this is mentioned nowhere else.⁵⁴ The magazine was actually blacklisted by the U.S. government as a “prohibited import,” post offices

⁵¹ PC, Oct. 1, 1950, 6; Nov. 1, 1950, 5.

⁵² Epstein, *Woman*, v.

⁵³ Ibid., 523; Israel Epstein writing in *China Today*, *Friendship & Peace: The 50th Anniversary of China Today* (Beijing: China Today, 2002), 14.

⁵⁴ Lu Ping, later deputy editor-in-chief, writing in *China Today*, *Friendship*, 18.

and custom houses were ordered to destroy all copies, and individuals receiving it were required to register.⁵⁵

The more obvious reasons for Soong to head the publication were that she was already a well-known world figure, Sun's widow, head of a nongovernmental body, and she was not a member of the Chinese Communist Party, representing instead one of the "democratic parties" in the ruling "coalition." Confirming the importance of the last point, in 1957, she reportedly asked Liu Shaoqi, then CCP vice chairman, to let her join the party. But after it was discussed, Liu and Zhou came personally to tell her "that it was thought better for the revolution that she not join formally."⁵⁶

At Zhou's request over dinner in March 1951, the staff was organized by Chen Hansheng, who became vice chairman of the editorial board and would remain so for years.⁵⁷ He in turn recruited Li Boti, an American educated reporter at the Xinhua News Agency, and the two of them reportedly planned the first issue on a Beijing park bench,

⁵⁵ Epstein in CT, Jan. 2002, 20. In a 1961 book, Edgar Snow reported that "each time" a copy of *Peking Review*, *China Reconstructs* or other periodicals arrived from China, "I was advised by the Postmaster that subversive Communist propaganda had been addressed to me." To receive it, he had to write the Postmaster and accept the " 'Communist propaganda' . If and when the material reached me it was months late." Edgar Snow, *The Other Side of the River: Red China Today* (New York: Random House, 1961), 108.

⁵⁶ According to Wang Guangmei, Liu's widow, as recounted in *Soong Ching Ling Jnianji* (Memories of Soong Ching Ling), as reported in Epstein, *Woman*, 491. They told her she would be informed and consulted on party matters. Epstein also quotes but cannot verify that Zhou is reputed to have told her earlier, "There are a million Party members in China but only one Soong Ching Ling." Ibid.

⁵⁷ Chen Hansheng in CR, Jan. 1982, 6. In contrast to the lack of material on *People's China*, which died an early and unheralded death, we are fortunate to have so many reminiscences of *China Reconstructs* from its early staff members because the publication has continued to exist for so many years and many of its early staff were alive to recount its history in anniversary stories every five years, beginning in 1982.

since there was no office at the time.⁵⁸ Both Chen and Li would contribute many articles to the magazine over the years. The staff was only six people at the beginning, including Epstein and his wife Elsie Cholmeley, but Epstein's byline appeared only twice in the 1950s, in two 1955 reports on his first trip to Tibet. (A three-part series on the trip were published in *People's China* at the same time.) At least three other Chinese staff writers in the early 1950s had attended U.S. colleges and universities, as had a number of the non-staff contributors as well.⁵⁹

The first issue of *China Reconstructs* had a striking full-color photo of smiling peasants carrying new tools and returning from the fields they had been given as part of land reform. The picture-laden magazine included an article by Soong on "Welfare Work and World Peace," the first of more than thirty she would pen for CR over the next twenty-nine years.

The name of the magazine echoes a much earlier periodical founded by Sun Yat-sen called *Construction*, and the communists repeatedly mentioned goal of reconstructing China. The introduction to the first issue expresses sentiments very similar to those found in *People's China's* first issue two years earlier:

The purpose of *China Reconstructs* is to present the work and achievement of the Chinese people to people abroad who believe that all nations should cooperate for peace and mutual benefit. ... It will give up-to-date information on what China is doing to solve social, economic and cultural problems — both old and new. ... *China Reconstructs* will chronicle the life of the Chinese people in authoritative articles, vivid features, representative photographs, drawings and charts. It will relate how difficulties are overcome and problems are solved. It will report on our resurgent art, literature, music,

⁵⁸ Epstein in CR, Jan. 1982, 2.

⁵⁹ Writers for China Reconstructs, *China in Transition: Selected Articles 1952-1956* (Peking: China Reconstructs, 1957), unnumbered appendix. *China Reconstructs* is the only one of the publications studied here that uniformly gives readers background information on its contributors.

drama and cinema — on works that embody our best national traditions and our new experiences.⁶⁰

What this did not mention is what *China Reconstructs* would not contain. At an August 30, 1951, meeting in Shanghai, where Soong was based, the editorial board determined that the new publication would not carry “the original texts of official documents, political reports, [and] theories...”⁶¹ Instead it would “concentrate on reporting China’s social, economic, cultural, educational, relief and welfare developments.” The audience would be “the progressive personages and liberals in capitalist and colonialist countries, and those who sympathize or may sympathize with China, especially professionals, scientists and artists who sincerely pursue world peace, but who are not advanced politically.”

In short, it would carry little of the political coverage that was the primary focus of *People’s China*, and focus on those social and cultural areas that were secondary, though important, to the twice-a-month magazine. *China Reconstructs* also ran fewer photos of Chairman Mao and other officials, though, like *People’s China*, it did run a color portrait of Mao clearly intended for framing or display.⁶² It is not as if there is no mention of politics and government in the publication, since some articles are written by government ministers, like Li Dechuan (Li Teh-chuan), the minister of health and a member of the CR original editorial board. But she also was an important leader of the women’s movement, organizer of the Child Welfare Association, a third generation Christian and daughter of a minister who had married Gen. Feng Yuxiang, “widely

⁶⁰ CR, Jan. 1952, 1.

⁶¹ *China Today* (CT), Jan. 2002, 17.

⁶² CR, September-October 1952.

known as ‘the Christian general.’ ”⁶³ But the magazine’s overall emphasis remains its stated focus on issues like health, women, children, families, and practical aspects of the economy. “Protect the Children!” declares Soong’s lead article in the second issue.

In 1958, after the anti-rightist campaign and in the midst of the Great Leap Forward, as *China Reconstructs* attempted to strengthen its political content, Zhou Enlai made it clear, through an aide, that he did not wish the magazine to stray from its mission. “When *China Reconstructs* reports China’s development in economic and cultural construction, it already had political content. Excessive politics will change its original style, and make it no different from *People’s China*. This is not good.”⁶⁴

The model in the early years is clearly the larger format, photo-heavy U.S. magazines of its day: *Life*, *Look* and *Saturday Evening Post*. For its first three years, it came out every two months, just six times a year, with 56 pages, and cost \$1.50 per year (about \$11 in 2005 dollars), and in 1955, it starts monthly publication. Its circulation was small: just 10,000 in 1952 and 70,000 in 1957. It went down to 58,000 in 1962.⁶⁵

Like *People’s China*, *China Reconstructs* also publishes the impressions of foreign visitors and first-person accounts of life of the common people, sometimes responding to requests from readers for more such fare, such as “A Day in the Life of a Housewife,” requested by a British housewife.⁶⁶ The magazine was actively engaged with its readers, publishing letters in every issue, and regularly inserting questionnaires for readers’ comment about its contents. When the magazine went monthly in January

⁶³ CR, Jan. 1952, 53. She wrote “Health for All the People.”

⁶⁴ CT, Jan. 2002, 23.

⁶⁵ *China Reconstructs*, *China Reconstructs — Founded by Soong Ching Ling* (Beijing: China Reconstructs, 1987), 69.

⁶⁶ CR, May-June 1953, 10.

1955, as readers had requested, and reduced its size from fifty-six to thirty-six pages, the editors asked them: “Please write and tell us what you think of it compared with the old magazine.”⁶⁷ Bolstering the mélange of features and photo spreads were consumer-friendly columns and regular features. From the start, the magazine published illustrated short articles on new Chinese stamps. It later would print songs complete with sheet music and lyrics in both English and Chinese. There were reports on Chinese consumer items, and a “Language Corner,” not concentrating on reform of the language, as *People’s China* did, but on teaching its readers the basics of spoken and written Chinese. In 1958, it added a column “Mainly for Women” that included recipes of Chinese dishes and other interesting household facts, and a separate page for younger readers.

All the staff-written stories emphasized facts and “are born of direct reporting” in simple language, with “writers and photographers who from the start have traveled the length and breadth of China.”⁶⁸ Soong encouraged contribution from outside writers like Jack Chen, Rewi Alley, George Hatem (Ma Hai-de) and William Hinton, and “accurate field reporting by our own staff.”⁶⁹ “Seek the truth from facts” is a slogan Mao would repeat over the years; *China Reconstructs* would describe that as its guiding principle.⁷⁰ This was part of the “tradition of truth” Soong Ching Ling traced back to the *China Defense League Newsletter*. In later accounts, Israel Epstein is described as trying to instill the standards of journalism in those not schooled for the profession. “Most of our

⁶⁷ CR, March 1955, 1.

⁶⁸ Epstein, writing in CR, Jan. 1987, 6.

⁶⁹ Epstein, in *China Today, Friendship*, 14.

⁷⁰ Mao Zedong, *Selected Works*, Vol. 3; *China Reconstructs, China Reconstructs*, 1987, 38.

earliest editors and translators had never expected to work on a magazine,” such as a group of English majors who arrived in 1954. “Through their work on the magazine, they were trained into journalists, though at first some had to write their articles several times before they were passed.”⁷¹ The magazine’s fact-based approach earned the praise of the highest leaders. In 1958, Mao, who supposedly used the magazine to improve his English, said: “*China Reconstructs* speaks through facts; this is what we should do in publicity for abroad.”⁷² The same year Foreign Minister Chen Yi said, “Facts speak louder than eloquent speech. Only the truth can convince. *China Reconstructs* describes the actual situation in China to friends the world over.”⁷³ Ironically, these laudatory remarks, repeated in several anniversary issues of the magazine decades later, came at a time when Soong and Epstein would later admit that the magazine had printed exaggerations and distortions, influenced by “ultra-leftist views” and the Great Leap Forward.

⁷¹ *China Reconstructs*, Ibid., 97

⁷² CR, Jan. 1982, 5; and CR, Jan. 1987, 6.

⁷³ CR, Jan. 1987, 6.; China Today, *Friendship*, 15.

Chapter 2: The Social Side of Liberation: Women, Marriage, and Children

The magazine editors pursued their aspirations to seek out the facts and find the truth with varying degrees of success. They were hampered by their own ideological commitments to socialist construction, by their publications' foreign propaganda role, and their understandable desire to maintain the post-liberation discourse of successful communist revolutionaries. Few aspects of Chinese life were not covered, but over the first eight years of the People's Republic, they devoted considerable space to coverage of women, marriage, and children. *People's China* had more than eighty articles exclusively on these topics, many of them long, and *China Reconstructs*, which came out much less frequently, would seldom let an issue pass without a story in these areas.

The need to change the family, the institution of marriage and the treatment of women were among the earliest preoccupations of Chinese revolutionaries in the twentieth century, starting with the May Fourth Movement of 1919. Mao Zedong wrote one of his first published articles, a 1919 essay in his hometown (Changsha) newspaper, on a young Miss Zhao who committed suicide rather than submit to an arranged marriage. The 25-year-old Mao, who had escaped an arranged marriage himself, did not approve of the suicide, but said Miss Zhao died "because of the darkness of the social system."¹ As Christina Gilmartin would say in her detailed re-examination of the early Chinese Communists from a feminist perspective:

To the first generation of Communists, changing what they understood as "traditional" or "feudal" culture and society was inextricably connected with the

¹ As quoted in Jonathan D. Spence, *The Gate of Heavenly Peace: The Chinese and Their Revolution 1895-1980* (New York: Penguin Books, 1981), 168.

task of political transformation. Thus many Communists of the 1920s were just as concerned with reconstituting their social relationships in accordance with egalitarian principles as they were with constructing a political organization. Dedicated to the proposition that “modern” marriages had to be based on love and free choice, they created a party that functioned at once as a radical subculture for social experimentation and as a revolutionary political organization.²

In the tumultuous 1920s, in the Jiangxi Soviets that followed, in the communist-governed rural areas during the anti-Japanese war, and in the civil war that followed, as more territory was placed under communist control, Mao and his compatriots, male and female, would put together an unusual amalgam of Marxist theory, socialist egalitarianism, and practical adaptation to unique Chinese social and economic factors. The liberation of women was a subset of the liberation of all China, and the survivors of the 1920s and 1930s, who made up the core leadership of the CCP and the PRC, would institute these policies for a whole nation. Deng Yingchao, a twenty-year veteran of “woman-work,” vice chair of the All-China Democratic Women’s Federation, and, in her never-mentioned connection to the highest levels of power, the wife of Premier Zhou Enlai, would say in *People’s China*: “the emancipation of women is an integral part of the Chinese people’s liberation movement.”³

The magazines take different approaches to the topic. Some articles are overviews of women’s issues, others involve reportage on specific women — former prostitutes, downtrodden peasants, model workers, transformed housewives — and some were even first-person accounts of family life, an approach popular in *China Reconstructs*. The women in these articles often have experienced some of the worst elements of patriarchal

² Christina Kelley Gilmartin, *Engendering The Chinese Revolution: Radical Women, Communist Politics, and Mass Movements in the 1920s* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1995), 2-3.

³ PC, Mar. 1, 1950, 8.

“old” China. Women in these stories were child brides; sold into slavery, prostitution and concubinage; married off to the young, lame, aged, and infirm; forced to give up or neglect their daughters; abused by their loveless husbands for failure to produce boys; overworked, starved and beaten by their mothers-in-law; unschooled, illiterate and forbidden to work outside the home; property-less yet treated as property themselves; prisoners in their own homes, particularly older women with bound feet; beggared, dispossessed and homeless; and young widows denied remarriage. Whatever their conditions, escape was difficult or impossible, except into sex work, and divorce was rare, especially for women, who had few legal bases to seek a divorce. The only honorable way out of an arranged marriage or concubinage was suicide, which women in the articles report witnessing or hearing about in their households or neighborhoods.

Then came the communists and liberation. In Marxist theory, women’s subjugation is based not on culture but on class. According to this theory, women are dependent and unequal because they do not engage in productive labor outside the home. This theory holds that once women work outside the home, their new class and economic standing will liberate them. To this Marxist stance, Mao added property rights, based in a peasant economy. No peasant could be equal unless he owned property, and the same went for women. Women peasants needed to own property, work in the fields, and receive equal pay for equal work. In addition, while women gained property rights, men lost their former property rights in women and their children.

Under CCP policies pursued since the 1930s, the emancipation of women was inextricably bound up in the redistribution of property under land reform. The economic independence of work outside the home was often made necessary by the absence of men

away from home serving the revolutionary cause, and was made possible by new ways of caring for the well-being of children. To this new freedom for women was added the independence of free marriage and free divorce, though not while the men were away fighting.

It is this attempt to create massive social change in family relations and married life that these magazines seek to document for foreigners, many presumably familiar with the historic maltreatment of women in China. From the start and through the years, the magazines present this ongoing drive to emancipate women as successful, but also slow and fraught with difficulties. The women face persistent resistance from men, the older generation and backward mothers-in-law. Over and over, authors, whether reporters or high officials, caution that “more must be done” to gain full emancipation, and that, even as the country rushes into socialism, centuries of oppression cannot be overcome in a few years.

In short, *People's China* and *China Reconstructs* present the liberation of Chinese women as an ongoing process, happening sometimes haltingly and with struggle. This also mirrors the coverage of the campaign in *People's Daily*, Xinhua (New China News Agency) and other journals, which did not minimize the problems and in fact, sometimes covered the difficulties in far more negative detail for the home audience. The magazines, after all, were China's smiling face to the world, and accounts of murder, suicide and official misconduct were more like a scowl. Instead, the magazines celebrate the victories of women and model workers, as they also celebrate victories in industrialization, production, diplomacy, combat, armament, and agriculture. But the victories for women are tempered by continued social conflict. While this may have been “soft” social news,

in the journalistic sense contrasting it with the “hard” news of politics, economics and foreign relations, there was comparatively little softness or gentleness about the path to victory. Independent studies published in later years will confirm that, while Chinese women made significant progress in the 1950s, some of the articles in the magazines may have been overly optimistic, if not exaggerated.

Prostitutes

In *People's China*, prostitutes are shown achieving some of the first victories for women. On the night of November 21, 1949, the People's Municipal Government of Beijing closed 237 brothels, and 1,290 prostitutes were “liberated from their lives of degradation as the playthings of the wealthier classes,” the magazine reported in its third issue.⁴ Rounded up at the Women's Production and Education Institute, the prostitutes were not grateful but suspicious, filled with rumors from the brothel operators and “their Kuomintang clients” that they were to be sent off to labor camps or given as brides to “grimy-faced workers.”

[T]hey faced their first day at the institute with extreme anxiety. When they gathered together for breakfast, a few of the girls purposely created a disturbance by loudly complaining about the quality of the food. Others, playing upon the understandable uneasiness of all present, blew up this incident and tried to stage a riot. Some burst into tears and shrieked hysterically; still others mobilized a stampede to the main gate in an attempt to break out of the compound. It was four hours before the cadres could calm the women and persuade them that the authorities were genuinely trying to help them. The women were further reassured when they were allowed to go out in the afternoon to gather their personal belongings and, if they so desired, arrange for their children or mothers to live with them in the institute.⁵

⁴ PC, Feb. 1, 1950, 22.

⁵ Ibid.

All but seventy-nine of the 1,290 prostitutes (less than one percent) had venereal diseases, many were drug addicts, and eighty percent were illiterate. But with the help of women cadres, women factory workers and other Beijing women, they are treated and begin their education. After seven weeks, thirty had gone back to their families or gotten married, but the rest stay on at the institute “until they had mastered some technical skill so that they could support themselves by their own productive labours. All of them have fundamentally changed their attitude toward life and society.”

Six weeks later, in the first of what would be heavy recurring annual coverage of women’s issues to mark International Women’s Day (March 8), the magazine devotes six full pages to “The Return to Daylight: The Reformation of Peking Prostitutes.”⁶ In the article, five prostitutes detail their life stories about how they “fell into the water” to a kind and gentle women cadre, Comrade Li of the All-China Women’s Federation.

Li Pei-tsan of Chanmu, Shaanxi province, a woman with bound feet, came from a peasant family hounded by a landlord after bad harvests made it impossible to pay the rent. She eventually sells herself to an inn-keeper to pay for her father’s funeral, then is passed on to a slave dealer, “the sworn brother of the local police chief”; she catches a venereal disease and winds up in Beijing. Comrade Li fills out official forms as each story is told, and in this case, next to “Cause of Prostitution,” she writes: “Poverty, due to feudal exploitation.”

Chang Shu-chen from Hsintang in southern Hebei (Hopei) province, married to a member of the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) off fighting the Japanese, is abducted by a Guomindang (GMD) secret service agent who drags her from place to place, as he

⁶ PC, Mar. 16, 1950, 12.

steals and takes bribes.⁷ She, like the others, lands in Beijing, “But somehow, you know, I had always felt sure that the PLA would avenge me.” Cause of Prostitution:

“reactionary KMT oppression,” the women cadre jots down.

A haughty, nineteen-year-old “first-class” prostitute nicknamed Hsueh Fang (Snow Showboat) from a village south of Jinan (Tsinan), Shandong’s capital, was very proud of her “first class” status and the wealth of her clients. She had been the child-bride of a hare-lipped nine-year-old, and ran away with a man to Beijing, where she was trained for prostitution and claimed to be “well-treated.” Comrade Li says she will see things differently after she’s been at the institute for a while. Cause of prostitution: “Matrimonial maladjustment under the feudal system,” with the notation: “class origin — landlord,” her haughty attitude perhaps reflecting her class background. She obviously needed re-education on several fronts.

Liu Hsiao-chen from Shankou, Manchuria, was sold to a morphine-addicted opera singer after the Japanese killed her parents and carried off her brother. She is eventually handed over to a man who takes her to a brothel. When she fails to get a GMD license for prostitution, she becomes an illegal prostitute. “My days and nights were one round of humiliation and beatings. I thought only death could release me from sufferings.”⁸ Cause of prostitution, writes Comrade Li: “imperialism.”

⁷ As in the previous chapter, names of well-known people and places are shown in the now standard *pinyin* phonetic spelling, and the Wade-Giles spelling as used in the magazines is in parentheses. Names of lesser known people and places are written as they appear in the magazines.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 24.

All the stories are told in great emotional detail, and once Li has heard all those from her group, clearly moved, she lectures them: “Dear fellow sisters, you may think that you have lost your freedom. No, you have regained it. . . . Of all the feudalistic and capitalistic methods of enslaving women, prostitution is the worst.”

What may have sounded like instructive morality tales, are actually turned into stories of political and economic oppression, and they demonstrate that the way out for the women is political and economic. At the institute, “their days were crowded with political lectures and discussion meetings, vocational classes, literacy courses and group games,” plus medical treatment.

The turning point in the saga of their rehabilitation is the miserable rendition of a fifth prostitute who slid down a string of hardships that took her from being a young, pretty, first-class prostitute to her final status as a degraded fourth-class hooker. “By the time she finished her story, all the girls in the room were in tears,” says the author, Hsiao Kan, though it seems obvious that parts of the chronology are reconstructed from later interviews or reports. The “girls” are ready to reform, training on the institute’s textile looms, weaving and spinning machines. “Many of the girls, especially the younger ones, do not want anything to do with men for a while. Their one desire is to become working women and obtain economic independence.”⁹

In the final twist to this narrative of liberation, Chang Shu-chen’s PLA husband tracks her down and in their reunion, sympathizes with her suffering and calms her fears of rejection due to her sordid journey. “I joined the revolution to destroy that corrupt

⁹ Ibid., 26.

society ... Now it has been swept away, and we can forget the past. It is only the future that counts now.”

There is no way of knowing how much of these tales are accurate or embellished, but we do know that what is described was a process that was going on all over China at the time. Gail Hershatter recounts in detail the process that accompanied the abolition of prostitution in Shanghai, which occurred a year after it took place in Beijing.¹⁰ The work with the prostitutes at the women’s institute in Shanghai closely conforms to their rehabilitation as described in *People’s China*: the telling of their life tales in front of their fellow prostitutes; the medical care for their considerable health problems; the literacy education; the job training and encouragement to take up productive work; the political re-education with the women cadres, who, in the case of Shanghai, were initially unenthusiastic about their work with the low-life prostitutes. The stories of the prostitutes were widely publicized, abroad and at home, as examples of the exploitation, abuse, and oppression of “old China,” as compared to the strong, modern, and healthy “new China.” The eradication of what has been called “the world oldest profession” was a source of pride; after all, while perhaps not as blatant or as widespread as it was in Beijing or Shanghai, prostitution still persisted in the United States and Europe. The Shanghai cadre in charge of its eradication called it “the most complex and difficult” of the reform tasks after liberation, and one warmly received by Shanghai residents, as publicized in the daily newspapers there.¹¹

¹⁰ Gail Hershatter, *Dangerous Pleasures: Prostitution and Modernity in Twentieth-Century Shanghai* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 304-24.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 515-517.

There is no further mention of prostitution in the magazines, except to say it has been eliminated. But the detailing of what led to its horrors brings up stock characters and themes in the magazines' presentations of "old China" — merciless landlords, abusive husbands, ill-matched marriages, GMD corruption, Japanese imperialism. The process of rehabilitation and liberation depicts the familiar elements of the road out of enslavement: the rescuing PLA, solicitous CCP women cadres, public confession and self-criticism, free health care, literacy education and job training — all leading to the women's ultimate liberator, productive work outside the home.

Common Program

In the same issue in which "The Return to Daylight" appears, Deng Yingchao lays out the past year's progress in an article headlined "Chinese Women Help Build New China."¹² The first All-China Women's Congress had already been held in March 1949, six months before official establishment of the nation, and it emphasized giving women a greater role "in the restoration and development of industrial and agricultural production." Deng, who would write several times on women's issues over the years, recounts the advance of women workers in Beijing and the locales where the CCP gained earlier control in northeast China. More women have joined trade unions, more are in heavy industry, more women are model workers (see below), and increasing numbers are engaged in agriculture "in the older liberated countryside. Here the saying 'marry to get clothed and fed' is no longer true, and labour has become an honourable thing."¹³ In these regions, the peasants "now own the land they till" and fifty to seventy percent of

¹² PC, Mar. 16, 1950, 3.

¹³ Ibid., 4.

rural women work in the fields. In these areas, “a good part” of the district and village personnel are women.

More than ten percent of the delegates to the first session of the Chinese People’s Consultative Congress were women (69 of them), and Deng herself is on the Standing Committee of the PCC’s National Committee. “[F]or the first time in China’s history, women enjoyed full political freedom and rights.” The PCC passed the Common Program, the first version of a national constitution, which spread the rights of women and children that had been instituted in the liberated areas to the entire country. Among these rights in the Common Program, she quotes:

The People’s Republic of China shall abolish the feudal system which holds women in bondage. Women shall enjoy equal rights with men in political, economic, cultural, educational and social life. Freedom of marriage for men and women shall be put into effect. (*Article 6*) The special interests of juvenile and women workers shall be safeguarded. (*Article 32*) National physical culture shall be promoted. Public health and medical work shall be expanded and attention shall be paid to the protection of the health of mothers, infants and children. (*Article 48*)¹⁴

The Common Program, while consistent with communist practice in the liberated areas for a decade, was a joint declaration of all the parties in the new state. It represented an early compromise between the communist and the liberal intellectuals in the other “democratic” parties — hence the term, Common Program.

Model Workers and Firsts

In the first years of the PRC, there are few subjects more consistently covered in domestic Chinese newspapers than model workers, both male and female, and the first women in traditionally male occupations. The same is true in the magazines produced for

¹⁴ Ibid.

foreigners. A PC photo spread on March 16, 1950, headlined “Women Labourers in National Reconstruction,” shows grinning women railway workers, industrial workers, and village leaders. A photo page and story in the next issue highlights “The First Women Locomotive Workers in China,” in which all the jobs on the train are performed by women.¹⁵ Thousands cheer as the train pulls out of the Dairen station. “Learn from the Soviet women,” shouts the crowd. Women workers in these stories often cite inspiration from Soviet films and magazines that show women working in industry.

The locomotive driver, Tien Kwei-ying, who would become a nationwide propaganda model, is inspired by a political lecture from a male Comrade Li. “The old society maltreated the workers, and the workers in turn maltreated their women. Women therefore were the most exploited of all beings ... To become really free, women must take part in social labour. Only when women are economically free can they find true political and social freedom.” Thinking of her mother and her mother’s friends, Tien breaks into tears: “She had always thought of marriage as an escape to a newer and happier life. But it had been a dream, nothing but a dream of slavery in another form.” Viewing a photo exhibit of Soviet women workers impels her to ask for training, over the objections of the men in her factory and her own father, who wants to marry her off. She persists, and after grumbling among the older workers, a Soviet advisor rebukes the men: “If you are indifferent or opposed to women becoming skilled locomotive workers, you just don’t know where your own interests lie. ... If your women folk work and earn their living, they free both themselves and you.” This article also connects two powerful indicators of China’s modernization — emancipated working women and railroads —

¹⁵ PC, Apr. 1, 1950, 16-18.

with a third persistent theme — emulation of the Soviet “elder brother,” who lectures the Chinese men on their duties. The building of rail lines to connect the remotest parts of China is headline news in this era, and the story above connects these women to economic modernization.

A similar dynamic is at work in the coverage of another model worker, Liang Chun, “A Girl on a Tractor,” who supposedly became the first women tractor driver in China during her late teens in pre-1949 communist-controlled northeast China.¹⁶ A native of Mingshun County in Heilongjiang province, Liang grew up as a farm hand for a landlord. Admiring depictions of Soviet women workers in magazines and films, she applies for tractor-driver school, and becomes the only girl in the class of seventy. The male students are astonished and the teacher grumbles, “This isn’t women’s work. It’s too dirty.” She persists and drives a tractor in two months, eventually teaching other women to drive tractors. In rising stages, Liang becomes a CCP member, a model worker, a delegate to the Woman’s Federation, and a symbol whose picture “has fired the imagination of countless Chinese girls. Her name is as well known as heroes of old. ... Her tractors have transformed part of the Great Northern Wasteland into a fertile granary.” This story too connects powerful themes of China’s economic advance: productive women and mechanized farming leading to increased agricultural output.

Tien was the role model cited by the women tram drivers of Beijing featured in the first issue of *China Reconstructs* 20 months later, after the crew had been front page news in daily newspapers of the time.¹⁷ Li Yun-Hua, 20, would write an essay for her

¹⁶ PC, Feb. 16, 1951, 16-17.

¹⁷ CR, Jan.-Feb. 1952, 34.

night school class, “The same woman — trash of the old days, but talent of the new society.” The unnamed author of the CR article reports an elderly male passenger on the tram saying with admiration: “Women are doing everything nowadays. We already have labour and combat heroines, women government leaders and workers, scientists, tractor drivers and railway engineers. And now we have women tram drivers in Peking.”

Inspired by such stories in the popular press, women workers in the railway office press to become train crews, part of the overall improvement in Chinese rail service.¹⁸ All in their late teens and early twenties, these new women conductors, in addition to their normal duties, provide important information about government policies and reform measures. One woman must argue with her mother-in-law, who wants her to stay at home with her young son, but her husband favors the train duty for her. The mother-in-law winds up watching the youngster, while the daughter-in-law plies the route from Tianjin to Beijing. “I never knew the meaning of independence. I do now. I earn a salary myself.”

There are firsts written about in other fields, such as the first women pilots and the first women oil-survey crews, and women in other conventionally male fields such as a construction foreman.¹⁹ Model women workers are portrayed engaging in customarily female occupations, such as textiles plants, and repeated articles discuss women acting as village leaders, district chiefs and so on. These women had been promoted as exemplars by party and government officials, and their stories are recounted in multiple domestic media organs. The two magazines sometimes report on the same models or firsts, though in different styles and formats at different times. The use of models to promote desired

¹⁸ PC, May 1, 1951, 40.

¹⁹ PC, Mar. 16, 1955, 19.

changes in behavior and attitude was longstanding practice in Soviet magazines that the CCP had made part of its arsenal for social change.

The Marriage Law of 1950

Underlying all this progress is the Marriage Law of May 1, 1950 — International Labor Day and one of new China's three major holidays. It was the first major national law promulgated after liberation, and represents the codification of the policies towards women and children developed in the late 1940s.²⁰ *People's China* publishes the law in its entirety, though it takes up just three pages in the publication, since the law is short, simply written, and straightforward, leaving much room for local interpretation, as we shall see.²¹ Under General Principles, it states:

Article 1. The arbitrary and compulsory feudal marriage system arrangement, which is based on the superiority of man over woman, and which ignores the interests of the children, is abolished.

The New Democratic marriage system, which is based on free choice of partners, on monogamy, on equal rights for both sexes, and on the protection of the lawful interests of women and children, is put into effect.

Article 2. Polygamy, concubinage, child betrothal, interference in the remarriage of widows, and the exaction of money or gifts in connection with marriages shall be prohibited. ...

Article 8. Husband and wife are duty bound to love, respect, assist and look after each other, to live in harmony, to engage in productive work, to care for the children and to strive jointly for the welfare of the family and for the building up of a new society.

²⁰ For instance, On Dec. 20, 1948, the CCP Central Committee issued a sweeping decision on woman-work in the liberated areas: "Under New Democratic Government, all laws of the old society which constrained or mistreated women and forced them into a humiliating position of obedience have ceased to exist. The new laws guaranteeing absolute equality of the sexes in the economy, in politics and in society have been formulated." From "Decisions of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party on woman-work at present in the countryside of the liberated areas," Dec. 20, 1948 as quoted in Delia Davin, *Woman-Work: Women and the Party in Revolutionary China* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), 203.

²¹ PC, June 16, 1950, 28-30.

The husband must be at least twenty years of age; the wife, eighteen. They “enjoy equal status in the home,” can choose their own jobs, “have equal rights in the possession and management of family property,” can inherit property from each other, and may use his or her own family name. Infanticide is banned, but features of the traditional family are kept in place: parents must rear and educate their children; children must support and assist their parents. In fact, nearly a third of the law is about children: whose they are and who supports and educates them after divorce.

A key component of the new law is the requirement to register a contract of marriage with the local government. Under the traditional system, marriage was a contract between two families, but here state power comes into play for the first time. The representative of the local government, typically a cadre, must approve the contract, and make sure both parties are truly giving their free consent.

While the new land law gave women property rights, and the marriage law enforced those provisions, husbands clearly have no property rights in women, no right to sell them to someone else.

A hugely significant feature is the legislation’s codification of the right of divorce. In fact, half the new law is spent on the terms and conditions of divorce, a fact that led some cadres to refer to it as the “divorce law” or “women’s law” rather than the Marriage Law.²² Divorce was automatic if mutually agreed to, but if only one party desired it, it was left to the decision of the local cadre or judge, a major move away from

²² “Directive of the Government Administrative Council concerning the thorough enforcement of the Marriage Law, dated February 1st, 1953,” in M.J. Meijer, *Marriage Law and Policy in the Chinese People’s Republic* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1971), 304.

the “free” divorce of the Jiangxi Soviet in 1934 or the liberated areas under the 1948 rules.

The Marriage Law of 1950 in all its ramifications, even when not alluded to explicitly, is the underlying driver of all the major themes involving women and children manifest in *People’s China* and *China Reconstructs* over the next few years. The freedom to marry or not, exemplified by ex-prostitutes and model workers; the priority of productive work outside the home; the care and education of children are all subjects the magazines repeat over and over again, in combination or separately.

Accompanying the printing of the new law in that June 1950 issue is a story that illustrates its provisions: “New Ways of Doing New Things: How a Young Peasant Couple Got Married in a Little Village of New China.” The piece also illustrates the long-standing social traditions that must be confronted in implementing the law. Unlike stories mentioned earlier and after this, this story is not placed in a specific village, county or province; Feng-lan, the bride, has no family name; and the extensive dialogue that occurs over several days in several locations must clearly be reconstructed, if not invented. Short stories and fiction in the magazine are labeled as such in future issues, but it is not clear whether this reportage is fact or fiction, or a combination of both.

Nevertheless, it is instructive about the new law. While the parents agree to the match, the groom, Wang Kwei-teh, a cadre in the regional government, and Feng-lan, “a model worker,” have clearly chosen each other. The girl must argue at length with her father to prevent him from offering a dowry of grain, especially since it is supposed to be set aside till the harvest comes in. The boy’s mother is equally upset at the lack of gifts from the girl’s family. He chides his mother for her concerns about sedan-chairs for the

bride and other “feudal nonsense.” “You shouldn’t do new things according to old customs ... these days one can have a bright face by enriching the family through production.” Hearing the argument, the village leader asks the groom’s mother whether she would prefer a daughter-in-law with a dowry and no work skills, or one that is a good producer. “We are peasants. We would choose the one who can work.” At the ceremony itself, with Chairman Mao’s portrait on the wall, the village leader, who remains nameless, affirms that the two “have chosen each other of their free will.” They’re good workers and thrifty, spending little on the ceremony and celebration, another break with the past. The villagers are not completely understanding, but one old woman approves: “Yes, it’s not bad, this simple wedding. In my days, I had to sit in a sedan-chair and I felt dizzy the moment I entered it — to spend money for torture. This wedding is far better, both frugal and smart.”

Resistance to change is a common theme in many articles on the marriage law. There is continued opposition from the older generation, parents, fathers, mothers-in-law and male co-workers to free choice marriage, schooling, work outside the home and other measures of equality for women. When the “old people” of Chaoyang village near Hulan county in Sungkiang province (now part of Heilongjiang) heard of the new Marriage Law, “the old people felt it was an outrage to modesty. ... But all the young men and women were overjoyed.”²³

An article run in conjunction with Women’s Day in 1951, “Freed From Unhappiness,” by Yang Yu, who writes several times on women’s issues, is not idyllic,

²³ CR, Jan.-Feb. 1951, 40.

but offers three cases histories “where the new law meant a new start in life.”²⁴ The women recite their tales almost entirely in their own words in unbroken first-person narratives.

Liu Shu-cheng is twelve, daughter of a horn-player; her family is forced into the streets of Beijing as beggars when they can't pay the rent. Homeless and penniless, a friend tells them another household is looking for a daughter-in-law, and “would send presents to the bride's family.” Desperate, the family agrees, and Liu is sent outside the city to Elm Tree Village where she meets her future “husband,” Chow Hsiao-chiu, Little Pig — “A boy of ten with a dirty face and some stones in his hands.” But this “little daughter-in-law,” true to custom, is more servant than family, up early feeding the pigs, fowl and cattle, cooking breakfast, washing, collecting firewood, doing chores from dawn to dark. “And when I couldn't get through my work on time, mother-in-law would beat and scold,” while her “husband” played with other children, and if she tried to join them, he too would beat her. Then the Communists arrive in 1949; under land reform, her father-in-law lost his holdings, but her mother, who came to live in the village, is given redistributed land, and her father joined the PLA, getting to play his instrument again. Her father realizes it was wrong to marry her off to Little Pig, and that child marriage is now forbidden. But the in-laws won't give her up, demanding repayment of the corn they paid for her and money for the food she ate. Finally, the girl and parents go to People's Court and Liu testifies she wants to return to her parents, but her mother-in-law complains. “The judge was stern,” Liu recounts. “He said: ‘She has more than repaid you with her work.’ For once mother-in-law was silent! And so I got my freedom. My father

²⁴ PC, Mar. 1, 1951, 21-23.

and the cadre who had helped us sent me to school. I am learning to read and write.”²⁵

“Her childhood has started again,” says the narrator. Around her neck, Liu Shu-cheng wears the red kerchief of the Young Pioneers.

Chien Yu, twenty-nine, is a nurse in Sichuan province who had been widowed for thirteen years; she couldn't help but be excited when women cadres sent her the Marriage Law with the passage forbidding “interference with the remarriage of widows.” Her marriage had been arranged to a second cousin when she was two. As he lay dying fourteen years later, his mother hoped the wedding ceremony would revive him, but he was already unconscious when Chen arrived, and she became a widow at sixteen. “A good girl never marries twice,” her in-laws insisted, lest she disgrace the family. Eventually, her late husband's brother comes home, and they fall in love, “yet to love him was a mortal sin.” He tells his mother of the relationship, and she “branded me a shameless woman who had killed one son and tried to bewitch the other.” When women cadres come to her house, they tell her of the Marriage Law, and she realizes she can remarry. She does, attends training school, and now is a nurse at a PLA hospital in Chongqing.

Wang Shu, now thirty-two, went to work in an antique store after her parents had died and her brother had lost his job when the Japanese captured Beijing. The aged owner of the shop plies her with gifts, and then, against her will, takes Wang as his seventh concubine, where she is trapped and not allowed to leave. Just before liberation, her husband flees, the other concubines split the remaining goods, and Wang stays behind.

²⁵ Ibid., 22.

Women cadres come to see her, and they persuade her that she must learn a trade to make a better life.

If I don't find a job and work myself, I will have to find my old husband some day or marry a man to support me, and my miserable life might start all over again. But the cadres already introduced me to work in a textile factory. I shall get a divorce and from now on I should work for my own living. Truly my life is beginning again. [The narrator concludes:] A glance at Wang Shu's capable hands and pretty face left no doubt that she would find happiness in work and a new, true marriage.²⁶

The situations are perhaps a bit too neat and didactic, but as the narrator says of the last case, "Strange as her story is, it was not strange for old Peking, nor is the ending strange for new Peking." The three stories offer up themes that would be repeated in later articles over the years — child brides, arranged marriages, exploitative mothers-in-law — and the solution to these problems — the Marriage Law, productive work and education.

Dozens of articles emphasize that it is productive work outside the home that make women truly equal. In September 1955, there were two million women employed as factory and office workers, five times as many as in 1949.²⁷ Hundreds of thousands of women work in traditional male industrial jobs. But winning jobs customarily held by men and getting equal pay for equal work in these jobs continue to be difficult. Men persist in insisting that women on farms and in factories can't do the same jobs or work as hard, and the women must prove them wrong. There is even the rare nod in *China Reconstructs* to the role of housewives — "Now I've begun to see that good

²⁶ Ibid., 23.

²⁷ PC, March 1, 1956, 27.

housekeeping helps the country” —but that is in response to a query from an English housewife who subscribes to the magazine.²⁸

Hand in hand with productive work is the need for women workers to be literate and educated. Otherwise, the women will not have the skills to run machinery or supervise factories and agricultural production. “A high level of culture is necessary to take part in the management of production,” says a female textile worker in a first-hand account.²⁹ The need for education applies to older workers and grandmothers as well. There is an extensive literacy campaign throughout the country. Deng Yingchao reports in 1952 that forty-two million peasants are in “winter” schools, half of them women, and fourteen million in spare-time schools. Seventy-eight percent of the students in Beijing spare-time schools are women, and they comprise sixty-five percent of the adult evening students.³⁰ But despite that, “the majority of women are still illiterate.” And men in some areas continue to resist the education of their wives and daughters.

A June 1, 1951 article ties together three basic reforms and in its conclusion provides the first allusions to serious problems in enforcement of the law. “The Growth of a New Outlook on Marriage” by Ling Mei-li explicitly connects land reform, marriage reform and labor reform.³¹ Without land reform, “the [Marriage] Law by itself would not have been practical among the rural masses. ... This new economic independence ... is the groundwork upon which the Marriage Law is based, and the foundation on which the

²⁸ CR, Aug. 1958, 26.

²⁹ PC, June 1, 1954, 13.

³⁰ PC, Dec. 1, 1952, 11.

³¹ PC, June 1, 1951, 14-15.

New Democratic social relationship between men and women is based.” For the urban working class, the Labour Insurance Regulations of 1951 contribute to this equality.

In Linshien County, Pingyuan province (a combination of northern Henan and western Shandong that was dissolved after two years in 1952), young women set up conditions their “sweethearts” must abide by, including allowing the women to attend “spare-time schools,” meetings and mutual aid groups. Couples throughout the country “hold emulation drives to create new records.” In Xinan (Hsinan) County, Hebei (Hopei), a nineteen-year-old Youth League member “fell in love” with another member, but this infuriates her father, who wants to arrange a marriage; as they argue, he tries to beat her and is still indignant after a district government cadre explains the law. The couple gets happily married, and the husband’s family is delighted with their new daughter-in-law.

For many of the villagers, this marriage was proof of the superiority of marriage based on freedom of choice. In many similar instances, though not always, such marriages have not only served as living proof to others but have by their success and obvious happiness mollified the parents’ feeling of outrage and eventually won them over.³²

Thousands of free choice marriages are taking place all over China, the article concludes.

The freedom to choose is presented as a boon to both men and women, but it is the women who seem especially appreciative. The choice of spouse is based on two major criteria: romantic love and industriousness. Women in several stories also establish “conditions” for their future spouses, stipulations about what they will be permitted to do, primarily schooling and work. Villagers and “diehard” parents still find the free choice notion “strange.”³³

³² Ibid.

³³ PC, Mar. 1, 1952, 27. “The Women of Wu Village” by Yang Yu.

“Romantic love” was an element of Chinese drama, opera and literature, even in peasant operas.³⁴ But as a basis for marriage, it is a very Western and modern concept. Arranged marriages are uniformly presented as loveless, while young women and men in work brigades, youth groups and factories “fall in love” repeatedly, against their parents objections. Typifying this new romantic approach is a dramatic narrative set to music in the *ping ju* style of northern Hebei. Called “Little Son-in-Law,” it is an updated version of an old folk tale in which a girl, denied marriage to the man she loves, is forcibly married off to an eleven-year-old boy, a decision her parents come to regret. She is saved by the proclamation of the Marriage Law, “is divorced from her little husband and marries the man she loves.” The drama reportedly played to over 300,000 theatergoers in Beijing, and audiences in most of the big cities in China and throughout the rural countryside as well.³⁵

Freedom of choice offers relief for the victims of arranged marriages. An incident in Lingchan district, Shaanxi (Shensi) province, is called “typical.” Despite protests and tears, Wang Yu-hsia must marry the husband arranged for her at fourteen. Her husband “treated her like a bought animal,” and her in-laws scold and beat her. Suicide or death seem to be only possible release, until the Marriage Law is propagandized in her village. She applies for a divorce, “the case was investigated carefully, and the divorce granted.” Wang, now in her late twenties, falls in love with another man in the village, and they marry, apparently energizing her industriousness, a new quality sought in mates that a

³⁴ R. David Arkush, “Love and Marriage in North Chinese Peasant Operas,” in Perry Link, Richard Madsen, Paul G. Pickowicz, *Unofficial China: Popular Culture and Thought in the People’s Republic* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1989), 73.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 40.; Friedman, Edward, Paul G. Pickowicz, and Mark Selden, with Kay Ann Johnson, *Chinese Village, Socialist State* (New Haven: Yale, 1991), 121.

number of articles mention. “She helps her husband sow and plough. Out of the profits of her own side-occupations, she has purchased two pigs and more than 20 chickens. She has never been ill or idle for a single day since her divorce.”

An even newer criterion for choosing a mate is hard work, productivity and a progressive political outlook. “He must be industrious in production and advanced in ideology,” Deng Yingchao says in December 1952.³⁶ “I like him because he’s hard working,” a young girl pleads with her resisting parents.³⁷ The minister of Justice explains:

There is a basic difference in the concept of mate-choosing under the new marriage law from that of the so-called “freedom of marriage” of the capitalist countries. Instead of considering wealth or genealogy, young men and women look for progressiveness of thought, activeness and diligence.³⁸

One girl in Liaohsi province tries to justify her love over the objections of her father to the young man’s poverty. But, she says, her intended husband “works hard, is progressive in thought, and has good working style relationships with his fellow workers.”³⁹ While this may seem a new way to assess the matches, the ability to support a family was an important factor considered in arranged marriages, and was bound to please the parents.

“Another typical case of emancipation from the dead hand of the past,” as writer Ling Mei-li puts it, was the situation of Wang Wu-lan, a widow in “a certain village” in Yunhsien County, Fujian (Fukien) province — a relatively rare instance when that

³⁶ PC, Dec. 1, 1952, 11.

³⁷ CR, Jan.-Feb. 1951, 40.

³⁸ PC, Jun. 1, 1952, 32.

³⁹ Ibid.

southern coastal province is mentioned in these magazines, probably due to the great distance from Beijing, where the magazines are based. She wanted to remarry, but this was “bitterly opposed by the old men of the village,” who called remarriage “indecent and an affront to society.” The local government called a mass meeting of the whole village to explain that remarriage was legal and to discuss “the objections of the old men based on their backward ideology.” This meeting not only “overcame the objections,” but “was an education for all the villagers.”

The article reports that the great majority of the applicants for divorce are women who were forced into marriage or who were victims of arranged nuptials. In Chongqing and South Sichuan, among the latest areas to be liberated and places where divorce by women was unheard of, even in cases of beatings, torture and neglect, people’s courts granted divorces to 7,000 women with unhappy or forced marriages. Besides free choice of partners, for women, the right to divorce and end arranged and abusive marriages was the primary benefit of the new law. There were hundreds of thousands of divorces. In the first four months of the law, divorces in fifteen cities and eleven counties doubled, and seventy to ninety percent of those were by women who had been in marriages involving sale, purchase, arrangement, cruelty or bigamy.⁴⁰ Yet, divorce and remarriage are met with the same kind of disapproval as is the remarriage of widows. Old women spit on the ground in contempt of both.⁴¹ And cadres continue to be reluctant to grant divorces. In

⁴⁰ PC, June 1, 1952, 10.

⁴¹ PC, Mar. 1, 1953, 22.

one case, a woman whose husband repeatedly beats her is turned down three times before she is granted a divorce.⁴²

The Marriage Law allegedly produced happier families. A survey of two Chongqing factories found the majority of husbands no longer interfere with their wives activities, and antagonism and bickering are in decline. A poor peasant testifies to its benefits; he never had enough land or money for a wife, or to pay a matchmaker. Now, he's got a "free choice" bride and they compete in mutual aid teams, though his wife's mother was opposed to the match since she received no payment for the bride. But seeing their happiness and industry, she begins to come around.

Clearly, lots of people require more time and more persuasion, "particularly in the countryside."

Feudal ideology and the conventions reflected in the people's family relations and in relations between men and women cannot be liquidated by a single stroke nor without struggle ... to break through conservatism.

Education in the Law's full aims must be long-term and painstaking ... Even where deviations take place as a result of certain cadres carrying remnants of a feudal outlook towards women into their application of the Law, or in instances of mechanical interpretation of the right to divorce, or indifference to the Law itself, full exposure and criticism of those responsible has resulted in further educating the entire community in the Law's superiority over the old customs.⁴³

The previous articles were quoted and described at some length to give the flavor of the publications, and their style. The articles are almost invariably related from a woman's point of view, and are often written by women writers, or at least seem to be. They raise the similar significant themes that are interwoven through dozens of stories,

⁴² CR, March 1955, 7.

⁴³ Ibid., 29.

reports and essays over the next five years. The themes are both interrelated and consistent over time, clearly centered in a revolutionary discourse and Marxist thought. In 1954, we do see some new themes regarding women emerge that reflect their further emancipation, at least in the cities. These newer themes focus on women's political equality, the ability to vote, and to hold party and government office.

Other persistent themes already evidenced in the early years of the Marriage Law include abusive mothers-in-law, problematic men, family violence and discrimination against widows. No mothers-in-law are kind and gentle, only women cadres. Some of these beastly oldsters are reformed through education and struggle, but as a class they are foul-mouthed and abusively violent shrews. Only landlords are portrayed more harshly in the stories. Yet oddly, mothers-in-law can also be the benign grandmas who take care of the children while the wife goes out to work. And they can mend their ways. Says one mother-in-law to her daughter-in-law after a quarrel: "The law is right. Men and women should be equal. Mothers-in-laws and daughters-in-law should also live in harmony, we are all human beings. It was my old-fashioned mind that messed up everything and I'll have to change."⁴⁴ Part of this old-fashioned mind was the general acceptance by daughters-in-law that they would be under the thumb of their husband's mother, who could mistreat them at will if she wanted. These wives in turn expected that when the son they were expected to produce brought home a wife, the new daughter-in-law would be subject to the same maltreatment.

While Old China is consistently bad, and New China is constantly improving and striving, mothers-in-law are among the most recalcitrant of groups attached to the old

⁴⁴ CR, July-Aug. 1952, 49.

way. It becomes hard to believe that some mothers-in-law would not take pity on at least some daughters-in-law. If they were all so hard-hearted and unsympathetic, how could so many of them in these stories, though not the majority, be so easily persuaded to see the error of their ways?

There is considerable ambivalence about men, who clearly fall into three categories: good guys, bad guys and toss-ups. Good guys include sweethearts, study mates, PLA soldiers and male cadres (mostly). Bad guys are landlords, mocking coworkers, standoffish fellow students, and *all* husbands in arranged marriages. Toss-ups can be most anyone, and Spring Festival turns many good guys into drunks and gamblers. Many men in rural Henan, for instance, find the new equality with women embarrassing.⁴⁵

The beating of women by parents-in-law (often), husbands, parents (occasionally), landlords, brothel clients, GMD and Japanese soldiers, and employers is so consistently mentioned that it represents a dark underside to Chinese domestic life. Even after liberation, a mother-in-law beats a woman with a poker for not carrying a heavy pail of water. Only a comrade threatening her with prison time causes her to cease. “After liberation ... wife-beating came to a sudden end” in a Henan (Honan) village, one writer reports, but this is contradicted by examples. On the other hand, one woman, routinely set upon before, now works in the co-op, earning her own food and clothes. “Men haven’t got the whip hand nowadays,” she says.⁴⁶ But a culture of such pervasive

⁴⁵ PC, Jan. 1, 1955, 36.

⁴⁶ PC, Jan. 1, 1953, 39.

domestic violence was unlikely to disappear overnight, since later social research shows such abuse tends to be a communicable social disease passed down generations.

Women whose husbands have died faced a life-time of isolated widowhood, based on the prevailing social convention that prohibited remarriage. When her brother-in-law and brother fail to persuade a widow to commit suicide rather than remarry, they beat her to death, the Justice minister reports.⁴⁷ Urged to remarry by a cadre, one Hebei woman still faces criticism for her intentions at village mass sessions.⁴⁸ In 1956, even a widowed Beijing nurse is worried about the “humiliation” of her daughter as she contemplates remarriage.⁴⁹

With continued resistance to women’s emancipation on many fronts, there is general and frequent acknowledgement that the early campaign made insufficient progress. “In places that were liberated later, much still remains to be done,” says *China Reconstructs* in “Marriage Law Brings Happiness.”⁵⁰ Writing two years after the implementation of the Marriage Law, Justice Minister Shih Liang, a woman and vice president of the Women’s Federation, says it most starkly: “The reactionary feudal marriage system ... has a deep rooted influence in the masses that can not be swept away in this short period of time. ... We regard [implementing the law] as a constant, serious, political task,” though the government is determined of victory.⁵¹

⁴⁷ Ibid., 9.

⁴⁸ PC, Mar. 1, 1953, 22.

⁴⁹ CR, Jan. 1956, 28.

⁵⁰ CR, May-June 1952, 46-48.

⁵¹ PC, June 1, 1952, 32.

The 1953 Campaign

Faced with continuing problems, in March 1953 the government began a major campaign for greater enforcement of the Marriage Law, including sending teams of social workers to the countryside. *People's China* and *China Reconstructs* carry extensive coverage of this campaign. In one of her most militant pieces, "Breaking the Yoke of the Feudal Marriage System," Deng Yingchao describes successes in some regions of the country, and problems in others, particularly those most recently liberated.⁵² (Land reform, the redistribution of landlord holdings to all the peasants after liberation, generally preceded or operated in tandem with marriage reform.) In Xi'an (Sian), from January to August 1952, over ninety percent of the marriages were free choice. In Lanzhou (Lanchow), Gansu (Kansu) province, only thirty-six percent of marriages registered in 1950 were freely entered into, but the next year it was ninety-eight percent. Divorce is much easier and more widespread, but couples are actually urged to reconcile rather than divorce, "to remold their old family relations on a new basis of harmony and co-operation." A survey of one village found only 0.5 percent of families were not living in harmony, although this seems an unbelievably low figure in any circumstance. But the feudal outlook remains firmly rooted in many places, and cannot be eliminated in three years or less. "The Marriage Law has been unevenly carried out in various places on account of the vast size of the country and the differences in the times" each place was liberated and the differences in "the scope and success" of the work to implement it. "Thus even at the present time compulsory 'arranged marriages' on the feudal model are still being made, the exchange of 'gifts' on marriage is still current, the feudal attitude of

⁵² PC, March 1, 1953, 8-12.

despising women still exists and freedom of marriage is often violently interfered with.” This explains why the campaign was launched.

But Deng and others make clear the movement is fundamentally different from the land reform which aimed at eliminating the landlord class completely. The marriage reform is a matter of “ ‘ideological remoulding,’ to eliminate the influence of reactionary social customs within the consciousness of the people.” The people resisting the Marriage Law are not “class enemies,” as are the landlords.

Six months later, *China Reconstructs*’ staff writer Fang Yen, a former Xinhua reporter and a woman, uncovers more persistent problems and less progress in “Making the Marriage Law Work.”⁵³ In northern Jiangsu (Kiangsu) province in 1952, there were nearly twice as many arranged betrothals as free choice marriages, and some involved children. Brides were still bought and sold, as was also true in Shanxi (Shansi) and in areas of northeast China. Other old practices persisted: grown women were engaged to infants, girls were sold into slavery, and widows were abducted. Young women were committing suicide when they couldn’t marry freely, and those who did become free choice brides were sometimes killed for their trouble.

The extent of the nationwide campaign was impressive: 3.5 million cadres were trained, almost three million books were published, and 1.1 million posters were printed. In the East China region alone, there were 1.1 million lecturers, and thirty-thousand amateur theatrical groups performing. The daily press and radio were full of material on the law. Fang brands the campaign a success in changing attitudes, reconciling families, creating harmony and getting more women out working in the fields and factories.

⁵³ CR, Sept.-Oct. 1953, 31-34.

After 1953, there are still occasional articles about marriage and the family, particularly in *China Reconstructs*, but there is much less than before in *People's China*. But there is continuing coverage of women as political and economic equals. A 1954 pictorial shows "China's Women at the General Election," casting their ballots along with Soong Ching Ling.⁵⁴ There continue to be stories of women workers, and the occasional story about women village leaders.⁵⁵ Most of the March 1, 1955 issue is devoted to women in connection with International Women's Day, with an emphasis on "New China's Women in State Affairs."⁵⁶

A rare return to marriage issues is a long June 1957 account of "A Suit for Divorce" that is almost the stuff of a celebrity magazine or tabloid. It also is one of the rare, if not the only, detailed accounts in either magazine of a formal court proceeding. A well-known film director attempted to divorce his actress wife, allegedly after he carried on an affair with another woman. "We weren't much in love," the director insists, but the wife contradicts him: "We'd been head over heels in love for three years before we got married." The couple trade charges back and forth in a front of a young woman judge and two lay members of the three-member judicial panel, and friends are called in to testify. The court ultimately rejects the director's petition for divorce, ruling for the woman, as she had asked and popular sentiment would have dictated, based on the Marriage Law campaigns.

⁵⁴ PC, Mar. 16, 1954, centerfold.

⁵⁵ "Women Textile Workers, Then and Now," a first-hand account by a textile worker, PC, Jun. 16, 1954, 13; "She Serves the People," PC, Dec. 16, 1954.

⁵⁶ PC, Mar. 1, 1955, 15.

Two issues before its last in 1957, *People's China* does run a six-page article on "New Marriages, New Families."⁵⁷ Zuo Songfen (Tso Sung-fen) of the Women's Federation describes widespread acceptance of free choice marriage, except for remote areas and among national minorities. At the federation, in earlier years, those cadres in charge of reconciliation work among married couples "were the busiest ... Now they are having less and less to do," while those in charge of promoting education, culture and recreation have the most to do. In 1956, cases of marital discord handled by federation workers were only forty-three percent of what they had been in 1953, and surveys report higher percentages of "really harmonious and happy families." But there is "Still more to be done":

We still cannot say that everything in the garden is lovely. Feudal ways of thinking which have lasted for thousands of years and the bourgeois viewpoint on marriage are not something you can hope to wipe out all at once. ... Problems still arise in many parts of the country.⁵⁸

That's hardly the kind of positive thinking seen in a magazine that declared the month before: "Socialist transformation has been achieved."⁵⁹ As the nation headed into the Great Leap Forward, the focus of the magazines for foreigners, following the lead of the national newspapers, becomes primarily economic, and women's key role is to work on the collectivized farms, as well as in the factories.

Children

A principal roadblock to work outside the home for women is children, their care and feeding. Improving health care and education for children has economic benefits in

⁵⁷ PC, Nov. 16, 1957, 28-33.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 33.

⁵⁹ PC, Oct. 1, 1957, 3.

itself by increasing the numbers of the trained, literate workforce. However, the articles written about children make clear that reducing infant mortality, offering child care, and mandatory schooling also benefit their mothers' health, well-being, and energy for productive labor.

Improvements in prenatal care and retraining of midwives in modern medical practice receive significant attention. Articles described old, unsanitary practices in which the "polluted" process of childbirth was not permitted to occur on the family bed, but was consigned to pig pens, animal shelters and outhouses. After liberation, Beijing-trained midwives went to the countryside, where they retrained the rural practitioners. The unsterile scissors and hands of the older midwives "used to cause nearly a third or more of the newborns to die of tetanus."⁶⁰ Training in modern antiseptic techniques also reduced the number of women who died in childbirth. In a district of the now defunct Pingyuan province, infant tetanus reportedly fell from forty-two percent to one percent.⁶¹ Yet some women resisted the new methods. In some areas, "most of the pregnant women or their mothers-in-law insisted on having their own way, and many a retrained old peasant midwife wavered back to the old methods," including superstitious practices. Because of this, emphasis was put on gaining the peasants' confidence in the new practices.

Soong Ching Ling, whose China Welfare Institute was a leader in this field, reported that nearly thirty thousand mother and child-care centers, maternity hospitals and children's hospital were set up, and 289,000 midwives were provided modern

⁶⁰ PC, "A Village Maternity Center," July 16, 1953, 32.

⁶¹ CR, Mar.-Apr. 1953, 20.

training. In Beijing hospitals, maternal mortality dropped by ninety percent, from seven per thousand to 0.7 per thousand.⁶² Soviet methods of painless childbirth were introduced that combined health classes, breathing exercises and relaxation techniques, the subject of an enthusiastic CR article.⁶³ Soong said ninety percent of the 48,000 women who tried the technique “suffered no pain in delivering their babies.” In addition, women factory workers frequently praise the impact of the fifty-six-day maternity leave provided by the Labor Insurance Regulations of 1951, the third-leg of the reform stool for women and the same measure that also demanded equal pay for equal work.

As the mothers returned to work in the textile industry, they could put their babies in crèches — 159 of them caring for twelve thousand children in 1953 — where they were allowed to nurse their newborns.⁶⁴ Rest areas were provided for pregnant women. As the children grew, factories cared for at least 127,000 in 4,000 nurseries, ostensibly under the supervision of trained nurses and doctors.⁶⁵ This is in sharp contrast to GMD days when women workers were routinely fired after they became noticeably pregnant, as also happened in the United States, and then, after childbirth, they had to set up makeshift arrangements for their children while they supported the family, also fairly typical in the United States.

⁶² PC, June 1, 1953, 6.

⁶³ CR, May-June 1953, 45-47.

⁶⁴ PC, “Women in the Textile Industry” by Chang Chuan-chu, vice minister of the textile industry and head of the production department at All-China Democratic Women’s Federation, ACDWF, May 1, 1953, 10-12.

⁶⁵ PC, “Chinese Women on the Industrial Front,” Mar. 1, 1956, 27-30.

It was heart-breaking struggle to bring up babies in those days. Many women had to lock their babies indoors or tether them to the door-knob before they went to work. The poor little things often cried their eyes out with no one to give them a meal or look after them. Countless children died of malnutrition and cold.⁶⁶

This was especially difficult for infants, and a young Shanghai textile worker reported that one model worker lost all but one of the eight children she bore before liberation, due, she believes, to their poor feeding and neglect after she went back to work after childbirth.⁶⁷ This anecdote was oddly enhanced or at least corrected in its retelling nearly two years later. In that account of Chu Fa-ti, now a deputy manager of one of the shops at No. 1 Cotton Mill, the woman lost all eight of the children, and then has two more, now looked after in the mill nursery, shown in a photograph of children in rows of cribs looked after by nurses.⁶⁸ Under these pre-1949 conditions, several articles report, many factory workers preferred to remain unmarried.

In another article by a textile worker at a different Shanghai plant, the pregnant worker, who is receiving prenatal care at the factory, describes her mother's desire to care for the infant at home rather than taking the new baby to the factory nursery. But after a tour of the nursery, and a glowing testimonial from a family friend, the grandmother's concerns are allayed, and she allows the child to be cared for in the nursery.

With the more limited resources in the countryside, child care did indeed become the responsibility of the grandmothers, under the presumption that they were getting too old to work in the fields, while their daughters or daughters-in-law engaged in

⁶⁶ Ibid., 29.

⁶⁷ PC, June 16, 1954, 15.

⁶⁸ PC, Mar. 1, 1956, 29.

production. This was especially true as the rural cooperative system was reorganized into the larger collective farms.

Sponsored as it was by Soong Ching Ling's China Welfare Institute, with its mission to better the health and well-being of women and children, *China Reconstructs* pays particular attention to these issues, in both photographs and text. The consistent coverage stands out in a magazine that is only published every two months in its first three years. The institute ran health clinics for women and children, and it operated nurseries and pre-schools for the children of working women, such as the Children's Cultural Palace in Beijing, also the subject of an article and photo spread in *People's China*.⁶⁹ The clinics offered childhood vaccinations and other pediatric care. In addition to normal day-care during working hours, the Welfare Institute's nursery in Shanghai also offered twenty-four-hour care for the children of the "many women who volunteer for work in the outlying areas," though this is described as "a transitional problem." This nursery, "A Place the Children Love" the headline calls it, also has a decidedly modern philosophy of child care and teaching. "The main emphasis in the nursery's education program is on love," love of country and its people, love of the people's property.⁷⁰ The Welfare Institute Nursery is notable enough that foreign guests are brought to see it. This progressive philosophy is also evident in a report by Li Boti (Li Po-ti), the female deputy editor, on "A New Day in Child Care" the following year.⁷¹ "The rule among nursery workers is always to persuade with patience, never to scold ... corporal punishment of

⁶⁹ PC, Dec. 16, 1952, 16; Aug. 1, 1954, 9.

⁷⁰ CR, Mar.-April 1952, 47-50.

⁷¹ CR, Mar.-Apr. 1953, 32-36.

any kind is absolutely forbidden.” Nutritional experts prepare special food for the children, whose “independence is cultivated. Children are taught to feed themselves at an early age,” says the caption under a photo of two toddlers spooning food from a bowl in a room where other children are eating on their own. A sidebar to this article reports that a million Chinese working mothers send their children to nurseries.

Children are often the subjects of photographs, photo spreads and cover pictures in both magazines, particularly *China Reconstructs*, an image-laden magazine which often runs the photos large and is printed on glossy paper for better reproduction. CR often runs photographs and illustrations of children playing on its cover, and children are the subject of cover treatment in *People’s China* in those years that it uses such a format. These PC covers include pictures of the first day of school, childhood vaccinations and Young Pioneers marching in Tiananmen (Tien An Men) Square. PC center-spread pictorials depict “China’s Bright Future,” “Peking’s First Children’s Palace,” “Children’s Life in China,” “A Happy Life for Children,” “Youth’s the Season Made for Joy.”⁷² Much of this coverage is pegged to the annual celebrations of International Children’s Day on June 1, and the word “happy” is often used in the titles, text, and captions of stories related to children. “The children of China have never been so happy as they are today.”⁷³ The children in the photos, of course, are almost always smiling, laughing, grinning, waving, dancing, or even hopping in the surf at the Beidaihe (Peitaiho) beach resort, except when they are engaged in serious school work. Young Pioneers, the elite red-scarved youth group, are occasionally photographed with top CCP leaders, such as

⁷² PC, June 16, 1951; Dec. 16, 1952, 16; June 1, 1953; June 1, 1954; June 1, 1957.

⁷³ PC, June 16, 1951, 20.

Chairman Mao who, one caption notes, “is especially concerned for the children of our country and is frequently seen in their company.”⁷⁴ Soong, who had no children of her own, is effusive about the youngsters: “Whenever I think of our children I feel happy. That is because I can see that their childhood is a happy one.”⁷⁵

“To Protect the Children” is one of the reasons Soong is so dedicated to the cause of world peace.⁷⁶ Soong, recipient of the Stalin Peace Prize, a major award in the communist world, began her welfare work in response to wartime conditions. In addition to her commitment to women and children, she frequently writes about the need for world peace and against imperialist war mongers. In both magazines, the role of women and mothers in the international peace movement is a repeatedly covered theme that has not been mentioned previously in this study.

Analysis

As is evident, the coverage of women, marriage and children in *People’s China* and *China Reconstructs* through the mid-1950s is detailed, diverse and wide-ranging. Descriptions of pre-liberation conditions are invariably negative, though the final long article in *People’s China* does make the rare concession that “there were cases where husbands and wives did have some love for each other, but even they often squabbled about money for life was hard and sorrow their constant companion.”⁷⁷ Yet, overall the coverage of post-liberation conditions does not shy away from detailing the many barriers

⁷⁴ CR, March-April 1952, 1.

⁷⁵ PC, July 1, 1956, 15.

⁷⁶ CR, Mar.-Apr. 1952.

⁷⁷ PC, Nov. 16, 1957, 29.

to true emancipation. Everything in the garden is far from lovely. The picture presented to the magazines foreign readers is generally upbeat, but far from rosy.

How accurate were these pictures and what are the flaws in this coverage? There is no reason not to take the editors and reporters at their word that the words and images in the magazines represent “facts” as reported by university-educated writers, either trained as journalists or turned into professional reporters and editors under the tutelage of experienced journalists such as Zhang Yan, Jack Chen, Li Boti and Israel Epstein. But over time, shortcomings are apparent or implicit, and some “facts” publicly known in China are too unhappy to be put in magazines for foreigners.

For one, the staffs are small with limited resources. In 1957, on the fifth anniversary of *China Reconstructs*, a humorous cartoon on the cover depicts the staff members still working out of a traditional courtyard house in Beijing, and a later commemorative book says at that time they “numbered a little over 40.”⁷⁸ This included all the support staff and administrative personnel occupied in production and circulation, as well as a cook. The editorial staff would have encountered all the usual issues journalists face: what stories to choose, what sources to interview, what information to use, what to discard, what people and scenes to photograph or illustrate. In 1950s’ Beijing, communication and travel were not easy. Other than government and party officials and large enterprises, few people had phones, and transportation outside of Beijing was troublesome to arrange, except to large cities with rail service.

These are the kinds of problems that even today confront journalists in Third World countries, and it explains why the magazines report stories and articles on urban

⁷⁸ *China Reconstructs*, *China Reconstructs — Founded by Soong Ching Ling* (Beijing: China Reconstructs, 1987), 94.

workers and families from just a handful of large cities: Beijing, Tianjin, Shanghai, Xian, and Chongqing. Except for Xian, these are some of the most modern and Westernized of Chinese cities, likely to be more open to non-traditional family values promoted by the new government. Stories from the countryside presented more daunting obstacles, though these are not mentioned in the articles, and it is almost a given that the small editorial staff would lift some stories without attribution from *People's Daily*, the Xinhua News Agency or regional newspapers. The bulk of rural stories come from the provinces of northern China, the region of the country under longest Communist control, though Mao's home province of Hunan, south of the Yangtze River, is an occasional exception. There is also extensive coverage of issues and people in Tibet, though only a few of such pieces touch more than glancingly on the issues we discuss here. However difficult to reach, Tibet is a special case, since what was happening there under the Chinese Communist takeover is a topic of great international concern outside of China.⁷⁹

Several articles treated in this chapter explicitly state that there has been much less progress on land reform, the Marriage Law, women and children's issues in areas where communist control was only recent gained or those populated by national minorities, who are specifically exempted from aspects of the new laws and policies. But this admission also indicated that little attempt was made to cover their lack of progress on this issue. The colorfully dressed minority groups are frequent topics in the magazines — to show China's good treatment of them by the majority Han — and the status of

⁷⁹ Tibet is Israel Epstein's particular area of interest, and he will make many visits there over the years, eventually producing a book. In April 1956, under one of his rare bylines in *China Reconstructs*, he wrote "Two Girls from Shigatsu," a piece describing the education of two Tibetan women sent away 900 miles to Chengdu in Sichuan province.

women among them is of occasional interest to the magazines, such as the article “I Was a Slave,” supposedly written by Niulo, a Yi woman of Dechang (Tehchang) county in Sichuan.⁸⁰ Born the daughter of hereditary slaves among the Yi’s, she was the property of an opium dealer; liberation wins her freedom, she becomes head of her township government, marries of her own free will, and represents her area at the National People’s Congress. Yet, she reports that in 1955 there were still slaves among the Yi’s, and the die-hard slave owners, who seem to be treated quite generously, “are not yet reconciled” to the Communist liberation of women and slaves, freedom to marry and so on. Few situations could be much more “feudal” than hereditary slavery, but there was a general policy that reform of land ownership, marriage, language and culture in minority areas would operate under more lenient rules.

Another problem is the bias inherent in depending on officials to identify people worthy of profiling, a long-standing and continuing dilemma for journalists. Troublemakers, idlers, dissidents and failures need not apply. In the countryside, a journalist arriving from Beijing will be steered, like most official visitors or foreign guests, to the most outstanding examples of official policy, though of course there are techniques to undermine this guidance if the journalist has time or ingenuity. Writing in the penultimate issue of *People’s China*, Sidney Shapiro, a translator best known for his still classic rendition of the novel *Family* by Ba Jin (Pa Chin), describes a trip to Shaanxi where flooded roads force him to hold up in Huangling, a rural town, as he makes his way to Yan’an.⁸¹ Encountering an unexpected foreign expert from Beijing, the top cadres

⁸⁰ CR, Feb. 1958, 13-16.

⁸¹ PC, Dec. 1, 1957, 32-33.

put him up in the government compound — where their gracious hospitality allows for better control and observation. Shapiro’s account of his surprise visit describes children in school and the new status of women, in which they get equal pay for work outside the home. “The men’s opposition [has] finally petered out,” though the males are “not thoroughly enlightened” and are “still rather contemptuous of women’s intelligence.” Fourteen of the sixteen local townships have women as deputy leaders, grandmas are taking care of the kids while the women work, and nurses are helping midwives modernize their techniques. “It augurs well for the future of China that backward counties are moving so fast.”

The PRC’s policies toward and treatment of women in the 1950s and 1960s would be cheered by the budding feminist movement in the West as a source of inspiration. While freedom of marriage based on love was not novel in the West or republican China, women’s work outside the home (except in the wartime shortage of men), child care centers, equal pay for equal work, and pursuit of traditionally male jobs were all advanced concepts. But foreign readers of *China Reconstructs*, which regularly printed a half-page or page of correspondence from its subscribers, were not uniformly laudatory.⁸²

Four letters in July 1959 under the heading “The Women Question” highlight the divide. Ethel Nielson of Toronto, Canada, writes, “The magnificent work your people, especially your women, are doing is breathtaking.” T.E. Thiel of Rainham, England, says: “The progress in education and the liberation of the women of China makes me very

⁸² *People’s China* was erratic in its printing of letters to the editor; they were always short, mostly positive and sometimes did not appear for months.

happy indeed.” On the other hand, Jack Monro of Penzance, England, has been reading the magazine out loud to his wife,

who spent five years in Foochow teaching nursing [and] is as interested in your country and its development as I am. ... while she knitted, she was (politely) bored almost to tears. In this country, women do *not* like *politics* or, for example, driving express trains, building bridges, setting up furnaces in the back garden or even piloting aeroplanes. Nevertheless, I can assure you they are far from being the slaves of their men-folk.”⁸³

Willy Gehrke of Hamburg, Germany, is as blunt in his embrace of traditional values, quoting a headline from the February issue, “Housewives Build Their Own Factories,” he says, “Respect to the women, but their husbands should earn enough so that the mother of the family can be at home.” The editors explain:

Chinese women have taken jobs because they are anxious and able to participate in the building of a modern socialist country, not because their husbands do not earn enough to maintain the family. When the people’s communes set up community dining rooms, nurseries, kindergartens and other institutions for collective welfare, Chinese women were freed from the confinement of household tasks. A whole new horizon was opened up to them, and they now enjoy equal opportunities with men for education, work and cultural activities.

Patriarchal family structure is not an exclusively Chinese phenomenon, and men in the West are clearly as unpersuaded about new order as are some of their PRC counterparts.

External Sources

Those are some of the problems with the coverage in the magazines that can be found without reference to external sources. Other scholarly research and public documents point to other problems. In some cases, they suggest the magazines’ portrayal was accurate enough to be the basis of academic research, in other cases, they do not

⁸³ CR, July 1959, 40.

contradict the accounts of social change in the publications, but suggests that the accounts are exaggerated in their depth and extent. Other research on village life in this time period also show that many areas of the countryside were little impacted by the marriage law and the campaign to implement it.

Scholar Elisabeth Croll in her well-regarded work *Feminism and Socialism in China* is confident enough of the articles and reportage in *People's China* and *China Reconstructs* that she cites them scores of times in her chapter on this period.⁸⁴ Of course, there were virtually no alternative sources in the mid-1970s, a circumstance that reinforces the importance of these early magazines. Croll frequently recounts some of the instructive tales at considerable length in her analysis. The magazines are also among her sources for her earlier work on marriage, a revision of her doctoral dissertation.⁸⁵ Croll and other commentators point out that the new equality of women in work and marriage were at odds with the long experience of the peasants and new cadres in the newly liberated south China. They also point out that the true economic liberation of women was really achieved in the period of the cooperatives, the collectives and the communes, when family income became solely based on the amount of labor contributed, not on the amount of land owned. This point is emphasized by Gao Xiaoxian, who noted that in newly liberated rural areas of the early 1950s, only twenty to forty percent of women engaged in farm labor, but by 1957, following the communization of agriculture, that had

⁸⁴ Elisabeth Joan Croll, *Feminism and Socialism in China* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978), 223-59.

⁸⁵ Elisabeth Joan Croll, *The Politics of Marriage in Contemporary China* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

risen to seventy percent.⁸⁶ Gao also noted that nearly all the villages outside the coastal area had no industry, poorly developed agricultural production methods, and a low level of mechanization. In that context, any kind of tractor — all had to be imported from the Soviet Union in the first few years — would have been quite a remarkable sight in itself, no less a girl driving a tractor.

Other Issues

Writing in 1975, Jack Chen describes the child care in the countryside:

Kindergartens were also set up to “free the women”; all the children would be looked at while their mothers were at work. But the old ladies assigned to the kindergartens were usually grandmas who could look after one or two at home but had neither the training nor the ability to look after whole schools of infants.⁸⁷

The emancipation of Chinese women in the PRC over its history has been a matter of significant interest and impassioned debate among feminists, historians of feminism and feminist historians in the West, who argue about the extent that Chinese law and policy transformed the status and role of women in society. Kay Ann Johnson takes a more negative view than Croll, and cites other official sources.⁸⁸ Johnson says that the Marriage Law was not what the rural cadres expected or desired, and in many areas, there was total ignorance of the law. The implementation of the law was left to “inexperienced and untrained lower cadres” — not the generally wise, forthright and persuasive cadres we find depicted in the magazines — and with land reform, and other

⁸⁶ Gao Xiaoxian, “China’s Modernization and Changes in the Social Status of Rural Women,” in Christina K. Gilmartin and others, eds., *Engendering China: Women, Culture and the State* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994), 81-84.

⁸⁷ Jack Chen, *Inside the Cultural Revolution* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1975), 127.

⁸⁸ Kay Ann Johnson, *Woman, the Family and Peasant Revolution in China* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1983), 115-53.

economic and political priorities on the agenda, enforcing the new law and women's equality was at the bottom of the cadres' list.⁸⁹ Three major investigations in 1951 of Marriage Law implementation in the Central-South Administrative Region —the provinces of Henan, Hubei, Hunan, Guangdong and Hainan, areas largely out of range for the magazines — found conditions much worse than expected in the implementation of the law. Probes by the military, the party and the Women's Federation found strong resistance of even higher cadres to the law, the failure to enforce its provisions on a local level, the unwillingness to defend women who sought the law's protection violence, and the interference of officials in attempts to contract free choice marriages. It was these kinds of conditions that led to the intense campaign to promote the law in 1953. Johnson quotes Ministry of Justice statistics published in *People's Daily* that seventy to eighty thousand women were killed or forced into suicide each year from 1950 to 1952 due to family problems or mistreatment.⁹⁰ And she points out that most statistics about women and the marriage law are fragmentary and localized, with few reliable national figures, an observation that applies to the numbers cited in *People's China* and *China Reconstructs*.

The most damning evidence that the magazines may have underplayed the problems with the liberation of Chinese women comes from both official sources at the highest levels of the government and from domestic Chinese news sources. A February 1, 1953 directive of the Government Administrative Council said the implementation of the Marriage Law had been “uneven,” and had not been carried out successfully “in the

⁸⁹ Ibid., 136.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 132, *People's Daily*, May 30, 1953, 3; Mar. 25, 1953, 2.

majority of areas.”⁹¹ It cited the continuing support by some cadres of the “old wicked feudal customs” and even the buying and selling of brides. “These serious circumstances can absolutely not be tolerated,” said the directive, signed by Premier Zhou Enlai. The council order launched the extensive mass movement campaign in March to spread acceptance of the Marriage Law as described in *People’s China*. But a follow-up report to the Administrative Council in November was disheartening.⁹² It found implementation of the Marriage Law “very uneven.” It reported that the education campaign “penetrated deeply” in only fifteen percent of the PRC; in sixty percent of the country, perhaps sixty to seventy of the people now understood the law, but significant distrust remained, and ill-treatment of women persisted. In twenty-five percent of the nation — one quarter of China — the cadres and people have only a “rough understanding and superficial knowledge” of the law, and due to its disregard, suicide and murder of women were still occurring. Based on these factors, implementation of the law is described as “a long-term task, complicated in character,” and the report recommended a continuing plan for education in the law.

Neither magazine for foreign readers presented the lack of progress as harshly as these government reports. Nor did they use any of the material found in an unusually long dispatch from Xinhua released January 22, 1953, ten days before the initial committee report and clearly intended to prepare the country for the new campaign. Headlined “Women Still Persecuted and Murdered as Marriage Law Failed to Be Thoroughly Implemented,” the wire story, which would have gone to all Chinese publications,

⁹¹ “General Report of the Central Committee of the Movement for the Implementation of the Marriage Law,” in Meijer, 303.

⁹² “Directive,” *ibid.*, 303.

documents in some detail the murders and suicides of both women and men as a result of refusal to abide by the Marriage Law and its requirements of free choice and divorce in cases of abuse. “Among those dead, some were murdered by their husbands; some by their parents in law; and some by cadres or their own family members.”⁹³ While the report details gruesome specific cases of human suffering, the need for aggressive implementation of the Marriage Law is based not on human rights issues, but on the loss “of large numbers of able-bodied males and females” which has “seriously affected public security production work.”

What was emerging over these and following years is what Judith Stacey dubs a New Democratic Patriarchy, which she calls “a historically unique family system.”⁹⁴

The fact that the CCP subordinated activist drives on the marriage law to other economic and political priorities should not lead us to conclude it was not serious about family reform. There is not one comparable historical example of a national government responding to a family crisis by initiating family transformation on such a vast scale.⁹⁵

In fact, Stacey and M.J. Meijer say the marriage law and the family reform it put in place were nothing short of revolutionary. Legal scholar Meijer says it “was intended to cause such fundamental changes in the existing family that it may be safely said to have aimed at a family revolution,”⁹⁶ And Stacey says: “The Chinese revolution facilitated and depended upon a genuine family revolution. ... The revolution succeeded

⁹³ In U.S. Consulate, Hong Kong, *Survey of China Mainland Press 1950-1972*, Report 499, 22-24.

⁹⁴ Judith Stacey, *Patriarchy and Socialist Revolution in China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 191.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 181.

⁹⁶ Meijer, 15.

in resolving the pre-Communist family crisis by establishing a family system different from the Western nuclear family.”⁹⁷ Family reform “was more disappointing” only if evaluated in terms of Western feminism or some of its stated goals.

Delia Davin also begs to differ. She says, while difficult to implement, the 1950 Marriage Law was “a death blow to the old system. ... As land reform was the primary instrument in the overthrow of the old power structure in the villages, so the Marriage Law was the main factor in changing the old authority structure within the family.”⁹⁸

Interviewing rural women in the late 1990s, Hershatter and a team of scholars found the women would often describe the difference between the “old society” and “Liberation” as a “gendered” experience with a “common vocabulary ... of ‘feudalism.’ ”⁹⁹ Their lives were changed in many ways by the changes in land ownership and agricultural production, but, particularly for “activist” women, their personal experiences within the family were transformed by the elimination of many “feudal” notions and practices that had restricted the freedom of women.

Even Gilmartin concludes in her specifically feminist analysis:

The campaigns in the early 1950s to end arranged marriages, for instance, revealed the enduring legacy of the feminist phase of the Chinese Communist movement. After 1949, the party kept alive much of the language and rituals of women’s emancipation, providing a legitimate basis within the Communist state for anyone with the determination and savvy to use them.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ Stacey, 192-93.

⁹⁸ Davin, 106.

⁹⁹ Gail Hershatter, “The Gender of Memory: Rural Chinese Women and the 1950s,” *Signs*, V. 28, 1 (Autumn 2002), 59.

¹⁰⁰ Gilmartin, 216.

Looking at women, marriage and the family in revolutionary China through the eyes of many Western feminists, the liberation of China did not achieve the liberation of women. Of course, looking at China in terms of Western capitalism, liberalism, or conceptions of human rights, the PRC is not now and never was “liberated” economically or politically, either. While acknowledging limitations of women’s emancipation, the editors of *People’s China* and *China Reconstructs* would make as strong a case as they could find for their foreign readers that progress was being made, overlooking some vivid examples of back-sliding. In some cases, this editing crossed the line from journalism into advocacy, but these sins of omission would be in keeping with Mao’s instruction to writers to focus on “the bright side,” though certainly not dismiss the difficulties to show the contrast to the dark.¹⁰¹

¹⁰¹ Mao Zedong, *Selected Works*, Vol. 3, 91.

Chapter 3: The New Face and Voice of China's Language, Culture, and Arts

How the magazines presented the cultural face of New China to their foreign readers was more complicated and ambivalent than their treatment of women, marriage and children. The story was more fraught with historical and political problems and culturally even more unfamiliar to their readers in the West and India, the core of their readership. The fundamental underlying message of the magazines in this area was that just as the treatment of women, marriage, and children was creating a new and better social order, new China's action on language, culture, and arts was creating a new and better cultural order. This improved culture does not destroy the best of China's cherished traditions of literature and arts, but invigorated and polished with popular folk art and customs of the masses, and phrased in the language of the common people, it becomes an even more brilliant mirror of the greatness of the Chinese people. This new cultural front is also a fundamental tool in the reshaping of Chinese values and thought in the mold of the Chinese Communist Party.

The Chinese Communists were, first of all, Chinese, heirs to thousands of years of tradition and accomplishment in poetry and literature, in crafts, sculpture and painting, in drama and opera, dance and song. The complex and difficult Chinese language in its written form, whose characters could be read by only an estimated 15 percent of the people, was still the linguistic and literary cement that over the centuries had bound together a polity of dozens of spoken dialects. While a few dialects were dominant in large areas of the country, there was no common spoken language.

Chinese arts and crafts were among the products the West had long coveted and acquired — its silks and cloisonné, its porcelains and ceramics. Its plates, bowls, cups, vases and serving dishes were of such legendary beauty and quality that even when they came to be reproduced in the West, these objects would bear in English the name of the country that invented them — china.

The Chinese Communists as nationalists and nation builders wanted to restore the greatness of China, its prestige and power, and this included its cultural heritage. Yet, they also recognized that this cultural heritage was weighed down by a long “feudal” past. Feudal (*fengjiande*) is a term borrowed from Western history that meant far more than its original denotation of a system of serfdom and barony. As employed by Karl Marx, feudal meant the pre-capitalist stage of dominance by aristocratic landholders. To the Chinese Communists, the term meant not just that, but all those elements of old China that stood for oppression, servitude, class-dominance, and patriarchy.

While the poetry, novels, scroll paintings, calligraphy, and some of the elaborate operas may have had their origin among the aristocracy and the educated gentry, the fine furniture, architecture, utensils and works of art in ceramic, porcelain, bronze, gold, silver and jade were largely produced for a small elite by a mass of peasants and craftsmen. But these were also part of the patrimony of old China needing to be cleansed of its feudal trappings, admired for its artistry but critiqued for its class background and the ugliness of the social system that produced it. Some cultural ministers and artistic leaders would insist that the best in literature and art had its origins in peasant and folk culture, and the more distant in the past, the better its class origins.

Even more important than their nationalism, the Chinese Communists were also Marxist revolutionaries who had risen to power through the action and support of tens of millions of peasants and urban workers. Their popular culture also needed to be recognized, appreciated, elevated and enhanced as a way to spread and bolster the revolution.

For the PRC's leaders trying to foster this cultural transformation and the magazine editors trying to convey its sweep to a foreign audience, there was a tricky balancing act between the honored past and the revolutionary future. Even with the longstanding folk art, customs and crafts coming from the common people, the people also had large residues of superstition and feudal mentality that had to be scoured away with revolutionary spirit and modernism.

In addition to this political and philosophical balancing act the editors needed to convey, many of the elements of Chinese culture had to be explained in great detail to foreign readers, first of all the complex language and why it needed modernizing. Opera, music, song and dance also needed detailed explanation, since most outside of China were unlikely to have seen or experienced much of it in live performance or on film. Only the major classics of Chinese literature were available in translation, and few but Sinophiles had read them. Limited samples of porcelain, art objects and folk decorations may have been seen in books, museums and Chinese restaurants. But even the art books and art collections were limited in scope, and the average Westerner was unlikely to have seen little but snippets and caricatures of China's performing arts — a dragon dance in Chinatown, for instance. In their depiction of China and the Chinese, the films, newsreels, magazines and newspapers of the United States and Western Europe from the

1920s on, and particularly in the 1940s, showed a country filled with death, destruction, poverty, starvation, and civil war, relieved by the occasional bright feature on quaint Chinese customs that American correspondents found their editors craved.¹

In *People's China* and *China Reconstructs* through the 1950s, there are literally hundreds of articles describing the broad cultural ferment occurring in China. The editors clearly presumed fairly vast ignorance among their readers, or at the best, knowledge loaded with cultural stereotypes. Many of the articles would take pains to explain the historical context, whether from the long view of Chinese writing and art in the Warring States period (the time of Confucius), or the cultural history of the twentieth century in the revolutionary perspective of the May Fourth Movement of 1919. The exciting cultural, social and economic transformation of New China had to be inevitably compared with the horrid conditions of old China under the Manchus in the Qing dynasty (1644-1911), the foreign imperialists after the 1830s and Chiang Kai-shek's corrupt Guomindang (GMD) (1927-1949). In this context, the Guomindang government could do no right, and under it, the artists, actors and writers are mistreated and disrespected, and their work products — except by those who participated in the revolution — are stultified and in decline. Through many articles on many fields of cultural endeavor, there is considerably more ambivalence about the West and its influences. On the one hand, the literature, drama, art and later film were bourgeois and capitalist to the core — “imperialist garbage,” as one article describes the “insufferable” Hollywood fare.² On the

¹ Stephen R. MacKinnon, and Oris Friesen, *China Reporting : An Oral History of American Journalism in the 1930s and 1940s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987).

² PC, Apr. 16, 1951, 12.

other hand, whole bodies of Western work by select progressive writers and artists could be read in translation, celebrated and emulated, including Leonardo DaVinci, William Shakespeare, Victor Hugo, Charles Dickens, Walt Whitman, Nikolai Gogol and a long list of others “who pioneered the road through ignorance and championed the human race against stupidity.”³ The West that spawned imperialism also gave rise to Marxism and socialism, and it embodies modernism and social progress. The magazines in multiple instances describe the need to meld Western technique in drama, song and music to Chinese traditions in folk and classical art. There is no such ambivalence about the culture and arts of the Soviet Union and the other people’s republics; throughout the 1950s in culture and every other sphere, the Soviets are the role models and exemplars, particularly in the implementation of “socialist realism” in fiction, visual and performing arts.

The guide for all Chinese cultural “workers” in maintaining their equilibrium in this delicate balancing of good and bad, old and new, high art and folk, Chinese and Western is Chairman Mao Zedong himself, and chiefly through his 1940 work *On New Democracy* and his 1942 “Talks at the Yenan Forum on Literature and Art.”

Mao’s Cultural Doctrine

Mao’s May 1942 talks, which firmly established his and the party’s control over intellectuals, are referenced literally scores of times in the hundreds of articles in these magazines about culture and art. The more limited discussion of culture in the 1940 book is also quoted as a guiding directive, but in fewer articles. These are not just the often

³ PC Nov. 16, 1954, 26; CR, July-Aug. 1952, “China Salutes Giants of World Culture,” 50.

routine and obligatory references to the “leadership of Chairman Mao Tse-tung and the Communist Party” found in the articles about women, children, and other aspects of life. Mao’s instructions are the way the editor’s frame their treatment of writing and art, and they are often presented in the words of Zhou Yang (Chou Yang), “a noted critic” and more importantly, vice minister of cultural affairs who was a key cultural theorist in Yan’an. In long, critical articles, Zhou applies the Yan’an talks through the years as a yardstick to measure the achievement and faults of “The People’s New Literature” and other forms of contemporary art.⁴

Allusions to the Yan’an talks are not just found in these sorts of “official” pronouncements. Workers at a new cinema school, for instance, receive “training based on the principles” of the Yan’an talks, and a Literary Institute is founded “to train young literary cadres capable of carrying out Comrade Mao Tse-tung’s line on literature and art.”⁵ Mei Lan-fang, a Peking opera star who became an iconic figure repeatedly featured in the magazines, said that “It was only after liberation, that inspired by [Mao’s Yan’an talks], I began to realize that literature and art should serve the workers, peasants and soldiers in the first place.”⁶ Woodcut artists are dispatched to the countryside in response

⁴ “The People’s New Literature,” PC, Feb. 16, 1951, 7, “the abridged version of a critical essay” delivered in 1949; “Mao Tse-tung’s Teachings and Contemporary Art,” PC, Sept. 16, 1951, 5; “Socialist Realism — The Road of Advance for Chinese Literature,” PC, Jan. 16, 1953, 10-15; PC, “More and Better Works of Literature and Art,” PC, Nov. 1, 1953; also “On Mao Tse-Tung’s Teachings on Literature and Art,” by Mao Dun (Mao Tun), PC, June 1, 1952, 5-8, 30-32.

⁵ PC, June 16, 1952, 35; Mar. 1954, 16.

⁶ PC, June 16, 1955, 16.

to the Yan'an addresses.⁷ Similar references occur in dozens of other articles, which summarize or quote passages from the Yan'an speeches.

The talks in two separate sessions at the Yan'an headquarters of CCP-controlled China are both a critique of problems Mao saw in the fiction, journalism and drama being produced there and a prescription for the future. In the war of liberation, Mao saw two main fronts, "the pen and ... the gun, the cultural and the military," and while the military was the most important, a "cultural army" was needed as well to energize and instruct the masses.⁸ To do this, writers and artists needed to know the masses of urban workers, rural peasants and the fighters, and they needed to appreciate and use their "rich, lively language" — this is where the intellectuals, most of them urban bourgeoisie, had failed, Mao said.⁹ But he also conceded, "The people, too, have their shortcomings," such as "petty bourgeois" and "backward ideas" that required education to overcome. To do this the writers and artists needed to live and work with the masses, learn from them, and then create literature and art "for the people," based on a close study of class structure and Marxism Leninism.

China's new culture ... is anti-imperialist, anti-feudal culture of the masses of the people under the leadership of the proletariat. ... We should take over the rich legacy and the good traditions in literature and art that have been handed down from past ages in China and foreign countries, but the aim must still be to serve the masses of the people. Nor do we refuse to utilize the literary and artistic forms of the past, but in our hands these old forms, remoulded and infused with new content, also become something revolutionary in the service of the people.¹⁰

⁷ PC, May 1, 1953, 24.

⁸ Mao Zedong, *Selected Works of Mao Tse-Tung*. Vol. 3 (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1967), 69-98. This official translation from the original Chinese appears first in 1965, but other translations were made in the 1950s, and actual references to the "talks" or "addresses" in the magazine vary slightly in exact wording.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 72.

The writers and artists must also use the people's "nascent literature and art" found in "wall newspapers, murals, folk songs, folks tales, etc."¹¹ As is often the case with Mao, his speech explains the theory and then shows how to put it into practice.

The life of the people is always a mine of the raw materials for literature and art, materials in their natural form, materials that are crude, but most vital, rich and fundamental; they make all literature and art seem pallid by comparison; they provide literature and art with an inexhaustible source, their only source. ... Some may ask, is there not another source in books, in the literature and art of ancient times and of foreign countries? In fact, the literary and artistic works of the past are not a source but a stream; they were created by our predecessors and the foreigners out of the literary and artistic raw materials they found in the life of the people of their time and place. We must take over all the fine things in our literary and artistic heritage, critically assimilate whatever is beneficial, and use them as examples when we create works out of the literary and artistic raw materials in the life of the people of our own time and place. ...

China's revolutionary writers and artists... must for a long period of time unreservedly and whole-heartedly go among the masses of workers, peasants and soldiers, go into the heat of the struggle, go to the only source, the broadest and richest source, in order to observe, experience, study and analyse all the different kinds of people, all the classes, all the masses, all the vivid patterns of life and struggle, all the raw materials of literature and art. Only then can they proceed to creative work. Otherwise, you will have nothing to work with and you will be nothing but a phoney writer or artist.¹²

In these 12,000-word speeches, Mao spends much time critiquing other theories and practices of literature; he explains the Marxist approach, makes historical allusions to the ancient kingdom of Chu, provides practical advice on "popularizing" writing and art to make it accessible to the masses, and includes several references to the ideal revolutionary artist, Lu Xun, for whom the art academy at Yan'an was named and who would be featured often in *People's China* and *China Reconstructs*. In short, Mao's message can be summed up: Literature and art must serve the masses of the people, and

¹⁰ Ibid., 76.

¹¹ Ibid., 78.

¹² Ibid., 81.

they must take their inspiration from the people's lives. Whether fiction or journalism, song or drama, music or dance, their ultimate purpose is not abstract, art-for-art's sake, but practical and political: the victory of the revolution.

Literature and art are subordinate to politics, but in their turn exert a great influence on politics. Revolutionary literature and art are ... an indispensable part of the revolutionary cause. If we had no literature and art even in the broadest and most ordinary sense, we could not carry on the revolutionary movement and win victory.¹³

Aspects of these instructions are used repeatedly in the magazines to explain the transformation of culture in New China to foreign readers. There is no doubt that Mao's directives quoted above were studied closely by the writers, artists, professors, and correspondents who pen the cultural stories in the magazines. Sometimes Mao's own words are quoted, but more often they are paraphrased, echoed or even repeated verbatim without quotation marks. The editors, authors, poets, playwrights, composers, musicians, singers, actors, directors, choreographers, sculptors, crafts people, even puppeteers, acrobats and magicians, clearly understood, or came to understand, after sufficient re-education and reform, that their role was both important and political — serve the people, draw material from the masses, subordinate their art to politics. They knew or would come to know what kind of works they were supposed to present — and would be firmly instructed if they strayed from that course.

This overriding political burden produces a seriousness of tone in *People's China* about cultural coverage. As contrasted with its coverage of issues involving women and family, there is less reportage from the field, fewer first hand accounts, and the articles are more explanatory and didactic. In contrast, *China Reconstructs*, with fewer issues and

¹³ Ibid., 86.

fewer pages (bimonthly in 1952, 1953 and 1954, turning monthly in 1955), did a far better job of conveying the spirit of the new culture in a lively and less ideological way. There is better story telling with a more conversational style, there are more interviews of and first-hand accounts by the writers and artists themselves. Overall, *China Reconstructs*' cultural coverage is more engaging and less preachy. This probably reflects the fact that, under the patronage of Soong Ching Ling and the China Welfare Institute, and under the guidance of experienced Western-trained journalists like Israel Epstein, *China Reconstructs* could afford to be less blatantly political toward its foreign readers and less slavish to the party line, with far fewer references to the Yan'an talks. This also reflects the homier flavor of the magazine, which came to include recipes and articles about fashion and hairstyles. Yet in both magazines the larger mass campaigns preoccupying the country at the time are a subtext even in articles about opera or film: land reform, the marriage law, the war in Korea, the communes and collectivization are all alluded to.

Both magazines also show a continuing attentiveness to what would be a perplexing dilemma to any writer and editor, and what was a major concern to a party and government seeking to gain control of a huge country by force, persuasion and the tools of revolutionary literature and art: In 1950, four out of five people in China could not read or write. Not only could they not read the newspapers, the magazines and the novels, however much these hewed to the mass line, Chinese workers and peasants also could not read the training manuals and textbooks essential to modernizing industry, agriculture, and health care. They could not keep the account books, write the reports or do the computation necessary to a functioning modern economy and government.

Because of this, a linchpin of China's socialist cultural transformation into a modern nation would be a mass literacy campaign from the bottom and a reform of the language from the top that would be the subject of three dozen articles in the magazines.

Literacy

“For many years, illiteracy among the masses has been one of the main handicaps to China's progress,” a *People's China* writer declares in its first article on the topic in March 1950.¹⁴ As with so many other of China's ills, “the root cause of mass illiteracy” was easily identified — the “feudal and imperialist exploitation which reduced the labouring population to stark poverty.” The Common Program of 1949, the working constitution of the allied “democratic” parties dominated by the communists, prescribed universal compulsory elementary education and the strengthening of the higher levels of schooling, but it also stressed the need for technical education and “the education of working people during their spare time and that of cadres at their posts.”¹⁵ The first aim of this workers' education was “to end illiteracy” among industrial workers in three to five years. A mass movement against illiteracy among peasants had already begun in those areas that had already gone through land reform. Several articles estimate that, before liberation, 85 percent of the population was illiterate and less than 40 percent of the primary-age children were at school.¹⁶

Behind the preoccupation with military and political control, land and marriage reform, literacy was one of the top priorities in any newly liberated area, and was in fact

¹⁴ PC, Apr. 16, 1950, 22.

¹⁵ “Education for Workers and Peasants,” Mar. 15, 1951, 12.

¹⁶ PC, Oct. 1, 1951, 32.

seen as an essential cultural element to both political control and economic advance. In the industrialized Port Arthur-Dairen area of northeast China, where the Soviet Army accepted the surrender of the Japanese occupiers in 1945, the number of illiterates was actually estimated to be lower than in the rest of the country at the time, with perhaps 40 percent of the 900,000 inhabitants (370,000 people) unable to read or write in 1945. The CCP government initiated a literacy drive that had already reduced that number by almost 100,000 in 1948, and the plan was to totally eliminate illiteracy by the end of 1950. A process that “many people thought would take generations” was allegedly achieved in a few years.¹⁷

As happened with other reform campaigns, there was sometimes strong peasant resistance to attending the thousands of literacy and spare-time schools that were set up, as an example from one village shows. For some, like housewives with children at home, there were practical difficulties in attending. Others “were just disinterested; since they had managed to get along until then without knowing how to read or write, they did not feel it was worth the effort to change. Still others were convinced that they just did not have the brains to master the intricacies of Chinese characters.”¹⁸ The cadres tried to force the villagers to attend classes by threats of punishment, leading some to half-heartedly attend, but others just paid the fines and stayed away. Finally, the area party chief, hearing of the problem, decided to set up mass meetings where “the peasants recounted their past sufferings because of illiteracy.”¹⁹

¹⁷ PC, Apr. 16, 1950, 22.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid., 23.

One older peasant told how he had been evicted from his home by his “landlord creditor” after he had signed a loan agreement in which he did not understand the harsh terms. “Although I had eyes, I was just like a blind man. Now I am going to open my eyes. I am determined to learn how to read and write.” In another case, a cowherd named Hsieh Shih-shan moves to Dairen to get factory work, but because he is illiterate, he can only get a job as a coolie at a fish plant. After the Soviets free the area, he begins attending literacy classes and technical training at the plant, a move which keeps him from home and causes tension with his neglected wife. He gradually becomes a trade union leader, a department head, and then is elected a “First Class Model” of the literacy campaign and joins the CCP. “I once felt that trying to study characters and technique at the same time was like riding two horses. But, comrades, I was wrong. . . . We must all learn more and more, until we have equipped ourselves to carry out our task of building a new China.”²⁰ Hsieh’s story makes plain the connection seen between cultural knowledge and technical advance, a link reinforced in an article about worker-peasant schools. “A new Democratic society requires an entirely new type of scientific and professional workers — specialists trained up from the ranks of the classes that have taken over leadership in the new society.”²¹

The People’s Liberation Army joined the battle and “launched a new offensive on the cultural front.” The army became “a huge school. With the great campaigns over on China’s mainland, it has embarked on widescale attacks on illiteracy.”²² Most PLA

²⁰ “Hsieh Shih-shan, Dairen’s Study Model,” May 1, 1950, 19-20, 26.

²¹ “A Worker-Peasant School,” Aug. 16, 1950, 22-24.

²² “Army on the Cultural Front,” Aug. 1, 1950, 25.

soldiers had been poor peasants and farm laborers, with little chance for education, the article asserts. Only after the fighting is over do they have the opportunity to study. Starting in the pacified northeast, in July 1949, several divisions begin to devote five hours a week to reading and writing, and then in November, twelve hours per week. By the fall of 1952, “every PLA soldier will have received a full elementary education,” the magazine says, and in the next four to five years, all the commanders were expected to gain a secondary education.

With 250 million or more adult illiterates in the country, the obstacles are immense, and the progress is slow. By the end of 1950, about a million workers will be in spare-time schools three days a week, two hours a day.²³ Most of the teachers for the elementary courses in factories and mines are volunteers recruited from the literate members of the staff and receive no pay. Technical education is organized by the plants themselves. The peasants in areas where land reform has been carried out engage in winter study at spare-time schools, and about 13 million peasants are enrolled by the end of 1949. For the most part, the huge number of teachers needed are drawn from those who already can read and write — “people teach the people.” This includes “little teachers,” children who pass on their knowledge to grown-ups. Classes are reinforced by reading circles organized in the fields and around the *kang* in peasant homes.²⁴ In the newer liberated areas, literacy education is combined with political education to raise class consciousness. For the higher levels of education, the goal is to take illiterate

²³ “Education for Workers and Peasants,” Mar. 15, 1951, 12.

²⁴ A note dutifully explains that a *kang* is the large clay bed that sits in the center of peasant homes and is heated in winter.

workers and peasants and have them ready for university in three or four years, which means abandoning “the orthodox bourgeois methods of education.”²⁵

On the second anniversary of liberation in 1951, a ministry of education official reports there are 22 million peasants in winter study, and 10 million more in regular schools. Workers in spare time schools number 1.5 million.²⁶ Some 440,000 primary schools enroll 37 million students, a 45 percent increase from 1946, though earlier articles had accused the Guomindang with a near total neglect of education. There are 5,100 secondary schools with 1.57 million students, and 201 institutions of higher education with 128,000 enrolled. This represents significant progress, but still, given the size of the population, the numbers are paltry. There are many hurdles to overcome: a shortage of teachers, more than one million more needing to be trained; a shortage of time for workers and peasants; a lack of textbooks and facilities. There is still resistance to education for women, as we saw in the last chapter.²⁷ But perhaps the biggest barrier in the battle for literacy is the Chinese language itself with its complicated ideograms, as villagers near Dairen had complained.

Language

The PLA rides to the rescue again in the person of Qi Jianhua (Chi Chien-hua), an army “cultural worker” and former peasant who becomes a national hero by developing “a quick method” for learning Chinese characters.²⁸ Under the older methods, students

²⁵ PC, Aug. 16, 1950, 22.

²⁶ “Two Years of Advance in People’s Education” by Liu Shih, PC, Oct. 1, 1951, 33.

²⁷ “A Village Teacher Fights Illiteracy,” CR, Mar-Apr. 1952, 12.

would learn just a few characters a day by rote, and “the average adult learner forgot old characters as fast as he picked up new ones, lost confidence, and finally gave up.”²⁹

Under Chi’s method, students first spent six hours learning 37 phonetic symbols, principally the Roman alphabet and other simple signs, then they use them to write out Chinese words spoken to them. In the second stage, the students see the Chinese characters for the spoken words along with the phonetic “crutch,” and begin learning 30 characters per two-hour session, reportedly picking up to 2,000 characters in 100 hours of class. In the third stage, the crutch is dropped, and the students begin reading the characters themselves, and then finally writing the characters. A reader with knowledge of 2,000 characters can read a Chinese newspaper, the articles say. The Qi method was so successful at speeding the task of reading and writing that it was adopted nationally. But as *China Reconstructs* notes, “Changing over completely to an alphabetical system is the ultimate solution.”³⁰

The magazines present the Chinese language as a source of both pride and perplexity. On the one hand, it is one of the world’s oldest original written languages with a continuous 2,500-year history.³¹ It unified dispersed peoples in China who spoke different, though related, languages, and it was adopted by the rest of East Asia. The written language was “the repository of culture and the means of spreading it,” but even

²⁸ “Weapon Against Illiteracy,” CR, Sept.-Oct. 1952, 49; “The PLA’s New Weapon,” PC, Apr. 1, 1952, 25. The same dramatic photo of a gesticulating Qi in front of a board with symbols and characters that appears in *China Reconstructs* runs in *China Pictorial* in March 1952, the domestic picture magazine reprinted for foreign consumption.

²⁹ CR, Sept.-Oct. 1952, 50.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 49.

³¹ “The Origin and Development of Chinese Script,” PC, Mar. 1, 1954, 34.

though simplified over time, it was still “as a rule the exclusive possession of the ruling class.”³² Calcified over time, it became rigid and archaic, and was one of the targets of the May Fourth Movement of 1919, which wanted to reform the classical writing style, replacing it with language and literature closer to the common vernacular. As Chairman Mao would say in *On New Democracy*, “Written Chinese must be reformed, given the requisite conditions, and our spoken language brought closer to that of the people.”³³

In May 1954, the editors of *People’s China* said they had “received many letters from readers requesting information on the problem of reforming the Chinese written language,” and they quote one from P.N. Rudenko of Karkhov, U.S.S.R: “The Chinese language is still largely pictographic. Such a language, so far as I know, impedes the progress of education among the broad masses of the people. I wonder if any attempt has been made to gradually reform the Chinese language on a phonetic basis.”³⁴ Wei Jue (Wei Chueh), vice chairman of the Committee for the Research on the Reform of the Chinese Written Language, responds with a lengthy article, and would do so several times over the next two years, explicating in detail and at length the background, research, and planning for language reform. The reform committee was created more than two years earlier, in February 1952 after a year of preparation. Wei is blunt about the problems with written Chinese, compared to phonetic languages.

³² Ibid., 37.

³³ Mao, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 382; as quoted in PC, May 16, 1954, 25, it reads, “Our written language must be reformed on certain conditions, and our spoken language must be brought closer to that of the people.”

³⁴ Ibid., 18, “The Problem of Reforming the Chinese Written Language.” It is not clear whether Rudenko was reading the Russian or the English-language version of *People’s China*.

In phonetic languages, for instance, one can “fairly easily” spell a word, using the limited number of letters in the alphabet, if one knows its pronunciation. But in Chinese, to learn a character one has to know how to say it, how to understand its meaning, and how to write it, using five, ten or more strokes. “For this reason, besides being difficult to read and write, the Chinese language is very inconvenient for use in type-setting, typewriting, telegraphy, indexing and lexicography.”³⁵ Typesetting in Chinese must still be done by hand rather than on a linotype machine, for instance, and telegraphy, which he does not explain here, requires each character to be converted into a series of four numbers, and then decoded at the receiving end.³⁶ These facts make Chinese characters difficult to use for large numbers of average citizens in a modern industrializing nation. To remedy the situation, the language reform committee was given two tasks: one, draw up a plan to simplify the characters, and two, develop a new phonetic system. Wei does not underestimate the enormity of the undertaking. “To reform a written language which has been in use for thousands of years and is still in living use into a phonetic one is a gigantic task; it is fraught with difficulties and requires great labour and patience.”³⁷ Yet with typical communist resolve and optimism, he says, “We may say with confidence that the replacing of the present Chinese language with a new phonetic one will certainly be brought about in the future,” under the leadership of the CCP and Mao.³⁸

³⁵ Ibid., 23.

³⁶ CR, March 1952, 2

³⁷ PC, May 16, 1954, 25.

³⁸ Ibid., 26.

A year later, again responding to letters from “many readers,” Wei repeats his argument about the drawbacks of Chinese script. It “remains a very inconvenient means for the spread of education and culture, the propagation of knowledge and assimilation of new ideas and skills. It is sometimes hard to adapt it to the needs of life in a modern society.”³⁹ This is why there needs to be “a reform of the written language and a gradual adoption of the phonetic system.” Wei downplays a key problem with implementation of an alphabet-based phonetic system — where the letters indicate pronunciation — in a country with many dialects and no common tongue. “A common national language (Mandarin) based on the Peking pronunciation has already taken shape,” with greatly improved communications, he declares. But he foresees “a period of transition in which the [simplified] characters and the new alphabet will continue in use side by side.” In an article at the end of 1955, he makes a stronger case for how “the Peking pronunciation has in fact virtually become the standard pronunciation of spoken Chinese.”⁴⁰ And in closing, as is often the case in *People’s China* articles, he quotes a directive from Chairman Mao in 1951: “The written language must be reformed; it should follow the common direction of phoneticization which has been taken by world languages.”⁴¹

In all three articles Wei wrote in 1954 and 1955, he took pains to explain and illustrate how Chinese characters would be simplified. He shows, for example, how the old character for the word *zhuan* (*chuan*) meaning “advise” with twenty strokes would be reduced to four strokes, and the word *zai* (*tsai*) meaning “just” would be reduced from

³⁹ PC, May 1, 1955, 33.

⁴⁰ PC, Dec. 16, 1955, 14.

⁴¹ Ibid., the source of the quote is not given.

eighteen strokes to four. But to the foreign reader, who can recognize only the simplest of Chinese characters such as *ren* and *zhong*, or someone who can read no Chinese at all, the discussion is likely fairly opaque and hard to fathom. A “simplified” array of 1,700 characters is hardly simple compared to an alphabet with twenty-six letters, fifty-two characters counting capital letters. The discussion is particularly academic to a non-Chinese reader in illustrating the elimination of homonyms, characters that sound the same but are written differently. Yet, Wei says 200,000 people in organized groups across China “held organized discussions” on the draft simplification plan, and generally supported it. Beginning in May 1955, newspapers and magazines began a trial using 141 simplified characters; the national conference supposedly took the opinions expressed about this trial into account and revised the plan.⁴²

In March 1956, Wu Yuzhang (Wu Yu-chang), chairman of the Committee for Reforming the Written Language, makes clear that after years of study and consultation, some final decisions have been reached.⁴³ In January, the State Council, the cabinet of top ministers, approved the conference plan for the simplification of 1,700 characters and its recommendation for the elimination of 1,000 doublets. The national conference also adopted the northern dialect as pronounced in Peking as the common tongue, and the State Council “issued a detailed directive” to “popularize” it, with implementation steps taken by the Ministry of Education and the army. The move to a common language (*putonghua*) is “a real popular demand,” Wu says, at a time “when socialist construction

⁴² Ibid., 12-13.

⁴³ “Making Chinese Easier to Write and Learn,” PC, Mar. 16, 1956, 18-20. The word “research” has been dropped from the name of the committee indicating it has gone from study to action.

is in full swing, when wireless and cinema command huge audiences and people tend to move round the country far more than they did in the old days.” Not only will this remove “the inconvenience of differing local pronunciations which make it hard and sometime impossible for people of different localities to understand one another,” but also “this step will immediately help strengthen national unity and facilitate the economic and cultural development of the country.”

In another move, not previously mentioned in the magazines for foreigners, the manner of printing Chinese was radically altered. No longer would the newly simplified characters run down the page vertically, in columns from right to left, but they would run horizontally in rows from left to right, just like a phonetic language, in preparation of becoming one. Most of the national magazines made the switch in late 1955, then the national newspapers on January 1, 1956, followed by the provincial newspapers in short order. “It will certainly not be long before people take this as a matter of course,” Wu says, in one of the few hints that all these changes in the written and spoken language might take some getting used.

The same issue of *People’s China* provides a twelve-page supplement, a “Draft Scheme for a Chinese Phonetic Alphabet” that includes thirty letters — the Latin alphabet minus the letter V (a sound not found in Chinese), and five modified letters, two Cyrillic, representing sounds unique to Chinese. In January 1957, the new alphabet is approved, without the five symbols “to make the new alphabet less outlandish,” *People’s China* explains in a half-column item buried in the back.⁴⁴ *China Reconstructs* gives the alphabet a three-page treatment by Zhou Youguang (Chou You-kuang), the head of the

⁴⁴ PC, Jan. 16, 1947, 41.

Phonetic Research Department of the reform committee.⁴⁵ This was the system called *pinyin*, now in general use to transliterate Chinese characters.

In their articles, Wei, Wu and Zhou painstakingly detail the five years of study, research, consultation, feedback, revision, opinions, and local and national meetings and conferences that led to all the changes.⁴⁶ But totally absent from the commentaries written by the officials are any voices of disagreement, dissent or resistance — except, oddly, in a long, two-column letter from a West German reader generally bemoaning the loss of the Chinese script, the “iron chain” of China’s unity.⁴⁷ There is no reportage of the reform process or its implementation by correspondents in the field. Reading between the lines, one can see the language reform officials knocking down arguments, such as why “the preservation of the ideographic characters is not necessarily a help in the preservation of China’s cultural heritage.”⁴⁸ But missing are the voices of any of the tens of millions Cantonese or Fukienese who might not want to abandon the language of their birth and speak the tongue of the north, no matter how common it has become. How jarring was it for longtime adult readers and the elderly to find the characters they had come to recognize for decades suddenly stripped of their identifying strokes? How

⁴⁵ “China Gets an Alphabet,” March 1957, 2-4.

⁴⁶ Zhou, discussing the year-long discussion of the alphabet before its approval by the State Council says: “Over 10,000 language experts and teachers took part in special conferences organized by local and national committees of the People’s Political Consultative Conference. More than 4,000 letters of suggestion and comment were sent in, including many from Chinese living abroad and from foreign philologists.” *Ibid.*, 2.

⁴⁷ PC, Oct. 1, 1956, 42.

⁴⁸ PC, May 1, 1955, 34-35.

disconcerting and disorienting was it to suddenly find their reading habits switched from down the page and right to left, to left to right across the page? The magazines are silent.

But the magazines are clear about the political, economic and cultural imperatives behind the moves. With a backdrop of the creation of cooperatives and then collective farms in the countryside and the increasing industrialization of the cities, the need for a literate, politically informed and technically competent populace was even stronger. Illiteracy “has been a great stumbling-block on the nation’s march to socialism,” says a Peking newspaper editor, writing in *People’s China*.⁴⁹ In late, 1955 another mass literacy campaign was instigated because the first “anti-illiteracy drive became insufficient” in fulfilling the first Five-Year Plan ahead of time. Rural spare-time schools enrolled 62 million peasants, two and half times more than in the previous winter, and winter schools themselves were being abandoned in favor of instruction spread throughout the year, since the gaps were too long for sustained learning. “A big army of specialized teachers” was to be mobilized — ten million more in addition to the million already trained, and volunteers still made up the core of that force. Appropriate textbooks for farmers were in short supply. But as usual, victory is not in doubt: “Everyone is reaching out for culture. The reforms being instituted in the Chinese written language will, as time goes on, greatly speed this process.”⁵⁰

⁴⁹ “Wiping Out Illiteracy,” by Chang Chih-ching, editor of the *Guangming* (Kwangming) Daily in Peking, PC, Apr. 1, 1956, 22 and 27.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 29.

Analysis

The coverage of the literacy campaigns over the years is just one of many examples in which the magazines show the entire people mobilizing to overcome China's backwardness and to take its rightful place among the modern nations. Work by scholars in decades to follow confirms the basic outline of the story line the magazines offer their foreign audience about the literacy campaigns and language reform in the 1950s, as do contemporaneous domestic news media.⁵¹ But overall the development of both is more complicated than presented — no surprise in journalistic treatment in publications for general readership — and the amount of internal dissent is downplayed, as with almost any topic in the magazines. More importantly, the success of the literacy drives are considered vastly overblown and their projections for the future unrealistically optimistic. Based on internal Chinese documents of the time, later scholars also strongly question the commitment of the top leadership to rural literacy, although there was very strong support for vigorous promotion of the common speech, *putonghua*, because it made mass communication and indoctrination much easier. When it comes to language reform, they assert that Mao was never very keen on some form of the Latin alphabet replacing simplified Chinese characters. The government, as Zhou Enlai would elaborate in 1958, envisioned *pinyin* as a way of expressing Chinese characters for transliteration and other uses, not as an eventual phonetic replacement of the characters, as the most optimistic reformers hoped.⁵² Even without the later scholarship, the evidence of PRC domestic

⁵¹ U.S. Consulate, Hong Kong. *Survey of China Mainland Press 1950-1972*.

⁵² Susan Biele Alitto, "The Language Issue in Communist Chinese Education," *Comparative Education Review*, 13, no. 1 (Feb. 1969), 43-59; Hilary Chapell, "The Romanization Debate," *The Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs*, 4 (July 1980) 105-118; Constantin Milsky, "New Developments in Language Reform," *The China*

publications themselves show that simplified characters came into wide use, the format of the publications was dramatically changed, but *pinyin* was not widely used even in books and magazines for foreign readers until the late 1970s.

Glen Petersen says the whole question of literacy in China under the Communists has been “understudied and riven by competing claims,” with little literature in Western languages.⁵³ He cites four different texts from the early 1980s saying that literacy is “virtually achieved,” that it is one of the PRC’s “greatest achievements,” “one of the success stories,” and even UNESCO called China a “nearly literate society.”⁵⁴ But he notes Vilma Seeberg’s early monograph on the subject saying there was actually “very little improvement” in the first thirty years of the PRC, and literacy remained at about 32 percent, confirmed by the 1982 census.⁵⁵ Writing in the late 1990s, Seeberg insists that “illiteracy has been the norm and remains so,” especially in the countryside. But she does say that the most improvement in literacy occurred in the early years and reached its peak in 1957, the period covered by the magazines.⁵⁶

Petersen describes China’s spending on education as among the lowest in the world, and in the 1950s countryside, for political mobilization, “visual and oral media

Quarterly, no. 53, (Jan.-Mar. 1973), 98-133; Peterson, Glen. “State Literacy Ideologies and the Transformation of Rural China,” *The Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs*, no. 32 (July 1994), 95-120.

⁵³ Glen Peterson, *The Power of Words: Literacy and Revolution in South China, 1949-95*. (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1997), 4.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ Vilma Seeberg, *Literacy in China: The Effects of the National Development Context and Policy on Literacy Levels, 1949-1979* (Bochum: Brockmeyer, 1990), 268, 278-79 as quoted in Petersen, *China Quarterly*, 927.

⁵⁶ Vilma Seeberg, *The Rhetoric and Reality of Mass Education in Mao’s China* (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2000), v and viii.

predominated over written communications.” The teaching of basic literacy skills was a much lower priority for the leadership. It was the push to collectivized farming in the countryside that led to the new 1955 literacy campaign, with an emphasis on only practical literacy to help with the new agricultural organization. Petersen says Qi Jianhua’s “quick method” was “all but dismissed as a hoax” after six months; Alitto says many people quickly forgot the characters using Qi’s approach, and that in any case, 1,500 to 2,000 were insufficient.⁵⁷ “The patently exaggerated claims made by local cadres reflect the pressure for quantitative results that was characteristic of campaigns in general.”⁵⁸

In language reform, there was more general acceptance of the simplified characters, since reducing the number of strokes had been a natural tendency in Chinese, especially as more people learned to write. Yet, alleged “rightists” criticized the simplification in the Hundred Flowers Campaign.⁵⁹ There was much stronger opposition to the use of common speech (*putonghua*), especially among older people, and to the phonetic alphabet.⁶⁰ “Officials stressed repeatedly that this script would not replace characters.” *Pinyin* became widely used in schools (to represent the sounds of characters), in telegraphy and the post office. Mao himself had wanted a phonetic alphabet somehow based on Chinese, and not an existing alphabet, but he rejected the schemes that were

⁵⁷ Petersen, “State Literacy,” 105; Alitto, *ibid.*, 55.

⁵⁸ Petersen, 105.

⁵⁹ Milsky, 124.

⁶⁰ Alitto, 57.

presented to him as being too awkward and inconvenient.⁶¹ Overall, there was continued attachments to the characters as representing the essence of Chinese culture, and concern that their loss would represent its destruction.⁶² This ambivalence was reflected in the magazines, who would occasionally run calligraphy in Mao's own hand and also by Zhou Enlai.⁶³ Calling calligraphy "an independent branch of the fine arts" and noting the practice of well-known visitors leaving some writing behind as commentary at famous natural beauty spots, *People's China* said the flowing script of the characters would go on even when it was replaced by phonetic characters.⁶⁴ Of course, as we know almost 50 years later, calligraphy is still alive, though less practiced, and the phonetic alphabet has not replaced the characters. Most of the language reformers and the English-speaking magazines editors, who likely agreed with them, did not know that Mao had little interest in replacing the characters with the Latin alphabet, apparently based on Stalin's advice during Mao's 1949 visit to Moscow. In a 2003 interview with a *New Yorker* writer, the 97-year-old Zhou Youguang said Stalin told Mao: " 'You're a great country, and you should have your own Chinese form of writing. You shouldn't simply use the Latin alphabet.' That's why Mao wanted a national-in-form alphabet."⁶⁵ Technology — computers and off-set printing technologies — have helped overcome some of the drawbacks of the characters as well.

⁶¹ Hsia, 149; Milsky, 104.

⁶² Milsky, 128.

⁶³ PC, July 1, 1950; Nov. 1, 1950; May 16, 1952; Zhou's calligraphy runs on Oct. 1, 1957.

⁶⁴ PC, May 16, 1957, 35.

⁶⁵ Peter Hessler, "Oracle Bones: A wandering poet, a mysterious suicide and a battle over an alphabet," *The New Yorker*, Feb. 16, 2004, 118.

Literature

Mao himself was a writer and a poet. While he certainly appreciated the role of the performing and visual arts in revolutionary politics, in his speeches and writings, his allusions are mainly to classical and contemporary literature. The “high culture” that he predicted would emerge was most importantly a new literature for the newly literate workers, peasants, and soldiers, drawn from their experiences and speech by professional writers but also by authors newly cultivated from the masses themselves.

Much scholarly work has been written about the fiction, poetry and plays written in this early post-liberation period. This thesis, as a history of the magazines and the society they represent, will present a few interesting facets of their coverage and leave the literary criticism to others, though *People's China* in particular offers some heavy literary criticism itself, and Mao saw a role for critics in the arts and letters. Criticism and self-criticism are key components of Marxist Maoist political practice and of the role of the press and literature.⁶⁶ Not surprisingly, the literary criticism is often political in nature, and is often delivered by Zhou Yang, “noted critic,” vice minister of cultural affairs, and the man who introduced Soviet literary style in Yan’an. Zhou criticizes a lack of socialist realism, a failure to disclose difficulties and an overabundance of optimism, inadequate descriptions of the thoughts and feelings of new heroes, “the reason why many of literary works suffer from lack of vitality, are dry and formalistic.”⁶⁷ Zhou could have been writing about some of the magazine’s stilted prose as well.

⁶⁶ “The Press in New China,” PC, Dec. 16, 1950, 10.

⁶⁷ “Socialist Realism — The Road of Advance for Chinese Literature,” PC, Jan. 16, 1953, 14.

Literature was important from the first months of *People's China*, where major articles on the topic appear headlined on the cover. In its first issue, Guo Moruo (Kuo Mo-jo), chairman of the All-China Association of Writers and Artists, and, unmentioned here, holding a number of high government and nongovernmental posts as well, weighs in on “The United Front in Literature and Art,” and the role of writers and artists, echoing Mao at Yan’an.

We shall plunge deep into reality, give expression to and praise the industry, ingenuity and bravery of the masses of the people. We shall create a people’s literature and art rich in thought and moral content but which the people shall dearly love to read, to look at and to listen too and through which our great mission of educating the people can be achieved. Attention shall be paid to the literary and artistic activities of the masses in the factories, in the countryside and in the armed forces, so that new writers and artists are recruited from the masses.⁶⁸

People's China is almost lyrical about a drama written by industrial workers.

“The Muses now dwell beneath the factory chimneys of New China,” it says in “Theatre of the Workers,” a one-page Cultural World column, later to be called Cultural Front.⁶⁹

“Dramatists, writers, musicians and artists in organized groups ... are now regular visitors to the factories, works and mines. They have gone as learners as well as teachers to all the main industrial towns and centres.” A railway wagon repairer with only four years of primary education writes a four-act play about factory life deemed “an artistic triumph.” A team of Dairen dockworkers pens a 40-minute play on breaking industrial records for unloading, climaxing in a dance scene in which the dockers grapple with a huge log to the chants of popular labor rhythms — “not merely a display of physical beauty, but an expression of cultural strength,” says the gushing review. The play was

⁶⁸ PC, Jan. 1, 1950, 29.

⁶⁹ PC, June 16, 1950, 25.

published in the *Literary Gazette*, organ of the national writers and artists association.

Worker and peasant news correspondents were apparently a permanent feature of the pre-liberation revolutionary press, but the spread of the “new democratic literary culture” engendered a new group of worker and peasant literary correspondents, *People’s China* reports, “an inexhaustible reservoir of new literary cadres.”⁷⁰ In Hankou, the Yangtze River port in central China, there were 832 of these correspondents reportedly writing for the *Changjiangwen* (*Chang Kiang Wen I—Yangtze River Literature*), a fortnightly magazine. One of them is Li Ho-kung, a stevedore on the Hankow wharves. After his first feature is published, he writes the editor: “In the old days could a ‘coolie’ ever have dreamed of such a marvel?” The editors are professionals, but “There is no such thing as a rejection slip. Unusable manuscripts are constructively criticized; faults and achievements are analysed so that correspondents treasure editorial replies as textbooks.” In corresponding with fledgling writers, the editors are enjoined to “be as sincere and kind as if writing your own sweetheart.” Li Wen-yuan, a peasant with four years of schooling, wrote a short story on a landlord called “The Plot” that earned him “over a half million yuan in royalties.” (Perhaps a few hundred 1951 U.S. dollars, but a huge sum for a peasant.) Li had had six manuscripts returned to him “heavily annotated.” “Now I understand the toll of literary composition,” he said. (With that much editing, it raises the question of how much of the story was truly the work of a relatively uneducated peasant.)

⁷⁰ PC, Nov. 1, 1951, 29.

A more credible story is told of Chen Dengke (Chen Teng-ko), “A New Writer Is Born.”⁷¹ Poor peasant and the son of poor peasants, he eventually joins the PLA, learns to read and write, becomes a news correspondent, produces 300 pieces of reportage, short stories, and then novels in 1946 and 1947 about his war experiences. *China Reconstructs* recounts a similar story of the development of “Kao Yu-pao, Soldier Writer,” whose autobiographical novel is published by the magazine *PLA Literature* in 1952. Both men struggle to learn Chinese characters as young adults, but eventually become “professional” writers, though still army men. Of the fifty-three writers in the first graduating class of the Literary Institute of the Union of Chinese Writers in 1953, which included Chen, three-quarters of them (thirty-nine) were from the PLA, including cadres and political workers. Only seven were workers and two were peasants.⁷² The students there first study Marxism-Leninism and Mao’s Yan’an talks, then Chinese classical literature, in particular *Shuihu* (in English, *Water Margin* or *All Men Are Brothers*), the thirteen century Yuan dynasty epic in which a band of outlaws battle harsh feudal officials — one of Mao’s favorites. There is a special concentration on Lu Xun, “founder of the new Chinese literature,” and his novel *The True Story of Ah Q*. They also study contemporary novelists like Mao Dun (Mao Tun) and Ding Ling (Ting Ling), along with Western writers such as Shakespeare and Whitman. Not surprisingly, the works of Chen, Kao and other graduates are based on their own experience of the anti-Japanese war and the civil war against the GMD.

⁷¹ PC, Nov. 16, 1951, 29-30.

⁷² “Cultivating New Writers,” PC, Mar. 1954, 16.

Lu Xun is the idolized master of revolutionary literature. He is mentioned often in cultural and literary contexts, and is at the top of the rather limited list of literary icons celebrated in the 1950s magazines. While criticized for subjectivism and reformism in his earlier years, he had fully embraced the revolutionary cause and had the advantage of having died in 1936, making him politically reliable and unswervingly loyal. In addition to early features explaining his significance, a flurry of articles marked the twentieth anniversary of his death.⁷³ On the short list of icons are also Mao Dun; Ding Ling; Lao She, author of *Rickshaw Boy*, well-known in the West; and Ba Jin (Pa Chin), author of the novel *Family*. All four would write articles for both magazines. Ba Jin told readers of *China Reconstructs* “How I Wrote the Novel ‘Family’” in a very intimate tone.⁷⁴ And Lao would take advantage of the Hundred Flowers blossoming of party criticism to declare in *People’s China* that “A writer should be allowed to write what he likes and in any way he chooses,” complaining that officials had delivered “too many thrashings of writers.”⁷⁵

People’s China published the short fiction of lesser-known writers: a seven-part novelette on village life in 1951; two short stories in 1952; three in 1954, seven in 1955. The stories, modeled in the style of socialist realism, include tales of village and neighborhood life, family centered and full of dialogue, or they are about PLA action,

⁷³ “How Lu Hsun Lived in Shanghai,” CR, Nov.-Dec. 1953, 32-35 CR, Oct. 1956, 7; “My Reminiscences of Lu Hsun,” June 1, 1954, 34-37; “The New Tomb of Lu Hsun” and “Homage to Lu Hsun,” Oct. 16, 1956, 42; “Lu Hsun Museum in Peking,” Nov. 1, 1956, 41.

⁷⁴ CR, Jan. 1958, 15; a chapter from the novel was published along with the commentary.

⁷⁵ “Freedom and the Writer,” PC, Jan. 1, 1957, 13, 14.

land reform or other mass movements. From 1954 through 1958, *China Reconstructs* would publish two or three short stories a year of the same genre, including a 1957 reprint of a Lu Xun story; it printed several folk tales each year as well. Yet even in 1956, the number of professional writers in China, as opposed to journalists, is still fairly small. The Union of Chinese Writers had only 946 members, and only a fifth of them are full time.⁷⁶ “There is simply not enough creative writing, and there simply aren’t enough writers,” said novelist Liu Baiyou (Liu Pai-yu).

One role of the magazines is to present an approved selection of the classics of Chinese literature to their foreign readers and provide a Marxist reinterpretation of these old works. The case of *The Dream of the Red Chamber* offers one of the few examples available on record of how the internal editorial process at the magazines worked and how they were subject to political discussion and external influence. The Peking University scholar Yu Pingbo, an acknowledged expert on *Dream*, submitted an article to *People’s China* that arrived on the desk of Jack Chen.⁷⁷ This eighteenth century novel of the extended Jia family written by Cao Xueqin is considered a masterpiece of Chinese literature and runs more than 2,000 pages in English translation. Chen and other editors at the magazine felt that Yu, despite his years of study, knew little about Marxism and “completely ignored the essential social significance of the novel for its author’s time and present-day China.” Other editors were “aghast” that Chen and the other “hard-liners” would seek to challenge “a leading intellectual” like Yu.

⁷⁶ “Write More, Write Better,” by Liu Pai-yu, PC June 16, 1956, 19.

⁷⁷ Jack Chen, *Inside the Cultural Revolution*, New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1975, 99-101.

It was finally agreed that the magazine was not being run to express the individual, rather muddled idealist opinions of Yu Ping-po, but to help people in other countries understand China's classical literary heritage and modern China's views on that heritage and her history.⁷⁸

Chen spent weeks editing the article, rereading *The Dream*, and when the final version was presented to Yu, "he hit the ceiling, raged that his article was being mutilated," rejected some of the changes and made more of his own. The finished article, which pleased neither Chen nor Yu, ran May 16, 1954, and described the novel as "a swan song of the feudal system in China," a critique of the class system, the corrupt landlord aristocrats in the Qing dynasty and the lack of freedom of marriage in feudal society.⁷⁹ Chen clearly had his political antenna tuned properly, because a few weeks later Mao sent a fairly short letter about Yu and his studies of *The Dream* to members of the CCP Politburo, high-ranking cadres and editors. Mao criticized Yu and others of his school for their "formalism" and "bourgeois idealism," and promoted the work of two young critics who had trouble getting their critiques of past *Dream* studies published by the literary establishment. A year later *China Reconstructs* publishes its own article about *The Dream of the Red Chamber*, but this one is critical of Yu and spends more time espousing the interpretation of the young critics, whose cause had been taken up by *People's Daily* against the literary magazines.⁸⁰

The debate about *Dream* and how to interpret it is the kind of struggle taking place in many areas of Chinese cultural affairs in the 1950s. New China embraces the rich heritage of its classic literature and art, but it must enfold them in its own gloss on

⁷⁸ Ibid., 100.

⁷⁹ PC, May 16, 1954, 32-35.

⁸⁰ CR, May 1955, 20-23.

the meaning of China's past and how that leads into its modern future. The Maoist interpretation of *Dream* is not readily apparent without fully absorbing his politicized worldview, and literature, particularly a long, complicated novel, has many potential interpretations. That observation, Mao might have said, is a good example of bourgeois subjectivism.

Performing Arts

Reinterpretation and reform were particularly troublesome in the Chinese opera, the traditional and popular performance art that combines drama, singing and dance. The themes, language and allusions to familiar operas were rampant in Chinese popular culture. But the dramas themselves were full of generals, princes and aristocrats in unquestionably feudal story lines. Both the operas and the actors in them needed socialist reform. Pre-liberation, actors and artists “were an oppressed group on the lowest rung of the social ladder,” said Mei Lan-fang, called “China’s greatest actor” and repeatedly featured in both magazines over the years.⁸¹ “Their grievances and bitterness against the ruling class were those of the people, but they were also confused in politics and constantly, though often unwittingly, influenced by feudal ideas.”

Shanghai was a good place to begin the reform because it was home to scores of theaters and tea-houses offering operas in six or seven regional styles, including those of Peking, Shaoshing, Shanghai and Ningpo.⁸² The city also supported as many as 8,000 other performing artists — comedians, story-tellers, singers, jugglers, acrobats, with their feudal and semi-colonial baggage. One re-education training session for 227 Shaoshing

⁸¹ “Old Art With a New Future,” by Mei Lan-fang, CR, Sept.-Oct. 1952, 21; “greatest actor,” PC, Mar. 16, 1956, 31.

⁸² “The Cultural Front in Shanghai,” PC, Aug. 16, 1950.

playwrights and actors lasted 47 days in 1949. They visited factories “where former exploited peasants related their sorrows. Their class consciousness was awakened ... and they began to develop a new attitude to life and art. They saw how they should and could serve the masses.” In February 1950, more than 3,300 artists participated in a competition for new dramas and ballads where “service to the masses” was the criterion for the awards.

To conform to the new politics, new plays had to be written, old dramas rewritten to remove feudal and semi-colonial elements, and old plays jettisoned from the repertoire completely. Mei, who was noted for his portrayal of women on stage even at the age of 61, observed that the audiences were reacting in new and surprising ways to familiar lines in old plays, manifesting a new political consciousness, for instance, by murmuring with hostility at a line insulting “womanhood.”⁸³ Some of the most popular of the politically correct plays of the classical theater are put on film, and Mei becomes a film star as he turns 60. In 1954, China’s fledgling film industry produces its first full-length feature film in color, but it is the ancient folk tale of two young lovers, Liang Shanpo (Liang Shan-po) and Zhu Yingtai (Chu Ying-t’ai), popular on the Chinese stage, depicting “the hopeless struggle against inexorable marriage laws of the feudal system” in which the lovers die.⁸⁴ Premier Zhou Enlai screened this film for British Prime Minister Anthony Eden and other Western diplomats at a reception at the 1954 Geneva Conference, a major

⁸³ CR, Sept.-Oct. 1952, 21.

⁸⁴ PC, Nov. 1, 1954, 37. The story had been “preserved in many forms: novels, dramas, operas, poems, songs and now on film.”

debut of the PRC on the world stage, and Zhou suggested the title should be “the Chinese Romeo and Juliet.” It won two international awards and was big hit in Hong Kong.⁸⁵

The live performing arts were a crucial tool in the new cultural front for two reasons. One was the population’s illiteracy. What could not be conveyed in print could be communicated on stage, in word, song or dance. Secondly, the reach of radio in China was still very limited, and the number of radio receivers “still very small,” even in 1955, and the electronics industry cannot supply enough.⁸⁶ A photo illustrating the article depicts residents of a remote village crowded around a single radio receiver, and in many villages, the broadcasts were delivered on loudspeakers. In some areas, monitoring posts would transcribe Radio Peking commentaries, and then distribute them by newsletter since “regular newspapers still take a month to reach some areas.” In 1955, China’s first television station was only in the planning stages. Of course, many parts of the country were still without electricity, and this made seeing the growing number of products from China’s film industry a rare event. A 1953 article in *People’s China* estimated that 600 million people had seen a movie that year, but that means the vast majority of rural Chinese viewed a film only two or three times a year, if that. As another indicator of China’s electronic limitations, in 1953, lantern slides were still being used for mass education in rural areas.⁸⁷

Lacking the tools of modern mass communications in many parts of China, the party and government encouraged the creation of tens of thousands of cultural troupes

⁸⁵ Gao, James Z., *The Communist Takeover of Hangzhou* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2004), 236.

⁸⁶ “Broadcasting for the People,” CR, Aug. 1955, 2.

⁸⁷ “Lantern Slides for Mass Education,” CR, Mar.-Apr. 1953.

traveling the country to perform plays, skits, songs and dance to promote mass campaigns, as the last chapter described in fostering the Marriage Law. The People's Liberation Army had long had its own cultural troupes to entertain and inform the soldiers, and every major school, factory, institution, and village had its performance troupes for dance, drama and song.⁸⁸ The Liuliho Cement Works in Peking had all three on stage at one amateur night.⁸⁹ The packing house men play themselves in a work called "Raising Production," one of 25 plays composed by its drama troupe of 150 people. (The applause was "deafening," the correspondent reports.) Young workers load bags of cement in a dance routine called "Happy Cement Workers." "Ten Praises of Cement Workers" was a song written and performed collectively. And a trade union organizer at the plant penned a poem about "happiness in the soul of the workers." "Unpolished lines?" the correspondent asks. "The polish will come. What is important is that they express the sincere convictions, the song in the heart of a worker of People's China." In another article about the new mass singing movement, the author notes that "although many of the songs written by amateurs may lack artistic refinement and finish, they pulsate with life and vivid sense of reality."⁹⁰ The amateur playwrights and composers are not always on their own. Seven playwrights sent to a textile factory to get acquainted with the masses help the workers there write a play that turns into a box office hit.⁹¹ A

⁸⁸ PC, Jan. 1, 1952, 23; June 16, 1953; Apr. 16, 1954, 28; one article estimates there were 100,000 amateur dramatic companies, PC, Dec. 16, 1954, 24.

⁸⁹ "Amateur Night at Liuliho," PC, Dec. 16, 1952.

⁹⁰ "The People Sing," PC, July 1, 1954, 28-30.

⁹¹ "Song of the Red Flag," Sept. 16, 1950, 19-21.

geological survey worker trying to write a song has an exchange of letters with a young woman composer. “We need your help badly,” he says in one letter.⁹²

Not only do peasants and workers perform their own productions, there is a strong emphasis on reviving and elevating all the old folk arts. Once impoverished and despised by the wealthy, the magicians, tumblers, rope walkers, acrobats and sword dancers of the old Tianqiao (Tien Chiao) entertainment district for Peking’s poor are given new status and tour the Soviet Union.⁹³ The waist drum, “a characteristically Chinese national instrument” with origins in the fourth century, was “loved by the working people” but “despised and considered very ‘low brow’ by the ruling classes. It was “discovered” by the Lu Xun Academy in 1942 as part of the process of learning from the people initiated by the Yan’an talks. Revived by the people’s army, its rhythmic beat “is symbolic of the victory of the Chinese people,” and factories, schools, institutions “and even many family groups have their own waist-drum teams. It has become a new national art.”⁹⁴

The pattern is almost axiomatic: art was created, often centuries before, and loved by the people; the art and its artists are despised by the old society; but as China gains liberation, the art form and its performers gain recognition and prestige. “When liberation came, we stood up and our dolls stood up too,” said the puppeteers, whose art is traced to the Zhou dynasty in 1,000 B.C.E.⁹⁵ Acrobats and magicians were first found on “a late

⁹² “Birth of a Song,” Apr. 16, 1954, 28-29.

⁹³ PC, Nov. 16, 1950, 30.

⁹⁴ PC, May 15, 1951, 28.

⁹⁵ PC, July 1, 1955, 28, 30.

Tang mural” (ninth century) and “now they prosper.”⁹⁶ Shadow plays, already popular in the Song dynasty (960-1279 C.E.), “virtually died out under the Kuomintang,” but are now being revived “with new material reflecting the life and hopes of the Chinese people at the present time.”⁹⁷ The *yangge* (*yangko*) was a line dance, combined with folk plays and singing, often done with drums and likely deriving from rituals for spring planting; it spread from the countryside to cities, as do other forms of folk dancing.⁹⁸ Ancient Chinese music and instruments are recovered, and “our beloved national music is playing an active role in creating the music of a new age,” as the old instruments are combined with Western musical instruments.⁹⁹ *China Reconstructs* regularly publishes the sheet music with lyrics for new Chinese songs, such as “The Tractor Comes,” and old folk tunes as well, such as “Lan Hua-hua” (“Blue Flower”).¹⁰⁰

A mid-1952 graphic in *China Reconstructs* lists some extraordinary figures, in round numbers, for the “Cultural Work of Chinese Trade Unions”: 5,100 libraries, 2,400 ballad groups; 1,900 string orchestras; 66 “cultural palaces”; 5,200 drama groups; 2,500 dance groups; 1,900 *yangge* and waist-drum teams; 8,700 factory clubs; 1,000 writing and composing groups; 1,800 graphic arts groups; and 3,300 choral groups.¹⁰¹

⁹⁶ PC, Jan. 1, 1956, 36.

⁹⁷ CR, July-Aug. 1954, 23-25.

⁹⁸ “Dances of the People,” CR, Oct. 1955, 15.

⁹⁹ “Recovering Ancient Chinese Music,” Jan. 16, 1956, 28.

¹⁰⁰ CR, Aug. 1956, 31; July-Aug. 1954, 51.

¹⁰¹ “Workers’ Clubs and Cultural Groups,” CR, July-Aug. 1952, 24

Visual Arts

The visual arts follow a similar pattern to the performing arts. The magazines try to show China's rich tradition of painting, calligraphy, sculpture and vessels, while promoting the traditional folk arts that arise from the common people. In this case, the magazines have an easier time of it since they can actually show the art itself in pictures, some of them in color. For the performing arts, the publications could depict the costumed actors, singers and dancers on stage, but they struggled mightily to convey what the performances might look and sound like — Peking opera is hardly like Italian opera.

The magazines can also show the drawings, paintings and photos produced by the workers and peasants at the cultural clubs that became common at factories and in villages. *People's China*, which ran pictures mainly in a center spread, was actually a fine example of the use of contemporary woodcuts and paper-cuts, which it used to illustrate its articles, along with line drawings and cartoons.

In its first article on the topic of visual art, *People's China* talks of the “two main currents” in Chinese art. One “flowed toward the imperial courts. Monopolized by the nobility and the gentry, it reflected the life and taste of these ruling classes.” The other was the folk art that offered the peasantry “momentary escape from their everyday drudgery. ... Although strongly coloured by feudalism, the folk arts often broke through the shackles of the existing society.”¹⁰² The custom of posting New Year's pictures around the house was an old one, and many were images of gods, “an offshoot of the superstitious feudal society.” The New Year's pictures for the new China, on the other

¹⁰² “New Year's Pictures — A People's Art,” PC, Feb. 16, 1950, 12.

hand, depict the first tractor arriving, the welcoming of a Soviet friend, a celebration of “production brings prosperity,” children playing a game of “Knock Down Chiang Kai-shek,” and a portrait of Chairman Mao being paraded through a village to celebrate the 1949 liberation. There is absolutely no hint of irony when the cartoonist who writes the article mentions that images of gods have been replaced with pictures of men. Two years later, *China Reconstructs* runs its own spread of New Year pictures.

Scissor-cuts of red paper were used to decorate the windows of peasant homes in northwest China, and the Lu Xun Academy in Yan’an was supposedly the first to draw national attention to the art form. They were still “influenced by superstitious beliefs,” but are filled with “robust feeling and great simplicity. The decadence of China’s old style literati or of the so-called modernists has not touched them.”¹⁰³

The woodcuts that illustrate *People’s China* constantly and the photo-heavy *China Reconstructs* occasionally are excellent examples of an old Chinese folk art that was deliberately revived to serve the revolution and was influenced by foreign techniques. A reader of *People’s China* who kept the magazines, as many appeared to do, judging from their letters, would have amassed a fine collection of woodcuts in many styles executed by some of China’s finest practitioners. “Here was an art form that was of its very nature democratic, cheap to practice — needing only wood blocks, knives and graters — able to produce many copies, and with a rich fund of experience both in China and abroad to draw upon,” said Wang Chi, an assistant professor of graphics arts in a five-page article, one of several that would appear in both magazines.¹⁰⁴ After the

¹⁰³ PC, Mar. 16, 1951, 26; “Peasant Paper-Cuts,” CR, Nov.-Dec. 1952, centerfold.

Japanese had invaded Manchuria in 1931, Lu Xun had personally “called on young patriotic artists to use the woodcut as their weapon in the national-liberation movement,” and suggested they study the work of Soviet and German artists. The Lu Xun Academy in Yan’an continued to foster the art after Lu Xun’s passing, sending woodcut teams to guerilla areas that would document and publish Eighth Army heroics and Japanese atrocities. Mao’s 1942 Yan’an talks provided further impetus for the woodcut artists to disperse to the liberated areas “to live with the masses of workers, peasants and soldiers,” where they became participants and not just observers. Their stark black-and-white but often detailed engravings would elaborate on many themes of everyday life: village elections, winter schools, family relations, public health, and land reform. These woodcuts would sometimes be published in supplements, and were valuable in organizing and educating a largely illiterate rural populace in areas where photography and sophisticated printing methods to reproduce it were very limited. After liberation, “an urgent and increasing demand for culture” by the masses for New Year’s pictures and picture books had stretched the woodcut artists thin, reducing their output as many turned to the faster technique of painting.

China Reconstructs documents a “New Spirit in Peking Handicrafts,” with newer designs replacing traditional decorations that had been reproduced for centuries.¹⁰⁵ There was initial resistance to the newer designs by craftsmen and brokers long accustomed to making and selling the same old items. But that changed through the leadership of some

¹⁰⁴ PC, May 1, 1953, 23-27; “Color Woodblock Printing,” PC, Sept. 1, 1954, 25-28; “Chinese Woodcuts, Old and New,” CR, Mar. 1955, 14; also “New Chinese Woodcuts,” by Li Chun, “one of China’s best know woodcut artists,” PC, May 16, 1955, 25-27.

¹⁰⁵ CR, Mar-Apr. 1952, 24-25.

Qinghua (Tsinghua) University professors under government sponsorship, and because the 1950 embargo by the West in response to the Korean War had shut off the traditional foreign markets. Craftsmen began placing children doing the buoyant *yangge* dance on cloisonné trays and painted silk lanterns. Flying peace doves were applied to powder boxes and plates. Other designs were inspired by vibrantly colorful Buddhist cave murals from Dunhuang (Tunhuang) in western Gansu province, featured at a substantial 1951 exhibit in Peking. Another major exhibition in the capital in 1954 displayed over 3,000 objects of folk arts and crafts, some of them seldom seen outside the provinces where they were produced.¹⁰⁶ It included porcelain and pottery; intricate carvings in ivory, wood and stone; silk brocades; hand-woven and embroidered articles; lacquer ware and so on. In the usual refrain, the writer says that the handicrafts had been in a state of decline before liberation, but loans to craftspeople and the forming of producer cooperatives had encouraged their revival. A book on the *Folk Arts of New China*, reviewed by the Australian Rewi Alley, highlights the “rebirth” of these products and art forms.¹⁰⁷

Classical art, its teaching and reproduction also have a place in the New China, such as the traditional flower-and-bird painting, despite the fact that it has little similarity to socialist realism. But its history can be traced back to Han dynasty handicrafts (206 B.C.E.-220 C.E.), giving it both folk origins and historical legitimacy. Flower-and-bird designs were also used in Tang dynasty silk and cotton cloth. Revived in post-liberation art schools, they will be used again on ceramic ware and clothing, for both domestic use

¹⁰⁶ “China’s Rich Folk Arts and Crafts,” PC, Mar. 16, 1954, 17.

¹⁰⁷ PC, Jan. 16, 1955, 38-39.

and export.¹⁰⁸ The magazines reproduce oil paintings that are clearly done in the socialist realism style, but they also publish classical and contemporary works that represent a native Chinese realism found on old scroll paintings.¹⁰⁹ Other forms of traditional Chinese painting also begin making a comeback, partly in response to the openness of the Hundred Flowers campaign.¹¹⁰ Archeological finds and major museum exhibits provide consistent opportunities over the years in both magazines to honor ancient arts and crafts and put them in a historical context that affirms the high stature of Chinese civilization.¹¹¹ These treasures of the past had been coveted by imperialists, who carted off some of them, as Chiang Kai-shek did with much of the collection in the Forbidden City's Palace Museum, but what is left belongs to the people and is protected by the government, the magazine assures.¹¹² "Care for their ancient culture has now become second nature to the Chinese." Many of these archeological finds resulted from the widespread construction going on after liberation.¹¹³

Analysis

This review of the cultural coverage in the magazines reflects only a brief overview of hundreds of articles in the magazines. Many were feature-length treatments,

¹⁰⁸ CR, May-June 1953, 50-52.

¹⁰⁹ "On the Classical Tradition in Chinese Painting," Apr. 16, 1954, 18.

¹¹⁰ PC, June 16, 1957.

¹¹¹ "The Tunhuang Murals," CR, Mar.-Apr. 1952; "Art Treasures Rediscovered," and "The Treasures of Ping Ling Ssu," CR, July-Aug. 1953; "Old Museum Comes Alive," CR, Jan.-Feb. 1953, 32; "Relics of the State of Chu," PC, Feb. 16, 1954; "Arts and Crafts of 2,300 Years Ago," CR, Jan.-Feb. 1954; "Grottoes of Machishan," CR, May-Apr. 1954.

¹¹² "Our Living Past," PC, Sept. 1, 1955, 26-29.

¹¹³ "Building the New, Uncovering the Old," Nov.-Dec. 1954.

and except for a two-and-a-half year period in which it disappeared unannounced (August 1952 through December 1954), every issue of *People's China* had a one-page column called Cultural Front or later Cultural Life. Other aspects of what the magazines considered “cultural” coverage but ran only sporadically have been given no attention at all: higher education; science and medicine; sports; and a dozen articles on religion, a topic on which the main goal was to show that the PRC was not mistreating its Muslims, Buddhists and Christians, both Protestant and Catholic. (Based on story counts, there is actually more coverage of religion in domestic media, but it is more negative, showing the churches' involvement in spying and undermining the state.)¹¹⁴

A review of some of the scholarly literature on the performing and visual arts suggests that the magazines accurately reflect the trends and preoccupations of the many domestic arts magazines and associations that proliferated throughout China in this period. For instance, Mei Lan-fang was one of the most famous actors of the Republican period, with a higher social status than many other performers, and he was indeed active in reforming the classical theater. But once the politically improper plays were purged from the repertoire, leaving only fairy-tale plays like *The White Snake* and dramas about Liang Shanpo and Zhu Yingtai, “were performed so frequently that the people become tired of them” and lack of variety on the stage became “an endemic problem.”¹¹⁵ For the spoken drama, introduced from the West early in the century, there is a wealth of newly written Chinese plays, and one scholar calls it a “golden age” for the Chinese stage.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁴ U.S. Consulate, *ibid.*

¹¹⁵ Colin Mackerras, *The Chinese Theatre in Modern Times, From 1840 to the Present Day* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1975), 197; Mackerras, *The Performing Arts in Contemporary China* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul 1981).

The coverage has some of the same faults and limitations identified in the last chapter. In particular, while it discusses the performing troupes developed in the countryside or traveling there, almost all the performances the magazine writers attended were actually seen in the big cities, mainly Beijing and Shanghai. These are the places where all the major exhibits of visual arts are found as well, old and new arts, foreign and domestic. More than two dozen articles discuss the availability of foreign literature, plays, film, music and dance in China. Other than the translations of Western classics by progressive authors, which might possibly be purchased in urban bookstores throughout the country, the foreign film festivals, ballet companies, orchestras and theater groups could be seen almost exclusively in Beijing or Shanghai. These imports came almost entirely from the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe and India. To the foreign subscriber of the magazines, the People's Republic would appear cosmopolitan and welcoming to world culture, but this was a very isolated phenomenon. Jack Chen writes about a Beijing exhibit of Picasso reproductions in late 1956, but this was likely an aberration given the communists firm rejection of abstract impression as "bourgeois subjectivism," though Picasso's leftist politics were sound and his painting of a peace dove had been used on a stamp. The extensive treatment of the old art, art objects and products of archeological finds may have been designed to appeal to foreign readers' sense of culture and history, but these were largely restricted to display in the museums and exhibit halls of Beijing, where the small staffs were based. Maria Galikowski confirms, as the magazine coverage implies, that the artists of the old styles were "tolerated" by the authorities as "as the

¹¹⁶ Xiaomei Chen, *Acting the Right Part: Political Theatre and Popular Drama in Contemporary China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2002), 6.

main upholders of China's 'artistic heritage' ” about which these party and government officials “were to remain ambivalent” over the decades.¹¹⁷

The authorities were not ambivalent about folk arts and customs. An abundance of scholarship shows the Yan'an decade as crucial in the creation of a cultural propaganda system based firmly in the existing or revived folk arts, the older and the more peasant-based the better. Their form is retained but their contents are changed to promote revolutionary values. “New Year's pictures are one of the most important of these folk art forms,” Galikowski says, but the peasants were not always thrilled with all the revolutionary images and foreign styles that had replaced the old images, preferring old styles showing happy marriages and growing families. David Holm says that the use of folk art forms for propaganda work had been recommended to the CCP and GMD by Soviet advisers in the 1920s, but it was the communists who embraced and perfected it. This was particularly true of the woodcuts and woodblock prints, which continues as a well-regarded art form to the present day. “We are asked to confront a different conception of art, one that reflects society, but also takes part in shaping it: art as communication,” says the director of an Israeli museum that put together a major 1999 retrospective of Chinese works.¹¹⁸ The transformation of a folk art form for political purposes was also true of the *yangge*, which David Holm describes as “the motley collection of songs, dances, and folk plays traditionally performed in North China from

¹¹⁷ Maria Galikowski, *Art and Politics in China, 1949-1984* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1998), 35.

¹¹⁸ Galia Bar Or, director of the Museum of Art Ein Harod (Israel) in Iris Wachs and Chang Tong-zun, *Half a Century of Chinese Woodblock Prints: From the Communist Revolution to the Open-Door Policy and Beyond, 1945-1998* ([Israel]: Museum of Ein Harod, 1999), 5.

the New Year until the Lantern Festival,” two weeks later at the first full moon of the new year.¹¹⁹

[*Yangge*'s] adoption by the Chinese Communist Party as a propaganda medium and as the basis of a cultural mass movement has usually been seen both by the Chinese authorities and by Western scholars as a particularly successful example of the stratagem of 'putting new wine in old bottles' and producing new hybrid genres suitable for the conditions and tasks of New Democratic society.¹²⁰

Holm reports that American newspaper correspondents who saw performances of *yangge* during a group visit to Yan'an in 1944 were overall "quite impressed" and included them in their "glowing reports" about conditions there.¹²¹ Yet Holm says the enthusiasm for the folk form lasted only a few years in the cities, where "it was already regarded as a bit of a joke by city sophisticates in 1949."¹²² Try as the magazine did to convey the vibrancy and charm of *yangge* to a foreign audience, this reader unfamiliar with the form must confess that it was not really comprehensible until Holm described it in detail with photos.

One overall impression that the magazines convey repeatedly with conviction about culture in the New China is that the people are having fun, they are happy. The workers and peasants are working hard in the factories and fields, but they are not so overburdened with drudgery that they cannot enjoy themselves after hours watching and participating in amateur productions. Once again we see the smiling faces of China and now we hear them sing and dance as well.

¹¹⁹ David Holm, *Art and Ideology in Revolutionary China* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 115.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 325.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 331.

Chapter 4: Political Problems and a New Magazine

Editors from the first seven years of the People's Republic of China would later remember that time as "the golden age" of the socialist revolution, particularly in the case of *People's China*. "Even now we call it the golden age because during that period, people's relationships were different," Zhang Yan, former managing editor of *People's China*, former deputy editor of *China Reconstructs*, and at one time, foreign affairs director of *Peking Review*, said in a 2005 interview. "Relations between people were equal and friendly. ... The changes began in 1957."¹

On the magazine's thirtieth anniversary in 1982, Epstein would write:

Many of us recall with fondness those early direct, family like days when the whole — the entire new society which we knew was behind us — and the part — our small initiating force felt so palpably linked, as did we to our early readers. The new nation was young then, the magazine newborn. As the poet Wordsworth wrote during the French Revolution long ago, "Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive. But to be young was very heaven...."²

In 1957, in the midst of the "hundred flowers" rectification campaign and the anti-rightist mass movement that followed in its wake, editors at *People's China* would be criticized and removed, and at the end of the year, the magazine itself would stop publishing, to be replaced by a more serious, more ideological, more frequent and more timely publication, *Peking Review*. The reasons for the demise of *People's China* were more utilitarian than ideological, according to those who planned its replacement, including several who worked on *People's China*. But there is no question that the new weekly magazine was more politically dominated and controlled, and contained almost

¹ Zhang Yan, Interview by the author, tape recording. Beijing, 14 June 2005

² CR, Jan. 1982, 3.

none of the balancing social news, none of the pictorials, few first-hand accounts and reports from the field, and more limited cultural news, except for a one-page weekly column. Those social commentaries, picture spreads, first-person articles, and journalistic reportage from the countryside would continue in *China Reconstructs*, as would CR's emphasis on articles about women and children, lighter features and reviews on Chinese music, film and culture, and regular columns on language, cooking and stamps.

But it too would be affected by the anti-rightist campaign and the blatant exaggerations of the Great Leap Forward which followed it. These excesses that appeared in *China Reconstructs* would later be lamented in print by Soong Ching Ling and other editors.

Demise of *People's China*

There is a little evidence within the pages of *People's China* of the internal political turmoil at the magazine. But there is marked shift in tone by mid-year. In January, the magazine had published a four-page article by Lao She, the well-known novelist and playwright, on "Freedom and the Writer" in which he states:

Again, we should write about our workers, peasants and soldiers. But is that any reason why we should not also mirror the lives of intellectuals and capitalists? Every writer should write about what he likes and what he can handle — people, life and themes. A writer should have perfect freedom to choose what he wants to write about. All writings other than those which poison people's minds are worth while and should be published. And by writing them and publishing them we really shall be letting flowers of many kinds blossom.³

This is fully in keeping with the "hundred flowers" campaign launched in 1956, and the open approach *People's China's* editors had embraced. But by May, the tone begins to change. The reaction to the overabundant criticism the rectification campaign

³ PC, Jan. 1, 1957, 14.

engendered has begun to set in. Trying to correct those excesses on right and left, the magazine reprints a six-page interview by Zhou Yang, the former vice-minister of cultural affairs and now deputy director of the propaganda department, given to Shanghai's *Wenhui Bao*, the newspaper for intellectuals that was apparently a hotbed of the intense cultural criticism.⁴ Long articles in the next two issues follow on these themes, trying to show the correct approach to criticism and self-criticism. The July 1 issue provides another explanation of the need for and the correct approach to the rectification campaign, and publishes as a supplement the entire 15,000 word text of Mao's February 27 speech "On the Correct Handling of Contradictions Among the People." But by the next month's issue the anti-rightist campaign is in full swing, reflected up front in "From the Editor's Desk," the half-page editorial that leads every issue:

If we were to name the most important political activity of the Chinese people in the past month, we would pick the mass refutation of the bourgeois rightist elements.

The rightists are a handful of people who took advantage of the "rectification campaign" for improving the work of the Communist Party to unleash a ferocious attack on the Party. They hoped thus to overthrow the socialist system and the leadership of the Party with which they had long been dissatisfied. When they became known, the schemes of the rightists aroused public indignation. All over the country rightists' statements and actions were condemned, and soon the counterattack became a mass movement.⁵

The 10-page lead article in the issue was the speech delivered at the National People's Congress the month before by the head of the CCP Propaganda Department, Lu Dingyi (Lu Ting-yi), entitled "Where We Differ from the Rightists" and introduced by an editor's note expanding on the accusations in the editorial. "At its meetings people's

⁴ PC, May 16, 1956, 4.

⁵ PC, Aug. 1, 1956, 1.

deputies from all parts of the country representing all walks of life cited many facts in denouncing the preposterous utterances of the rightists ...”⁶

The editors of *People’s China* had themselves been caught up in the attack, as had the entire foreign language operation. As Jack Chen recounts in 1975:

Our bureau was naturally full of intellectuals and they were usually ceremonious and mild spoken. Work was going fairly well, but as in any new organization there was much to criticize and correct. Most of us therefore had legitimate criticism, but some writers and editors seemed suddenly galvanized into action. They poured forth a deluge of invective that was astonishing to me and certainly must have taken the Party aback.⁷

Managing editor Zhang Yan took a more severe view of the attacks and their aftermath, as he recalled them forty-eight years later, since he said they cost him his job.

In 1957, all [of us] were criticized — all of us that were involved in the foreign publicity work who were more or less educated in the Western tradition. That, more or less, gets us into trouble. They had a different opinion about publicity and how to do it.

Everything at that time [went] to the extreme leftists’ idea. If they did not agree with you, they believed you belonged in the bourgeois category.

We [had] worked abroad, we worked in Hong Kong. We had a consensus on how to do it: To serve the readers, to speak the truth.

We used to say we must serve the reader’s needs with facts and let the readers draw their own conclusions. That’s how we were educated and trained to be as journalists during our university education. That, in 1957, was considered to be an erroneous idea.

You must bear in mind the political background of that time. That’s why the change happened. ... Before 1956, China was quite free in thinking. Only after 1957 was the control tightened up for political reasons. Before 1956, people here in China felt free to express themselves... 1957 was the turning point. The thought control was tightened up through the press.⁸

⁶ Ibid., 4.

⁷ Jack Chen, *Inside the Cultural Revolution* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1975), 117.

⁸ Zhang, Interview.

These may be just the wistful memories of an old man, but it is more likely Zhang is talking about relations in the editorial office of the magazine, as he had several pages back when discussing “the equal and friendly” relations. By 1956, having edited thousands of articles and written scores of editorials backing mass campaigns taken by Mao and the party, he had to have been well acquainted with the limitations on expressing views that opposed the party line, except in private with close friends and family, if at all.

By the fall of 1957, planning for a replacement for *People’s China* was well underway, and its planners included some of the PC staff. In its December 16 issue, the editorial board bids farewell — and publishes a full page advertisement for *Peking Review*, “New China’s First English-Language Weekly.” In its final note “To Our Readers,” the editors explain:

Many readers have asked us whether we could bring them news faster. Others have suggested that we specialize in political and economic reporting and analysis. Taking all those opinions into account, we have now made a decision — to suspend this fortnightly at year’s end and produce a new, weekly magazine which will go to subscribers and dealers by the fastest possible route. The Japanese-language edition of *People’s China* is not affected by this decision and will continue. A new Indonesian-language edition is making its debut.

Some readers will find the change gives them just what they want. Others may miss the descriptive features and pictorial pages which *People’s China* provided; to them we recommend the monthly *China Reconstructs*. Some, we imagine, will take both magazines — as they do not overlap.⁹

The continuation of the magazine for Japan and Indonesia is puzzling, but perhaps there was less need seen for speedy air-mail distribution to these closer countries.

⁹ PC, Dec. 16, 1957, 1.

Problems at *China Reconstructs*

At *China Reconstructs*, there is no indication of a similar purge of the Western educated. Unlike the “official” *People’s China*, the monthly was under the sponsorship and protection of Soong Ching Ling and her China Welfare Institute. But the magazine was affected by the times. “In 1958 when the ultra-leftists idea of ‘putting politics in the lead’ came to the fore throughout the country, the editorial department proposed publishing some articles with strong political content and asked for her opinion.” In her reply, she reminded the editorial staff that “these articles must reflect our own style,” in other words, “its tradition of truth, down-to-earth reporting.”¹⁰ Zhou Enlai, too, as we saw in chapter 2, criticizes the move: “Be careful not to have too much politics that will change the character of the magazine.”¹¹

In later years, the magazine would acknowledge “the influence” of the anti-rightists movement and the Great Leap Forward, when it “published such articles as ‘Racing to Overtake Britain,’ and ‘Back Street Rolling Mill’ ” — hardly the worst of the distortions. Soong Ching Ling herself gets caught up in the overblown rhetoric of the Great Leap in an article titled “A Glorious Era: A Glorious People,” illustrated with a photograph of her “at the anvil near the small furnace set up in her garden, one of the hundreds of thousands in which the people are making steel all over China.”¹² But in her

¹⁰ China Today. *Friendship & Peace: The 50th Anniversary of China Today* (Beijing: China Today, 2002), 30. But an earlier account of the incident in the 35th anniversary commemorative book, Soong tells the staff, “I agree, I support the idea” of more political content, “But these articles must reflect our own style.” *China Reconstructs, China Reconstructs -- Founded by Soong Ching Ling* (Beijing: China Reconstructs), 1987, 11.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² CR, Jan. 1958, 2.

better moments, Soong attempted to maintain the balance of the magazine, insisting that it report problems as well as successes. In one case in 1958, she was asked to review an article on welfare work. She responded in a letter the following morning: “My impression in reading it is that all the problems are solved. I think we have to say that there is still much that we have to do in welfare ... that with all our progress we cannot cover all those in need at the moment.”¹³

Yet, despite these intentions, the CR staff succumbed to the drumbeat of hyperbole, publishing articles, charts and graphs that showed soaring output of all products. One chart, for instance, claimed China surpassed the United States in production of wheat and cotton, and in per capita production of all grains.¹⁴ And how could they not buckle under the political pressure. In its January 1958 note “To Our Readers” that led every issue, the editors said: “As this column is being written, the walls of our office courtyard are thickly plastered with the huge bright pink, yellow and green sheets of ‘wall newspapers’ (over 120 were put up in the past week) full of criticisms and suggestions for improving our work and magazine.”

Twenty-four years later, Epstein would lament:

From the late 1950s, however, *China Reconstructs* was invaded and affected, to various extents, by the ultra-Left line then spreading in the country. During the Great Leap Forward, we were over-declamatory and gave currency to a number of exaggerated claims and statistics that were poured out at the time — even printing a cover-picture in this genre. Although the country, and we ourselves, soon recoiled from the overblown claims, the unscientific ultra-Left trend would recur.¹⁵

¹³ CR, Sept. 1981, 53.

¹⁴ CR, Dec. 1958, 7.

¹⁵ CR, Jan. 1982, 5. It is not clear what cover picture Epstein is referring to, but it could be the April 1958 close-up of an Anshan steel worker who reportedly set some incredible

In this charged political atmosphere, *Peking Review* makes its debut.

Peking Review: Plans and Debut

Accounts differ in detail on the origin of *Peking Review*, but there is general agreement among early staff members that the initial idea goes back to 1954 and Zhou Enlai. At the Geneva peace conference on Vietnam in April, the ingratiating Zhou, both premier and foreign minister, won new respect for China on the world diplomatic stage and showed it could be an adept player in Asia. Duan Liancheng, then an editor at *People's China* and later to be deputy editor in chief of *Beijing Review*, recalls that one evening at the villa where Zhou was staying, Wu Wentao, then chief correspondent of *People's Daily*, the CCP mouthpiece, was talking with Zhou about the urgent need to get China's point of view across to the international community on Korea and other issues by publishing translations of *People's Daily* editorials and articles. Duan has a vivid recollection of conference attendees vying to read *People's China* when it arrived, only to be disappointed that it contained mainly reports on the textile industry and a speech of the textile minister. "Because it was a fortnightly magazine, the editing and publishing were all very slow and was definitely out of date."¹⁶ Lin Wusun, later to be deputy editor,

production record, typical hyperbole from the time. Another possible, but improbable, candidate that year is the October cover shot of Premier Zhou Enlai — smiling, of course — in laborer's clothes pushing a wheelbarrow "at work on the construction site of the Ming Tombs Reservoir near Peking." While the photograph may have been staged, Zhou and other leaders did work at the site.

¹⁶ *Beijing Review, Zhongguo zhichuang shijie zhiyou: Beijing zhoubao de fazhan licheng*. (China's Window to the World: The Development of the Beijing Review), (Beijing: Beijing Zhoubao, 1998), 24. The name of the publication in English, from 1958 through 1978, was *Peking Review*; in 1979, it became *Beijing Review*. But in Chinese, the name of the publication has always been *Beijing Zhoubao*, and so throughout this 1998 commemorative history written in Chinese, that is what it is called. When it is clear we

relates another version of the tale from Yang Chengfang, who was to become *Peking Review*'s first editor. In this version, Zhou was meeting with foreign journalists in Geneva, asking them whether they got his speeches and statements in *People's China*, and they respond that they arrive too late to be useful.¹⁷ Returning home from Geneva with Zhou, Yang remembered that the premier “talked repeatedly” about the urgency of improving the understanding of new China and countering the inaccurate reports in the West about what was happening. When they arrived in Beijing, Zhou and CCP Vice Chairman Chen Yi reportedly met “with the comrades in charge of international propaganda” about a new offensive.¹⁸ Feng Xiliang, another editor at *People's China* who would work at *Peking Review*, remembers having a meeting with Wu Wentao, who apparently also headed the Foreign Language Publishing Agency at this point, and Zhang Yan, the PC managing editor, about a new publication, but as Duan Liancheng says, “it was just empty talk then.”¹⁹ For whatever reasons – staffing, resources, budget, other priorities – nothing would happen with this idea for three years.

Lin Wusun, a *People's China* editor on the planning team of *Peking Review*, reminds us that “the significance of the English-language journal was much greater than now. ... First of all, there were very few western journalists in China,” the embargo placed severe limitations on the information coming out of China, and the stories put out about “Red China” in the Western media, largely relying on their sources in hostile

are discussing its early years we will call it *Peking Review*, but in cases where an editor worked on it under both names, we will use the later name.

¹⁷ Lin Wusun, Interview by the author, tape recording. Beijing, 16 June 2005.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 14.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 24-35.

governments, were negative and inaccurate in the extreme. “*People’s China* was one of the few sources of information,” since “very few of the western journalists knew Chinese.”²⁰

For reasons not explained in available documents, the idea of a weekly in English was revived in the fall of 1957 by Wu Wentao, head of the Foreign Language Publishing Agency. “But under the current conditions, issuing an English weekly was easier said than done. Some comrades hesitated.”²¹ Lin believes the impetus for the publication “came both from the very top and from the bureau level, because there was this pressing need.” In October, Lin was appointed to the planning committee with three others from *People’s China*, which started to look at appropriate models for the new publication in similar magazines in the West and the Soviet Union. The planners looked at the limited number of the weekly publications available to them in the library: From the U.S., *Time*, *Newsweek*, the left-wing *Nation* and *National Guardian*, for which Israel Epstein was still a contributor from China; the *New Statesman* (now called *The Economist*) from Britain; *Blitz*, a tabloid newspaper from India; *New Times* from the Soviet Union. The committee members were ultimately more inclined to use the magazine format, rather than the tabloid, because of the limitation of their printing presses, and the fact that they wanted it printed on very thin paper, light enough to be air-mailed. The committee was more interested in format and design, than in content and writing style, which were to be closer to the more partisan Soviet and Indian models.

²⁰ Lin, interview.

²¹ Dai Yannian, former deputy editor in chief, writing in Beijing Review, *Zhongguo*, 15.

As their report went up the chain of command, Vice Foreign Minister Zhang Wentian, who supported the proposal, said that on such an important initiative to the outside world, “We have to ask Premier Zhou’s opinion again.” Zhang passed on his November 17 report to Foreign Minister Chen Yi, who agreed and passed it up to Zhou.

Several days later, Premier Zhou specially called a meeting in his office, Xihuating (Western Flowery Hall) in Zhongnanhai. He was very happy with the meeting and agreed to have the publication run. He talked to the leaders of the Foreign Ministry and asked them to support and help with the great effort.²²

Zhou’s instructions were written on Zhang’s report: “It is decided that *Peking Review* will be published March 1. They have already worked on it based on the decision made in the year before last.”²³

As intended by Zhou from the initial discussions, the new publication would emphasize international affairs and the position of the government in “socialist construction.” It would carry important statements and speeches, major policy pronouncements and translations of major articles from *People’s Daily* (*Renmin Ribao*) and *Red Flag* (*Hongqi*), the CCP’s monthly journal that began publishing that year. As opposed to *People’s China*’s mix of articles, there would be nearly no significant

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid. I have included this scenario in such detail because there is so little information available about how the decision-making process worked at any of the foreign publications, and because the *Beijing Review* is so proud of Zhou’s patronage. But the dates given in its commemorative history do not add up. For instance, it says Zhou’s instruction was written on the report on February 29, a date that does not occur in 1958, and by February, the publication is being readied for printing. There is still the unexplained time lapse from the April 1954 Geneva Conference to some kind of decision in 1955 or 1956, “the year before last,” and the final decision to move ahead in 1957.

coverage of social life, leaving that to *China Reconstructs*. “There was a division of labor. *China Reconstructs* had already prospered.”²⁴

Just as the 4-man planning committee had come entirely from the staff of *People’s China*, more than half of the 18-member staff Wu Wentao assembled had come from the disbanded magazine. At the time, the Foreign Languages Publishing Bureau had an overall contingent of only 100 people to handle all the foreign-language magazines, periodicals and books. Wu “assigned the strongest people to this project, I overheard the people saying that,” Lin said, some of the most experienced members of the staff.

Leading the enterprise was Yang Chengfang, who joined the Chinese Communist Party in 1927, and had long experience in foreign propaganda work, translation and writing in foreign languages. “His capability of writing in English compelled the admiration of many English and American experts,” and he wrote many reviews and essays for *Peking Review*. Besides other veteran PC editors already mentioned, such as Duan Liancheng and Feng Xiliang, there were also experienced journalists such as Jack Chen, Israel Epstein and Abe Chapek, native English-speakers who would edit and polish the writing. The versatile Epstein would continue to edit at *China Reconstructs*.

The staff included younger Chinese journalists who had lived abroad and studied in the United States and Britain. Among them was Lin, who was thirty-years-old at the time and had studied philosophy at Dartmouth College from 1947 to 1950. Born and raised in Tianjin, he later moved to Shanghai, and then to the interior as the Japanese advanced. After Liberation and the call for overseas Chinese to return and help the motherland, he returned to China as the Korean War began in June 1950. He was just six

²⁴ Lin, interview.

credits away from earning his bachelor's degree, but "I was in a great hurry to get back." "I had no idea what journalism was," he said. A poet who worked at *People's China* knew Lin's sister and that's how Lin found a job there. He would later become deputy editor in chief of *Peking Review* and ultimately head of the Foreign Languages Publishing Bureau, overseeing all the publications in foreign languages.

Also with the magazine from the start was Fang Jucheng (Fang Chü-Ch'eng), who went by the name Percy in English. He returned to China from England, where he had been studying nineteenth century British diplomacy. "I didn't need to think it over. I felt good and comfortable to be one of the people." He recalls:

We abandoned our Western clothes for Mao suits. In those days we lived simple lives and worked under rather inadequate conditions. When we had a night shift, someone would volunteer to bring food for everyone. We had to be versatile. We were reporters, editors, typists, proofreaders and salesmen all at the same time. During the "great leap forward" we even made steel in the backyard of our office building.²⁵

By December 1957, the staff had come together in its own office, but the first issue was delayed because most of the Chinese staff had never worked on a weekly and they needed to hammer out decisions on design, format, printing and distribution. The newly formed staff produced three trial issues, trying different formats for the cover and finally getting a press that met their needs from a former Japanese printing shop in northeast China. Zhou is given credit for approving the simple cover style, just article headlines without illustration, and choosing the name of the publication.²⁶

The magazine employed a special costly paper that included cotton fibers, making it both very strong and very light, like dictionary stock. This paper reduced the

²⁵ BR, Feb. 29, 1988, 6.

²⁶ Ibid., and Beijing Review, *Zhongguo*, 16.

weight of the new publication and thus the expense of air mail postage that was essential to *Peking Review*'s timely distribution, a key reason for its existence.²⁷ Due to limited airline service from Beijing, the publication had to meet tight deadlines to make it on scheduled flights; it was flown to Hong Kong, to be transferred to the United States and other countries observing the embargo.²⁸

And all this expense — a staff of eighteen, weekly distribution, special paper and costly foreign air mail delivery that dipped into the government's limited foreign currency — was meant to serve a readership at the beginning of only 10,000 subscribers.²⁹ But important readers they were. They included diplomats in Beijing and government leaders and politicians from around the world, including, if the editors are to be believed, Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, Indonesian President Sukarno and reputedly U.S. President John F. Kennedy. There were, of course, the intended audience of Western journalists and scholars, and universities subscribed. "The readership was small but influential," Lin said. "We didn't expect to have a large circulation. It was sort of an elite magazine, a channel of information for the people interested in China."

Peking Review was also read by members of the CCP Politburo — or at least it editors were told that each issue was sent to Zhongnanhai, the central Beijing compound where the Politburo lived and worked.³⁰ This would have added to the prestige of the publication. Zhou continued to take a keen interest in the magazine, and would refer foreign journalists to it for official English versions of speeches he made, as he did at a

²⁷ Ibid., "For years and years, it's been called Beijing Review paper."

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Beijing Review, *Zhongguo*, 5 on currency; Lin, Interview.

³⁰ Beijing Review, op. cit., 11.

news conference in Nepal in 1960. The official first date of issue of *Peking Review* is March 4, 1958, but the magazine is accustomed to celebrating it on March 5, Zhou's birthday, the date he visited the publication to toast its fifth anniversary in 1963.

The most distinguished domestic reader of the *Review* was Chairman Mao himself. There is no doubt Mao read some of it, since he made reference to its articles and speeches with foreign visitors, but the most popular tale is that Mao read the magazine aloud to improve his English as his tutors corrected his pronunciation. The editors admit this story is difficult to verify, "but one thing is certain that *Peking Review* was one of the most important reference materials for Mao and reading matter for Mao's study of English."³¹

Unlike the magazines examined earlier, *Peking Review* lists no subscription prices, but simply the distributors in each country. Only one is listed for the United States, the same one as for the other publications: Imported Publications and Products in New York. This was a small left-wing distributor of books and periodicals from the Soviet Union and China run by Margaret Cowl, who would later pass on her business to Henry Noyes, founder of China Books & Periodicals. Cowl in turn would distribute the

³¹ Ibid. Li Zhisui, Mao's private physician, makes repeated references to Mao studying English, but Li makes no reference to Mao using magazines to do this, only books. Karl Marx's *Communist Manifesto* and Friedrich Engel's *Socialism: Scientific and Utopian* "were his two favorite English books and we read them over and over. Mao never really learned English. He used the lessons as a way to relax, and our lessons were an occasion to chat."³¹ However, Li does not claim he was the only person to help Mao with his English. He does say at one point that Mao was reading the English version of Liu Shaoqi's report to the Eight National People's Congress. The doctor does not specify the source, but *Peking Review* is likely. Li Zhisui, *The Private Life of Chairman Mao* (New York: Random House, 1994), 263 and 241.

magazines to the small number of left-wing book stores and magazine stands in the United States that had withstood the anti-Communist crusade of the 1950s.³²

Timely Contents

In its opening note to its readers in the first issue, the editors laid out their mission and plan:

Peking Review ... will provide timely, accurate, first-hand information on economic, political and cultural developments in China and her relations with the rest of the world. ...

... There will be analytical and informative articles, giving facts and background on development of general or current interest, while the regular departments will record the day-to-day goings-on in various fields. **Round the Week** will be a round-up of important domestic events. **China and the World** will report current developments in China's relations with other countries. Those who want to follow the trends of Chinese public opinion will find **Chinese Press Opinion** useful for their purpose. And **What's Going on in Peking** speaks for itself.

Full texts of important statements of China's policy will be printed in a documentary section, when circumstances warrant. We shall also publish essential statistics, graphs and charts, cartoons and some illustrations.

... During the past eight years, *People's China* has accomplished a great deal, but much more remains to be done. To free so vast a country, with one-fourth of the world's population, from the tyrannical rule of foreign and domestic reactionaries was no easy task. To build socialism in such a country presents still more difficult and complex problems. Successes have been achieved, but there have also been difficulties and errors. Our magazine will chronicle all this in its full perspective and true context.³³

In general, over the next eighteen months, the magazine delivered on its promises.

It is replete with editorials, articles and bylines from the *People's Daily* and *Red Flag*.

Government ministers and party officials write on a regular basis. Almost completely gone are the first-hand accounts and personalized reportage that had characterized even the economic and agricultural coverage in *People's China*. Rare as well are articles on

³² Henry Noyes, *China Born: Adventures of a Maverick Bookman* (San Francisco: China Books & Periodicals), 1989, 68.

³³ PR, Mar. 4, 1958, 3.

various aspects of social life: women, children and the family, except as reported by official sources and documents. Descriptions of villages, factories, city lanes have little telling detail, and missing are the voices of the people in conversational speech. A January 27, 1959 article, "Report from Changsha," for instance, appears to be staff-written, but quotes no people and describes few scenes, as do other reports from the field "by our correspondent." All these stylistic elements are carried on by the staff of *China Reconstructs*.

Visually, the magazine is very gray, with few illustrations except for the occasional line drawing, cartoon, woodcut, and the rare photo. There are no pictorial spreads in this early period, except for two pages under the headline "Year of the Big Leap," highlighting steel mills, backyard furnaces, shipbuilding, tractors, electrical shovels and "China's first atomic reactor."³⁴ This lack of visual appeal reflects both the limitations of the printing presses, and the need to meet tight weekly deadlines. Cultural coverage is largely confined to a column that occupies a page.

The index of articles from the first two years make clear the limited space occupied by social and cultural affairs. The eight-page December 30, 1958 index, covering the first forty-four issues over ten months, lists twenty-four columns with hundreds of articles, but only half a column is under the heading "social," and five columns comes under the heading "cultural," which includes science, education, health and sports. The 5-page June 30, 1959 index, covering the next six months, has fifteen columns of articles listed, but only a third of a column is under the heading "social," and

³⁴ PR, Sept. 30, 1958, 15.

one and two-thirds columns are under the heading “cultural,” again a broadly defined category.

Features With a Different Tone

The serious, sober, earnest, often official content makes the few elements with a different tone stand out by contrast. The first items in that category are the cartoons, particularly the cartoons of Jack Chen. There is little humor in *Peking Review*, except in the hands of the cartoonist. The buffoonish imperialist, capitalist war-monger, the pith-helmeted colonialist, the top-hatted tycoon and the stuffy diplomat in morning coat and striped trousers are stock figures. Especially light-hearted is the boxed feature “The Passing Show” that begins in April 1958 and never occupies more than a quarter page. It turns out to be a collaboration between Chen and Lin Wusun, who dealt mainly with international affairs. Lin would choose news items, often from American newspapers, and Chen would illustrate them to draw a laugh. The United States is most often the butt of the jokes, and the tone is at turns mocking, sardonic, sarcastic or flippant. “Because he was a humorist, we had lots of fun,” Lin said. “Looking back, we were sort of overzealous. We only write about the U.S.”³⁵ The editors appeared to have recognized that the magazine was too solemn with its heavy emphasis on political news and international relations, but even the cartoons and illustrations they added for comic relief have political bite.

Chen and the other cartoonists were particularly fond of lampooning U.S. Secretary of State John Foster Dulles; this rather standoffish icon of the American upper class in homburg and rimless glasses was an inviting target. In one of many cartoons by

³⁵ Lin, interview.

Chen, Dulles in leotards skates in the “Ice Follies for 1958,” jeered by crowds holding signs such as “Yanks Go Home,” “Hands Off Taiwan,” “Leave Korea.” In the third frame, he disappears in a hole in the ice to the cheers of the crowd.³⁶ A “Passing Show” headlined “Making Themselves at Home” observes: “U.S. capital is working hard to take over their African colonial positions from the old imperialist powers,” and concludes: “That jingle-jangle sound you hear when Uncle Sam is around in Africa could be dollars, but it’s more likely to be a ball and chain.” Chen, identified by his initials in the drawing, shows a spectacled figure, which could be Dulles, in Santa Claus outfit, hauling a bag of loot in one hand and “Aid \$” in the other, as he strides toward his sleigh drawn by a befuddled lion.³⁷

Advertising and “What’s on in Peking”

An even more startling feature of the sober, official *Peking Review* is the advertising. *People’s China* often carried promotions of new English-language books and magazines or the broadcast schedule of Peking Radio, and *Peking Review* does this often as well. But in full-page ads on the back cover and inside the front cover, the *Review* also plugs a plethora of consumer and industrial products with a dizzying variety. Where possible, the ads also contain illustrations or photographs of the goods touted. Many of the ads ran several times over the months. Here is a partial list taken from the first three months:

High grade leather shoes; Song dynasty album paintings; cloisonné, porcelain, China tea, and hot rolled steel bars (quarter-page ads on a single page); an automatic nail

³⁶ PR, Jan. 6, 1959, 28.

³⁷ PR, Dec. 16, 1958, 34.

making machine; knitting machines and automatic hosiery machines; prawns — “quick frozen for freshness”; a large size oil expeller; quality machine tools; carvings in jade, ivory and hard stone; prints, products from China National Foodstuffs Export Corp., hot rolled steel (all on one page); industrial chemicals, pharmaceuticals and pesticides; the Bank of China; glazed wall tiles (illustrated by a huge western-style bathroom); Eterna paint brushes from Shanghai; dyestuffs and dye intermediates; Peony brand hand-embroidered silk blouses; oscillating desk fans.

In the fall, an advertisement offers “The Dongfeng — East Wind — China’s first sedan is ready for export.” There are two photos, and the car is inserted into a traditional landscape painting, jagged peaks and scraggly pine included. Also: China green tea; *People’s China*, now a monthly, in Japanese, Indonesian and French; Panda brand condensed milk; textile accessories; Panax Ginseng Extractum “a tonic without peer”; window glass; Shanghai beer, with a bottle pictured; Marie’s water colors; an automatic paper clip machine; China black tea; Jade Leaf toilet soap; rotary printing machines; *China Pictorial* magazine.

Many of the ads are repeated, or run again with small variations, but there are also ads for: Penguin air conditioners; portable gramophones; books by Jack Chen, Ba Jin, Mao Dun, and Israel Epstein; the Canton trade fair; Ma Ling canned goods — stewed pork, champignons (mushrooms), sardines, mandarin oranges; six kinds of electronic meters; radios in different styles; spearmint chlorophyll toothpaste; air service from Peking to Pyongyang, Korea (¥73); Shao Hsing wine. And on and on. Some ads even portray blondish women in western ball gowns (for UHO Dyestuffs and Textile Auxiliaries), or a Western woman working at a kitchen sink.

The list gives some idea of the variety found in hundreds of ads. The magazine provide no hints to their purpose in its historical notes in anniversary issues or in its book-length history released on its fortieth anniversary. In fact, in a section on advertising, the book insists that there had been no advertising in *Beijing Review*, as it was then called, until the 1980s. A 1994 article in the journal *Asian Survey* says that “although never officially banned, advertising in China halted for three decades” in all media after 1949.³⁸ Yet here we have not just a smattering of promotions for translations of Mao’s *Selected Works*. There are hundreds of advertisements for scores of consumer goods and industrial products two years after the declaration that “socialist construction” has been achieved. What’s more similar ads, though fewer in number, begin appearing in *China Reconstructs* in July 1958, four months after they first appear in *Peking Review*.³⁹ Why are they there?

There is the off chance that someone in far off Sweden might want to buy cases of stewed pork or canned mushrooms; or an Indian textile maker might want to purchase a knitting machine; or some car buff might want the novelty of owning the first Chinese-made sedan. The more likely explanation is that these ads serve the same purpose as the small feature called “Made in China” that ran regularly in *People’s China*, but they do it more convincingly and with more subtlety in a format the Western consumer is used to seeing. They are designed to show that socialist China, once the backward sick man of Asia, has now established a sophisticated manufacturing base able to produce cars,

³⁸ Junhao Hong, “The resurrection of advertising in China: developments, problems, and trends,” *Asian Survey* 1994, 34: 326-342.

³⁹ The first ad is for chemicals in CR, July 1958; the next month there are three ads: for silks, the Bank of China, and the East Wind automobile.

machinery and electronic goods up to western standards. The “Made in China” boxes would show off the “25-ton turret crane” or new “electrical hypnotic apparatus.”⁴⁰ But the carefully designed ads in *Peking Review* show a range of consumer goods that the reader is lead to believe can match the sophistication and taste of Westerners. China, the ads show, has become a modern nation, with all the goods that implies, while maintaining the appeal of its traditional arts and crafts, food and drink. Self-reliance is an important CCP goal, and China, the ads imply, is so self-reliant that it cannot only produce goods it used to import, but has enough to export. This is the underlying point of articles in *China Reconstructs* and *People’s China* about well-stocked department stores and the variety of merchandise they carry. It makes little difference that few Chinese could purchase whatever small quantities of Penguin air conditioners or Dong Fang autos were made, or that few of the many items were likely sold for export.

“What’s on in Peking” plays a similar image-making role, providing highlights of current entertainment and exhibitions, much as *The New Yorker* weekly magazine has long run. Certainly, Beijing’s small English-reading corps of diplomats and foreign experts might have found this crowded listing useful in planning their leisure activities as it gives dates, descriptions and show times. But “What’s on” also marks Beijing as a sophisticated, modern city, with theater, film, art shows, exhibits and sporting events from football to chess. Yet, the plays and opera are not quite New York or London: “Chiu Chin,” by the Peking Opera, is the story of a Qing dynasty woman “who protested the inequality of women. The feudal rulers, in their fear and hatred, arrested and killed her.” In the play, “Hearts Aflame,” “A group of demobilized soldiers set up a factory in a

⁴⁰ PC, Jan. 16, 1956; Mar. 1, 1956, 37.

broken-down building and turned out first-rate products.”⁴¹ But from flower shows, ice skating and picnics in the parks, and outdoor swimming pools to chess tournaments, acrobatics, ballet and concerts by overseas performers, Beijing presents itself as no cultural backwater.

The Great Leap Forward

All these features in a way are tangy condiments to the bland rice bowl at the core of the magazine. In 1958 and 1959, like every other Chinese publication, whether for domestic or foreign consumption, *Peking Review* is caught up in the fervor of the Great Leap Forward. The peasants store bumper crops in granaries, “China Tops Britain in Coal Output,” and “Soong Ching Ling Makes Steel” in her backyard, reported even before she is shown doing it in her own magazine, and those articles are from just a single issue.⁴² Schools run factories, the “Peasant Victors in the Great Leap” hold a conference to map more ambitious plans, “Electric Power Shoots Ahead,” and the graphs show production rocketing skyward in many areas, as they do in *China Reconstructs*.⁴³ The staff of *Peking Review* itself sets up a backyard furnace, and the editors feverishly make their first steel, to be paraded around the office the next day. Later, it was learned they had been chopping up and melting down the pipes and radiators of the central heating system.⁴⁴

Jack Chen, writing 15 years later, cannot bring himself to call the Great Leap an unmitigated disaster, since there “were some great and enduring achievements. There were also some horrendous fiascoes.” But all the irrigation projects and reclaimed land

⁴¹ PR, Oct. 21, 1958, 22.

⁴² PR, Nov. 18, 1958.

⁴³ PR, Sept. 30, 1958, 14.

⁴⁴ Chen, *Inside*, 130.

were “worth the cost,” as were the new factories and enterprises created.⁴⁵ He is willing to admit the destruction of useful stoves and utensils, the impractical nature of the collectivized farming in many respects, and the ridiculously inflated crop predictions, which caused cadres to hold back planting for fear of lack of storage facilities for the non-existent surpluses. But to explain the food shortage, Chen falls back on explanations like bad weather, floods and droughts, and while admitting “serious malnutrition in some places,” he says urban garden plots, communes and strict rationing “pulled the country through the crisis without grave loss of life.”⁴⁶ This is plainly contradicted by a wealth of later data, showing as many as 30 million people or more starved to death, many of them children.⁴⁷ Unlike the laments of Epstein and the concerns of Soong, the later editors of *Peking Review* make only vague repentance on their twenty-fifth anniversary: “Regretfully, the magazine also spread a number of erroneous ideas and misinformation at certain times.”⁴⁸

Editor in chief Yang Chengfang was criticized for rightist tendencies and removed from his post, as was Wu Wentao, head of the foreign languages operation who had put together the staff for the magazine. In the fortieth anniversary commemorative history, Lin Wusun, said when people look back on the criticism of Yang, “they really feel sad.”

⁴⁵ Ibid., 125.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 133-134.

⁴⁷ Jonathan Spence says 20 million in *The Search for Modern China* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1990), 583; Jasper Becker’s exhaustive book on the Great Leap famine settles on 30 million. *Hungry Ghosts: Mao’s Secret Famine* (New York: Free Press, 1996)

⁴⁸ PR, Jan. 3, 1983, 5.

It was very unfair to criticize him for having very harmful bourgeois points of views about news and for having tampered with the party's slogans. ... The fundamental problem is that the political direction and political points of views in Yang's writings were correct...⁴⁹

The magazine was already understaffed, with many of the cadres sent down to the countryside to participate in the Great Leap. Duan Liancheng, the former top editor of *People's China* who had been shifted to *Peking Review*, not only had to make self-criticism during the new anti-rightist campaign, "he had to work very hard, silently, day and night, in order to guarantee the quality, timeliness and amount [of copy]. It really can be called 'Swallowing humiliation and bearing a heavy load,' " that is, submitting to humiliation to fulfill an important obligation.⁵⁰

In September 22, 1959, the magazine carries a small, three-paragraph item that leads its Round the Week news summary. "Chairman Mao Calls a Meeting," it said, bringing together members of the democratic parties, and "prominent figures in the cultural and educational fields. ... Views were exchanged on the question of combating right deviationist tendencies, going all out, and firmly adhering to the general line for socialist construction." It concludes: "Chairman Mao made an important speech at the meeting."⁵¹ The magazine does not publish the speech or its main points, and for the rest of 1959 and for some time afterward the magazine published more translations of articles from other sources and far less staff written material, the kind Yang had been punished

⁴⁹ Beijing Review, *Zhongguo*, 34.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 36.

⁵¹ PR, Sept. 22, 1959, 4.

for. Lin said it was several years before the political wind would change again, and the magazine would go back to its initial course.⁵²

⁵² Lin, interview.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

One cannot read *People's China* and *China Reconstructs* from the 1950s without getting a strong sense of the wonderful possibilities the editors and writers saw in the new China that was unfolding before them. Like the nationalist revolutionaries who had preceded them in the twentieth century, they were all taken up in the grand task of building a new nation with a modern and progressive political program, to complement a very ancient civilization that had been beleaguered by a corrupt ruling class and exploited by brazen imperialists. This small band of Western-educated intellectuals, perhaps fifty to sixty people on the editorial side by 1957, produced low-circulation magazines to reach a few hundred thousand people overseas, mostly foreign elites and sympathetic progressives. Yet Premier Zhou Enlai and the national leadership, whom the editors regularly saw at official functions, remained supportive and engaged because the magazine effort was a small but special case in the larger context of national transformation and international outreach.

“Red” China was already isolated by the United States and other Western democracies as part of a worldwide communist conspiracy dominated by the Soviet Union. The isolation became even worse after the Chinese reluctantly but then enthusiastically entered the Korean War, and the United Nations imposed a trade embargo that made China's quest for economic self-sufficiency a necessity. The People's Republic could use all the foreign friends it could get, as the Chinese Communists had tried to do in the 1930s and 1940s. In the 1950s, they welcomed friendship delegations from anyone who would come, and they sent their own to any country who would accept them. The PRC, Zhou, Soong Ching Ling and many others promoted the international

peace movement and conferences, the international women's movement and other international goodwill efforts. And there was *People's China* and *China Reconstructs*, presenting China's smiling face to the world.

In the publications, the universal language of photography that had become a popular style in magazines throughout the world told the story of happy workers, peasants, women and children enjoying life in the new China. The photographs, illustrations and accompanying stories were designed to counter the grim images of China that the West had seen for decades. Those negative portraits continued in the 1950s as standard fare not just in Henry Luce's anti-communist *Time* and *Life* magazines, but in all the mainstream Western press, which largely reinforced the anti-communist fervor of the times.¹ The magazines' photo spreads and feature reporting from the cities and countryside balance the negative reporting in the West and conform to Mao Zedong's emphasis on showing the "bright" side and depicting "models" of good work, right living, and correct thought. Real working people in China, who had experienced a richness of suffering, were having their lives improved in concrete ways that Westerners and people all over the world could see and understand. *People's China* and *China Reconstructs* had the task of describing positively, comprehensively, but compactly, with some historical perspective, the people, places and events of new China to foreigners who had never been there. This "smiling" face of China was also the one shown in the mirror of the domestic news media, partly because the small staffs of the magazines for foreigners depended mostly on the same photographs that ran in domestic periodicals, as

¹ From 1949 through 1959, *The New York Times* had 2,097 articles with the term "Red China" in the headline and 1,377 with the term "Chinese Reds" in the headline; in the same eleven years, *The Washington Post* had 902 articles headlined "Red China," and 340 headlined "Chinese Reds."

China Pictorial shows. Sending this magazine overseas was called “stupid” because it made no attempt to change the articles or captions to accommodate the mindset and tastes of foreign readers, though PC editor Zhang Yan also had his doubts about the effectiveness of the *China Pictorial* photos. The magazines faithfully trace the same mass campaigns and significant developments as do the domestic press: the eradication of prostitution and disease, the marriage reform, the institutionalization of child care, the language reform, the literary controversies, the new plays, the archeological finds, the scissor cuts and woodcuts. All this material appeared in the domestic media, though with a different mix and balance of articles, presented often in a more heavy-handed polemical way for the readers at home. In the magazines, there is often, though not always, a lighter touch for foreign consumption.

Bad news is missing. In the magazines, villagers confront landlords in struggle sessions, but the landlords are re-educated or flee from the scene; they are almost never beaten to death or executed, as happened to perhaps tens of thousands. The failures in the implementation of the 1950 Marriage Law are not disregarded, but they are considerably downplayed compared to the gruesome detail offered in domestic Chinese media. The smaller campaigns of the Three Antis and the Five Antis against bureaucratism and rightists receive some attention, but the editors do not tell the foreign readers what happened to the targets.

The magazines are manifestations of the larger communist movement that began in the 1930s to reframe Chinese history, its politics, economy, society and culture, and to establish a new periodization for its history. Before liberation, “old” China is sad, bad, backward, corrupt, feudal, semi-colonial; its women are oppressed, its children

maltreated; its arts stultified, its artists marginalized; its language archaic, its people illiterate with no common tongue. New China is happy, good, honest, modernizing, free of imperialist influence, though embracing the Soviet “elder brother”; new China’s women are emancipated, productive and gain positions of authority; its children are being educated and professionally cared for; its arts and artists have a newfound vitality based on a revival of folk forms and a closer attachment to workers and peasants, who have become artists themselves.

It is difficult to assess how successful the magazines were in projecting the smiling face of new China as its real countenance in this crucial period of dueling propaganda machines. With Western reporters excluded from China, first by the Chinese and then by their own governments, the magazines were all that was available for the average foreign citizen or scholar. Biased information is better than no information, and the two magazines are widely cited in scholarly journals and books in many disciplines in the 1950s and later, from archaeology to politics to science. They are not always cited as the most reliable source, but as the only source. Their reports on official actions and statements of the People’s Republic were considered definitive. The *Survey of China Mainland Press* by the U.S. consulate in Hong Kong used material from the magazines to supplement the English-language transmissions of Xinhua and translations of *People’s Daily* and other important newspapers. The Xinhua wire previewed the contents of the magazines when they came out, and this made it into the consulate survey.

Based on the letters they publish, readers generally liked the magazines, and the editors will tell the readers when changes are being made in response to those letters. For further research, it would be informative to determine if these letters, including those not

published, were archived, as well as the responses to the reader surveys *China Reconstructs* regularly enclosed. We do know that *Peking Review* lost subscribers in the Cultural Revolution, when the propaganda became more blatant, repetitive and extreme, and readers would disgustedly write in to cancel their subscriptions.² In 1967, the propaganda was so excessive, particularly in its adulation of Mao, that Mao and Zhou actually lectured the propaganda workers to tone it down. “We should be more modest in what we’re sending out,” said Mao, describing how he crossed out a series of references to himself as “Great Leader, Great Teacher, Great Supreme Commander, Great Helmsman” in an announcement about the hydrogen bomb.³ At the same meeting, Zhou said:

It’s wrong to take what was intended for domestic readers and force it on people abroad. You’re not using your heads. You don’t care who the readers are or what they need. All you care about is what we want. Study your audience. Stick to principle and, at the same time, get results.⁴

We cannot tell if Mao and Zhou had the same mindset a decade earlier, but the magazines could have benefited from their advice. The compelling reportage found in the magazines in the early 1950s is often overwhelmed by a sea of official reports and articles by non-journalists, and these reports are often in the front of the magazines, particularly in *People’s China*, which, as we have seen, has a deliberately more political role. The magazine editors may assert their commitment to “seeking truth through facts”

² Zhang Yan, Interview by the author, tape recording. Beijing, 14 June 2005.

³ Robert Friend, ed., *Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-tung on Propaganda* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1967), 97, as quoted in Anne-Marie Brady, *Making the Foreign Serve China: Managing Foreigners in the People’s Republic* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), 158. Brady says only about 200 copies of this specialized collection of quotations were printed for foreign propaganda workers in Beijing.

⁴ *Ibid.*

and to the standards of journalism, but the writers and editors are clearly not disinterested observers in the building of new China. Scholars and journalists certainly relied on the magazines for the official spin on events, and fellow socialists, communists and other “progressives” in foreign lands could take heart from the successes of China’s transformation. But an average reader in the West, deafened by the relentless drumbeat against “godless” communism, the astounding reports of fanatic “Chinese hordes” in the Korean War, and other rhetoric attacking China and the Soviet Union, would have given the magazines limited credibility. Perhaps the publications could have raised doubts about the constant negativity coming from official sources and the mainstream media in the West. But the magazines were unlikely to have fundamentally changed many minds, especially given how limited their distribution was, and how even the simple receipt of the magazines could raise suspicions about a reader’s patriotism.

What China lacked in this time period were the “disinterested observers,” the foreign journalists who had always been its most effective promoters to other foreigners, including such writers as Edgar Snow and Theodore White. Some of the “disinterested observers” from earlier days, such as Israel Epstein, who had filed stories to *The New York Times* as well as to the leftist press, had now become too compromised by their association with the communist regime. In the late 1930s and throughout the 1940s, Mao, Zhou and their colleagues at Yan’an had been able to seduce and enthrall many foreign correspondents with their frankness, charm and accomplishments to great effect both at home and overseas. Snow’s book, *Red Star Over China*, had been important in establishing the credentials of the communists and bolstering Mao’s image not only in the United States and Britain, but in China as well, where it was among the first works able

to tell a Chinese audience outside the liberated areas what was happening under CCP control.⁵ In 1956, with the CCP now firmly in control and the PRC making considerable progress at home and abroad, Zhou believed foreign journalists might again be useful in selling China's story, and proposed an exchange of journalists with the United States. After Secretary of State John Foster Dulles rejected that offer, Zhou unilaterally invited journalists from fifteen U.S. news organizations to visit China for a month, but that proposal was rejected too.⁶ A small group of American journalists, eager to get a first-hand look at "Red" China but likely to have scant Chinese language skills, would have been easy to control in a country nearly devoid of foreigners.

Whether Chinese or foreign, controlling journalists and what they produced was paramount for the People's Republic and the Chinese Communist Party. The small staffs of *People's China*, *China Reconstructs*, and *Peking Review* would have been easy to control, based as they all were in Beijing. To a great extent, they would have been expected to control themselves based on the directives emanating from the propaganda department and Xinhua News Agency, and the clear direction of the party as expressed in *People's Daily* and other official journals.⁷ Without much more detailed "content analysis" based on words and phrases, it is difficult to say whether the magazines in English were under the same rigid constraints on the use of language as were the domestic media, but it is readily apparent that certain formulaic constructions are used repeatedly in expressing some key ideas or events.

⁵ Ibid., 46-47.

⁶ Yafeng Xia, *Communicating with the Enemy: Chinese-American Talks during the Cold War, 1949-1972* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Maryland College Park, 2004), 29.

⁷ Michael Schoenhals, *Doing Things with Words in Chinese Politics* (Berkeley: University of California, 1992), 31-53.

As pointed out in earlier chapters, the staff also had limited resources to travel outside the major cities, since road and rail connections were still poor. Whether in rural or urban areas, the correspondents were highly dependent on official sources of information. They would have likely been guided to the model villages, communes, collectives, factories and institutions to speak to model workers, who would, of course, know what to say or be told what could be said to a journalist for foreign consumption. This would have been especially true for the foreign staff members, for whom there is an elaborate system of oversight, both open and covert. Complaints about this mandatory guidance are common from the few Western journalists and scholars permitted to visit China in the 1950s and '60s, including Edgar Snow, and reviewers criticize the limitations it imposes on their published works.

The writers and editors of Beijing's English-language magazines were also operating within the constrained system of communist Chinese journalism institutionalized at Yan'an and carried on ever since. Journalists, writers and artists, as we have seen, were not just afterthoughts in the socialist system; they were key components in establishing and maintaining political control. Sometimes the controls on press coverage are looser, allowing greater freedom of expression, and sometimes they are applied more rigidly. But there is always the presence of control, obvious or subtle, and the journalists either consciously or unconsciously comply with it.

The mainstream Western press also is operating under an invisible, but no less compelling ideological control in this period, especially in regard to China. Mass media in general tend to reinforce the establishment point of view, and they cannot stray too far from the conventional wisdom of the day without generating protest from the authorities

and from their readers. One study of American coverage of China policy in this period documents that “what matters most is the official voice,” and American media follow the views of official policymakers on China, they do not lead.⁸ U.S. media also have an elaborate system of language control known as “style books.” These are largely designed to establish correct and uniform use of language, but some entries are intended to enforce a vocabulary of political neutrality or even political correctness, such as the avoidance of the terms “pro-life” and “pro-choice” in coverage of “abortion” — “anti-abortion” and “abortion rights” are the preferred terms — or the proscription against the term of “illegal aliens.”⁹ A key difference, as Schoenhals notes, is that these style books are imposed by individual publishers, not the government, but in the case of *The Associated Press Stylebook*, published by a voluntary cooperative of news organizations, its use is so universal that it is almost mandatory. However, there is no enforcement mechanism or punishment for violating its rules. In addition, in the United States, laws on libel, defamation, slander, trademark and copyright also exercise some control over what may be said, printed or broadcast, but this is generally viewed by journalists as part of the rule of law in a capitalist society, rather than government control. Many other federal and state laws govern the operation of the journalists’ workplace, as well.

⁸ Tsan-kuo Chang, *The Press and China Policy: The Illusion of Sino-American Relations, 1950-1984* (Norwood, N.J.: Ablex Publishing Corp., 1993), 162.

⁹ Norm Goldstein, ed., *The Associated Press Stylebook and Briefing on Media Law* (Cambridge, Mass.: Perseus Publishing, 2000), 5; Thomas W. Lippman, ed., *The Washington Post Deskbook on Style* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1989), 211. Interestingly, the current AP stylebook generally discourages the use of “Red China” except in “direct quotations or when needed to distinguish the mainland and its government from Taiwan.” The Post book, on the other hand, says flatly: “There is only one China, the People’s Republic of China.” “Red China” may only be used “in historical references,” it says. U.S. policymakers, from Richard M. Nixon on, would surely agree.

People's China and *China Reconstructs* represent an older brand of advocacy journalism rooted in China's republican past, socialist periodicals, and Soviet propaganda. American newspapers in the 1950s had begun to move away from this politically slanted editorial content — though not in regard to “Red” China — but partisan news content was the well-established norm in many countries. Epstein, Soong, Jack Chen, and others on staff were conversant in its style and techniques. Reportage — telling a story using concrete description, dialogue and other literary techniques — was an important part of this leftist tradition and was used in the magazines to great effect. Mao himself encouraged this style, and asked all propagandists to “oppose stereotyped party language” because it was dull, empty, ineffective, and not targeted to its audience.¹⁰

A lot of that “stereotyped party language” made it into *People's China* and *Peking Review*, but less so in *China Reconstructs*. Much of the coverage of economics, agriculture and industrialization could be described as boring and tedious, though perhaps not to someone interested in those fields. Recall the complaint of journalists at Geneva in 1954 that the issue of *People's China* that arrived contained largely outdated coverage of the textile industry and a speech by the industry minister. The same stereotyped language could be found about reports on foreign relations, which are often verbatim translations of government tracts. Exceptions include many articles about Korea that make generous use of reportage and first-hand accounts, in addition to government polemics.

Peking Review is a victim of the same propaganda flaws. The advertising, cartoons, and cultural listings are probably the most interesting reading in that magazine.

¹⁰ Mao, Zedong. *Selected Works of Mao Tse-Tung*. Vol. 3 (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1967), 53-68. As to who was a propagandist, Mao said everyone was, “not only teachers, journalists, writers and artists, but all our cadres.” *Ibid.*, 60.

From its inception, Premier Zhou intends it to be a serious communication of the government's intentions, positions and actions, not light bed-time reading. The magazine is sober, substantive and dull, reflecting more the heightened leftist tone of the late 1950s. Zhou tells Soong that he wants *China Reconstructs* to retain that softer touch and lighter tone as a well rounded compendium of China for a different audience.

People's China managing editor Zhang Yan called the 1950s "the golden age," and it was apparently "common to hear older people" in the 1980s use that phrase about the early 1950s.¹¹ In this era, the magazines do convey a palpable sense of hope, optimism and urgency, imbued with Marxism's full faith in the steady progress of mankind and the editors' own faith in China. Readers from all over the world catch the feeling. "What pleased me most," says "M.S." from Australia in 1956 in a typical letter, "was the spirit of joy and hope in the present, and confidence in the future expressed in almost every phrase in every article."¹²

The period seemed particularly golden compared to the dark times that would follow — the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution, in which almost all of the editors and writers would suffer. But the editors and their readers obviously did not know what was to come. The period was also a high mark in contrast to the two decades of war and chaos that preceded it. Yes, China in 1950 was at war again in Korea, but that was a war on foreign soil where China stood up to the most powerful foreign imperialists and prevailed.

¹¹ Zhang Yan, Interview; Gail Hershatter, "The Gender of Memory: Rural Chinese Women and the 1950s," *Signs*, V. 28, 1 (Autumn 2002), 43.

¹² PC, Apr. 16, 1956, 24.

The early fifties might not have been golden, but they were certainly better than the past decades for the bulk of the people, just from the absence of war. The economy was growing and industrializing; roads, bridges, railroads and dams were being built, along with steel and manufacturing plants; crop yields and food supplies were increasing; health care for women and children was improving, with more sanitary child-birth methods and vaccinations; diseases were being stamped out in the countryside; more people were learning to read and write, and the language was being modified to make that easier; marriage and family life was becoming more equal and less oppressive to women; popular culture was being revitalized and made more accessible. These improvements were often presented as part of a continuous process from the revolutionary days of 1911, 1919 and culminating in the 1940s as areas were liberated. The progress was uneven geographically, but it was widespread and happening quickly, or at least that is what the editors and the nation were told and believed.

But as we have noted before, the editors had little time or opportunity to travel beyond Beijing. They were dependent on Xinhua and *People's Daily* for the larger national picture, and these media were in turn dependent on official sources at the local and regional level. As would become evident in the later stages of the Great Leap Forward, local cadres often lied about progress being made to please their superiors. We know from later studies that the move to cooperatives and then to collectives in the countryside, where the great mass of people still lived, caused great disruption, and even Jack Chen must note the problems with group kitchens and organized child care. The shift from capitalism and private ownership to socialism and government control is described as smooth and voluntary, but the forced transition was hardly that at all. But

invariably the magazines ask the readers to look on the bright side, with the expectation that current problems would find future corrections.

The staffs were largely insulated from the problems around them. Editor Zhang Yan reports he lived in worse conditions than the Chinese students returned from overseas, and the foreigners lived better than the students. By urban Western standards, they all lived in modest circumstances, but they lived and worked in far better conditions than the workers and peasants they reported on, much as the higher cadres did.

For these urban intellectuals, 1956 may have been the pinnacle of the golden years. Socialist construction had been achieved, the five-year plan had been met ahead of schedule, and overall, life is better, at least in Beijing. The clothing is “gayer,” full of floral prints and colorful designs; Picasso is on display; church choirs sing Handel’s Messiah; Chinese ideograms are simplified, newspapers revamp their layouts; and a confident Mao launches the Hundred Flowers campaign, fully expecting the praise of the intellectuals.¹³ Instead of praise, there is a torrent of criticism. Then the door slams shut, the shades are drawn, and the editors are most conscious of the darkness because it is shadowing them. Bad things had happened to landlords, capitalists, Japanese collaborators, GMD cronies, and some party bureaucrats, but in 1957, the bad things began happening to a wider circle of the kind of people who make up the magazines’ editorial staffs: educated urban intellectuals, writers and artists, just as had happened in Yan’an. Like other revolutionary nationalists who had preceded them earlier in the century, many of them also returning from exile and study overseas, the revolution would come to disappoint them in many ways.

¹³ “Clothes Go Gayer,” CR, Jan. 1956, 12; Handel’s Messiah, PC, Feb. 1, 1956; other developments mentioned in previous chapter.

Zhang Yan loses his job, as do other editors, including his boss, Liu Zunqi, the top editor of *People's China* and the head of the Foreign Languages Press. According to an account by Zhou Youguang, the language reformer, his friend Liu spent “twenty years in jail,” but in 1981 Liu becomes the first editor the English-language *China Daily* and later heads an encyclopedia project.¹⁴

Zhang eventually becomes director of the foreign affairs office at *Peking Review*. The magazine history tells about a 1964 incident in which Zhang ordered 10,000 printed copies of the Japanese edition destroyed when an article incorrectly substituted the word “capitalism” for the word “socialism.”¹⁵ The story is supposed to illustrate *Peking Review's* commitment to “eliminating all mistakes,” but one wonders what part the political atmosphere and fear of punishment played into his costly decision. Zhang then moves to *China Reconstructs*, becoming deputy to Israel Epstein, who, in a remarkable turn for a foreigner, has become the top editor. Then the Cultural Revolution hits. In a 2005 interview, Zhang refused to say what happened to him in the Cultural Revolution. “I’m just one of many Chinese intellectuals who suffered during the last fifty years,” he said vaguely. In his autobiography, Epstein fills us in. Zhang was one of the staff pressured to accuse Epstein of espionage. He “was especially harshly grilled, confined to a cowshed, and beaten severely until several of his ribs were cracked. He refused to even acknowledge that I was a spy,” Epstein says.¹⁶ What happens in intervening years, Zhang

¹⁴ Zhang Lijia and Colum Macleod, *China Remembers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/english/static/dashiji_en.html.

¹⁵ Beijing Review, *Zhongguo zhichuang shijie zhiyou: Beijing zhoubao de fazhan licheng* (China’s Window to the World: The Development of the Beijing Review) (Beijing: Beijing Zhoubao, 1998), 43.

¹⁶ Israel Epstein, *My China Eye: Memoirs of a Jew and Journalist* (San Francisco: Long

and Epstein do not say, but in 1980, Zhang becomes the first Washington correspondent for *People's Daily*, and eventually returns to *China Reconstructs* to serve out his years as Epstein's deputy.

Even without Zhang's testimony, Epstein is arrested. Only when Epstein and his wife are thrown in jail, and he is imprisoned from 1968 to 1973 in solitary confinement, with regular interrogations, does the editor finally begin to question the revolution to which he had given his heart and soul and editorial skills. Afterwards, he does not blame Mao, Zhou or the nature of the revolution. Epstein returns to the magazine, later to be feted by Deng Xiaoping, a man he had joined in denouncing in the Cultural Revolution, and President Jiang Zemin. Epstein died in May 2005 shortly after his ninetieth birthday.

Jack Chen is perhaps the oddest case in his adamant support of the Great Leap and the Cultural Revolution. Apparently untouched by the 1957 Anti-Rightist campaign, he remains at *Peking Review*. But in the Cultural Revolution, he is subjected to painful struggle sessions, including being forced to hold the "jet plane" position with arms lifted behind his back. Yet Chen recounts these sessions in a strangely fictionalized way, almost as if they had not occurred. Sent to the countryside in 1969, supposedly at his own request, he spends a year at a Henan farm commune, and writes about the experience in a 1973 book published in the United States, where he had moved.¹⁷ Two years later, he publishes a long interpretive history of revolutionary China from 1919 combined with a memoir that is full of rosy pictures of the outcome of the Cultural Revolution. "The years of the Cultural Revolution were not years of chaos and destruction, though there was

River Press, 2005), 299.

¹⁷ Jack Chen, *A Year in Upper Felicity: Life in a Chinese Village During the Cultural Revolution*, (New York: McMillan, 1973).

turmoil and disorder, but rather years of intense intellectual activity among the millions — years of constructive effort.” Living in Beijing, Chen may have been largely insulated from the worst effects of the Great Leap in rural China, but he clearly experienced the Cultural Revolution first hand. Yet he is so blinded by his own lifelong revolutionary ideology that he cannot see the devastation around him. It is not clear if he changed his judgment in later years, as the CCP changed its judgment, but he never returned to China to live. He died in 1995 at the age of 86.

Only Lin Wusun escapes fairly unscathed. During the Cultural Revolution, he “was not allowed to write in English” and “there was a big character poster that sort of nailed me and some of the other staff,” but “they needed me” and he was not high enough up to be affected by the leadership changes, he said.

Throughout the Cultural Revolution, I became more aware of the problems. ... I only spoke the truth, even when I was criticizing, I did not follow any of the extreme measures. I think that is one of the reasons people trusted me. ... The Cultural Revolution was like a stage ... Everyone was a performer. It was a severe test. I didn't realize [that] at the time. I really had the interest of the magazine and the interest of the country at heart, and I didn't go with any of the factions. I thought they were all extremists.¹⁸

Soong Ching Ling is threatened by Red Guards, who had surrounded her posh Beijing compound, a former princely home and birthplace of the last emperor, but she is put under the sometimes tenuous personal protection of her old friend, Zhou Enlai. Yet she is apparently unable to help her own old friends, such as Epstein and his wife. In the magazine shortly before her death in 1981, she laments all the misery, and particularly mourns the death of Jin Zhonghua (Ching Chung-hwa), the chairman of the editorial

¹⁸ Lin Wusun, Interview by the author, tape recording, Beijing, 16 June 2005.

board of *China Reconstructs* from its founding, hounded to his apparent suicide in 1968.¹⁹ “Of the countless victims of that time ... Jin was only one.”

The list could go on and on of the editors, writers and contributors mentioned in this thesis who ran afoul of the Cultural Revolution, including *China Reconstructs* founding editors Chen Hansheng and Li Boti. They were held in detention but did not die.²⁰ In 1966, novelist Lao She, the outspoken advocate of artistic freedom in the Hundred Flowers period, suffered humiliating struggle sessions and beatings, and then drowned, either a suicide or one of the many alleged “suicides” of the time.²¹ Cultural boss Zhou Yang was denounced and served years in the same prison as Peking Radio’s Sidney Rittenberg, initially one of the reddest of the Red Guards.²²

It is no wonder that the early editors of these magazines look back with nostalgia on the 1950s as a time of hope and promise that faded away. Even a half century later, readers of *People’s China* and *China Reconstructs* too can sense the fantastic promise of the dawn of the new China. But encumbered as we are with the knowledge of the outcomes over the next decades, the red sky of morning has plentiful hints of dark foreboding. The sunrise of the People’s Republic will be plunged into fiery darkness by the very man who epitomized the sun, Mao Zedong, and by mass contingents of both

¹⁹ CR, Feb. 1981, 2-3.

²⁰ Israel Epstein, *Woman in World History: Soong Ching Ling (Mme. Sun Yatsen)* (Beijing: New World Press, 1993), 589.

²¹ Jonathan Spence, *The Gate of Heavenly Peace: The Chinese and Their Revolution* (New York: Penguin Books, 1981), 394.

²² Sidney Rittenberg, Sr., and Amanda Bennett, *The Man Who Stayed Behind* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 409.

enthusiastic and reluctant allies. The smiling faces of new China will in time turn into the angry scowls and frenetic shouting of the Cultural Revolution.

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