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Radicalism, Revolution, and Reform in Modern China

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Peasant and Woman in Maoist Revolutionary Theory, 1920s–1950s

Tina Mai Chen

From the 1920s to the 1950s Mao Zedong articulated a complex and shifting relationship between class and gender. His conceptualization of “the peasant” and “woman” as figures of history as well as figures of historic possibility shaped the ways in which he theorized and implemented a revolutionary movement. A conjoining of class and gender was at the core of Maoist notions of who makes historical change and in what contexts. Because Mao Zedong and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) made explicit their belief that gendered and class-based forms of exploitation in the feudal era had delimited China’s socio-historical progress, revolutionary transformation rested upon the intertwined emergence of new forms of gender and class subjectivity.

As scholars of Maoism oft note, one of the major innovations of Maoism was the extension of the proletariat class to include the peasantry as agents of socio-historical transformation. Moreover, the explicit inclusion of women as historical subjects broadened the group that could potentially make revolution and bring about the future.¹ The inclusion of peasants and women as revolutionary actors reflected: one, a pragmatic assessment of China’s situation in the first half of the twentieth century; two, ongoing socio-political engagements by Chinese intellectuals from the turn of the century with the “modern woman”; and, three, a theoretical position informed by a belief in “advantages of backwardness” for future progress. The linked projects of championing peasants and women as politically “present” furthermore rested upon multiple levels of historical relevance attributed to peasant and woman. Peasants and women simultaneously were the actors who would bring about social transformation, the bodies whose

- ...ll discussion of issues related to
76. ... the Communist Party,” in Tucker, ed., pp. 473, 491.
77. See Andrej Walicki, “Marx and ...,” *The New York Review of Books* (November 24, 1983), pp. 50–55.
78. Meisner, *Marxism*, p. 194.
79. *Ibid.*, p. 192.
80. *Ibid.*, pp. 201–2.
81. *Ibid.*, pp. 210–11.
82. Wakeman, p. 320.
83. Mao, “Speech at the Supreme State Conference,” p. 94.
84. Mao, “Talk on Questions of Philosophy,” p. 229.
85. Liang Shuming, *Dong Xi wenhua ji qi zhexue* [Eastern and Western cultures and their philosophies] [1921], *Liang Shuming quanji*, vol. 1 (1989), pp. 319–547.
86. Guy Alitto, *The Last Confucian: Liang Shu-ming and the Chinese Dilemma of Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), p. 105.
87. *Ibid.*, p. 13.
88. For a discussion of the uses of history in *Eastern and Western Philosophies and Their Cultures*, see Lynch, *Liang Shuming and the Populist Alternative in China*, pp. 141–58.
89. Liang, *Dong Xi wenhua ji qi zhexue*, p. 442.
90. *Ibid.*, pp. 372–73.
91. Liang, *Xiangcun*, p. 446.
92. *Ibid.*, pp. 141–585.
93. Liang, *Zhongguo wenhua yaoyi* [The essence of Chinese culture] [1949], *Liang Shuming quanji*, vol. 3 (Jinan: Shandong renmin chubanshe, 1990), pp. 1–316.
94. For a further perspective on Liang Shuming’s response to Chinese Marxists, see Catherine Lynch, “The Country, the City and Visions of Modernity in 1930s China,” *Rural History*, vol. 21, no. 2 (Fall 2010), pp. 151–63.
95. The discussion here and below is based on Liang, *Xiangcun*, pp. 232–33.
96. *Ibid.*, p. 232; Marx, in Tucker, ed., p. 5.
97. Liang, *Xiangcun*, p. 309.
98. *Ibid.*, pp. 432–33.
99. See the discussion in Lin Qi [Catherine Lynch], pp. 285–86.
100. Quoted in Li, p. 36.
101. Li, pp. 34–38.
102. *Ibid.*, pp. 47–59.
103. Marx, “Preface,” in Tucker, ed., p. 5.

oppression legitimated the need for transformation, and the future beings made possible by the transformation.

The revolution—in theory and practice—was entwined with a politics of claiming historical relevance for peasants and women. Maoism and general CCP discourse insisted that prior to encounters with the CCP and its socialist revolutionary movement, peasants and women occupied a status as “nobodies” located on the margins of history. This formulation of history and its subjects was not only about a politics of claiming women and peasants for a CCP-led socialist revolution, however. It was also about the political claims of Maoism and the CCP to represent “nobodies”; as well as the new forms of subjectivity and politics demanded when “nobodies” become the agents of history. In this chapter, I undertake to rethink “the peasant” as a category produced through the connected processes of theorizing who makes revolution and enacting particular forms of revolutionary politics. The result is a more explicit rendering of the ways in which “the peasant” in Maoism, even when embodied in male form, could not exist without its counterpart “woman.” In making explicit the gendered basis of revolutionary liberation as related to “the peasant,” I call for a shift in the theoretical and historical lens through which we understand peasant and gender history in China.

HAUNTED CATEGORIES: PEASANT AND WOMAN

Feminist scholars of modern China argue that the historical championing of any category of people (be it woman or peasant) rests upon a continuous making and remaking of the category and the people who inhabit it. This point brings to the forefront the politics of claiming the category and encourages us to interrogate how a movement comes to define its subject. Tani Barlow argues that to pursue such an analysis entails acknowledging the historicity of categories and emphasizing the temporal heterogeneity of the present.² Moreover, as Barlow continues, analyzing ubiquitous key terms such as “woman” or “peasant” as historical catachresis draws out the historical and theoretical work done by simple terms. In this chapter, I am particularly interested in how the universalized figure of peasant was haunted by the simultaneously articulated figure of woman, and what Barlow terms the “occulted quality” of these catachreses.³

Barlow uses the term “occulted quality” to draw out the ways in which key terms like peasant or woman are repositories of past meaning. Similar to Barlow’s approach to *nixing/funü*, we can reconsider “*nongmin*” (the peasant) in Maoism by working through an analytic framework attentive to apparitions

and haunting in the Marxist tradition. Jacques Derrida interprets Marx’s reference to the “specter haunting Europe” in terms of two key concepts: time and simulacrum. Both prove important for thinking about the category of “the peasant” in Maoist theory because of the ways in which modalized presents structure the very meaning and universalized possibilities of “the peasant.” For Derrida, the spectral moment is one that no longer belongs to time because it is not bound by predetermined progress from one moment to the next.⁴ Rather, the spectral moment exists through the interaction of past present, actual present, “now,” and future present. Bearing this in mind, the following analysis remains attentive to the dialectical tensions between multiple temporal moments inhabited by peasant and woman in Maoist theory.

HETEROGENEOUS TEMPORALITY AND COMPARABILITY

The focus on multiple temporality is not a point of merely academic interest. Rather, multiple temporality has political relevance for how we conceptualize the possibility for change. It highlights historic potentiality in the past, present, and future, a fact recognized by Li Dazhao.⁵ Moreover, as Maurice Meisner reminds us, post-Maoist Marxist theory denies agency to peasants as a way of deflecting criticism of contradictions produced by the forms of capitalist modernization currently embraced by the Chinese state.⁶ The silencing of alternative historical visions rests upon uncritical acceptance of, on one hand, a belief in linear progression of capitalism as modernization and, on the other hand, an understanding that Maoist modernization was a fixed progression through stages that ultimately was responsible for great human disasters. The focus in this chapter on heterogeneous temporality intervenes into the politics of writing history. It foregrounds the importance of historical contingency and dialectics for revolutionary transformation and the very existence of peasant and woman in Maoism as modern categories produced in, and through, the “present.”

Certainly, Maoism was infused with a spirit of modernization and an acceptance of stages of development for historical progress as adapted from Chinese interpretations of social Darwinism and Marxist-Leninist historical periodization. Yet, to understand peasant and woman in Maoist China requires critical engagement with peasants or women as recognizable collectivities who exist simultaneously as oppressed beings, as liberating agents with emerging consciousness, and as fully formed embodiments of revolutionary transformation. These different modes of existence appear as a central motif in the intertwined personal and national narratives of the PRC. Most often they are understood as a linear progression from one stage

to the next. However, the Maoist investment in voluntarism and championing of the possibility for transformation rested upon modalized presents alongside a linear model of development. To focus on modalized presents, rather than the linear progression, returns contingency to the very categories of peasant and woman. It highlights their intertwined existence and powers of transformation—as well as the limits imposed as the liberating categories also functioned in the post-1949 period as legitimating categories for the CCP. Moreover, it draws out the theoretical implications for subjectivity of the theory of the advantages of backwardness, dialectical materialism, and Maoist politics of the “nobodies.”

The combined articulation of woman and peasant as signifiers of feudal oppression *and* the “new woman” and “*nongmin*” of China emerges out of the political potentiality invested in the “untimely” of each (rather than in the presumed replacement of one by the other). By juxtaposing texts from the 1920s and 1950s this aspect of the shared articulation of “peasant” and “woman” in Maoism becomes evident. First, woman and peasant appear as the most recent instantiation of a historically situated emerging consciousness. That is, they are an evolving repetition of an existing category. Second, woman and peasant appear in each moment as the first iteration of a category of people whose realization has only just become possible because of new historic possibilities. As such they appear as vanguard elements through which the future will be realized. Third, woman and peasant appear as the dying vestiges of a past oppression. Because the demise of the old system is deemed imminent, woman and peasant in this form are presented as a final iteration. Importantly, however, while CCP discourse sought to locate particular bodies as first, final, or evolving iterations, the existence of all embodied forms of peasant and woman exists in reference to the other and as such they exist simultaneously at all levels of signification.

The ensuing comparative analysis of the temporal conditions of peasant and woman as agents of revolutionary change in the 1920s and 1950s also counters assertions that post-1949 Maoist references to “the feudal remnants of the past” or the use of a “feudal image” of woman and peasant functioned instrumentally as rhetorical flourishes to allow the past to serve the politics of the present. The comparative approach, as opposed to a genealogical approach that would trace the evolution of woman and peasant from the 1920s to the 1950s, highlights the centrality of particular tensions and sets of relations within Maoism regarding the role of the peasant.⁷ The intention is not to excerpt Yan’an era writings from Maoist theory by moving directly from the 1920s to the 1950s, but to provide a new lens through which we understand two moments widely recognized for making explicit the political and theoretical stakes of “the peasant.”

PEASANT MOVEMENTS, HISTORICAL TIME, AND GENDERED CONTEXTS, 1927/1955

Mao Zedong’s 1927 essay, “Report on the Hunan Peasant Movement,” generally receives credit as the earliest articulation of Mao’s championing of the peasantry as revolutionary force. Standard textbooks and document collections present the essay as a definitive point in 1920s leftist views on the revolutionary potential of the rural population.⁸ The context provided for Mao’s 1927 essay typically mentions tensions over the direction of the CCP, the near annihilation in urban areas of the CCP after 1927, and the advent of Jiang Jieshi’s (Chiang Kai-shek) White Terror. But what if we also locate the “Report on the Hunan Peasant Movement” within a frame of reference that includes Mao’s early writings on women and gender, as well as other contemporaneously circulating works that had a role in the unfolding of Maoist theory and practice, such as Lu Xun’s oeuvre, particularly the short story “*Zhufu*” (New Year’s Sacrifice)?

Lu Xun’s short stories capture the unevenness of modernity and its social contradictions, in part, through disjunctive temporalities.⁹ For Lu Xun, the present appears paradoxically as fated to death because of the iron cages of the past, as well as holding within it the seeds of an alternative but perhaps not realizable future. The oft-quoted final lines of Lu Xun’s 1918 “The Diary of a Madman,” “Perhaps there are still children who have not eaten men? Save the children. . . .”¹⁰ finds an echo in Mao’s early writings. In “Miss Chao’s Suicide” (1919),¹¹ Mao argues that the “three iron nets” (family, future husband’s family, and society) prevented Miss Chao from being able to develop her individual free will. He called upon all to remember Miss Chao—in universalized (and gender inclusive) terms—as a martyr for free will in love. As a martyr she could “warn the other human beings who are not yet dead.” For Mao, Miss Chao’s historical relevance derived from recognition that her choice of death constituted a moment of historic possibility. Miss Chao could not live in a world where her ideas about love placed her beyond the iron nets of family and society. Notably, for Mao, Miss Chao’s death was not an erasure of her existence by society. Nor was it a form of martyrdom akin to “China’s New Women” who died while contributing through military efforts to the foundation of the PRC as nation-state. Rather, Miss Chao rose after death as a specter at the crossroads of death and life, and as a point of intersection for the past, present, and future. Mao, in this essay, presented historic possibility and contingency as inherent in oppressed women for whom living within the nets of oppression had elicited the sprouts of a gendered consciousness and the promise of *duli renga* (independent personhood).¹²

Eight years later when he penned the "Report on the Hunan Peasant Movement" (1927), Mao's understanding of independence had moved from the individual to the collective. He also encountered a different political situation and exuded greater optimism for change. Peasant action had, according to Mao, begun to open the iron nets of society in a more pronounced way than the nascent consciousness of a "Miss Chao." Yet even as Mao proclaimed that the peasants were striking down the enemies who battered their flesh, the historical relevance of peasants extolled by Mao in 1927 invoked a similar conceptualization to that expressed in "Miss Chao's Suicide" of historic possibility and its gendered forms. First, "Report on the Hunan Peasant Movement" is marked by a celebration of historic contingency that emerges when individuals and social formations perish at the very moment that new forms emerge. This moment of transformation was not only about the deaths of corrupt officials, landlords, or the Guomindang who had resisted the peasant associations. Historical transformation also rested upon the death and rebirth of the peasant and woman as a transformation of subjectivity. According to Mao, peasant associations as a "movement of the riffraff" were a historic formation produced by those "people with no place in society, people with no right to speak, [who] have now audaciously lifted up their heads." Moreover, the future present of the peasant association was one in which "the whole feudal-patriarchal system and ideology is tottering with the growth of the peasants' power."¹³ It is the tension between being nobody and becoming somebody, simultaneously occupying the past present and future present, that rendered the peasant a historical force for change.

The differentiated political strategies assigned to the "now" present in which the peasant associations took action and the future present of the struggle against patriarchy, of course, had very real implications for women's liberation within the CCP and PRC. In 1927, Mao wrote that destroying the landlords and completing the economic struggles would take place first, and then would be followed by attacks on religion and patriarchy. He thus put forth a political strategy that prioritized certain struggles over others. At the same time, Mao's remarks about patriarchy as the "fourth" system of inequality were not merely passing commentary for future consideration. The modalized presents that underpinned Mao's very understanding of socio-historical transformation rendered economic and gender struggles layered projects rather than successive ones. As such, Mao's explicit recognition of the system of oppression as feudal-patriarchal demanded that the universalized (future) peasant could exist only at the historic moments and in the spaces where the iron cages of gender inequality were also being opened up.

Moreover, the "untimely" haunting of the present by alternative gender relations "prior to" the present contributed to the constitution of the categories of

people who would bring about the future. As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, Maoist voluntarism often invoked the advantages of backwardness. Many scholars tend to see this as a pragmatic political strategy that enabled Mao to apply Marxism-Leninism to China.¹⁴ However, as Mao's "Report on the Hunan Peasant Movement" indicates, for Mao historic possibility rested upon the coexistence of differently gendered past, present, and future. This point helps make sense of why, when Mao makes one of his most important theoretical points, namely that the peasants themselves will complete the historic work of bringing down the old, the point is articulated via questions of gender relations. The paragraph begins by talking about the blurred edges of patriarchy among the poor peasants¹⁵ and concludes with the destruction of temples to the martyred virgins and the arches to the chaste and faithful widows as the actions that will demonstrate the full consciousness of the peasant.

Mao's 1927 "Report on the Hunan Peasant Movement" certainly emerged out of a different historic moment than "Miss Chao's Suicide." Yet as the above cited passage makes clear, both make strong historical and theoretical claims for woman and peasant as agents of historical transformation. In each case, and this is the oft-overlooked point, the very existence of woman and peasant depends upon the productive tension between past, present, and future iterations of the conjoined categories. The Maoist insistence that transformation of the subjective world was the decisive factor in the transformation of the objective world¹⁶ thus needs to place writings on the peasant alongside those that engage questions of subjective transformation in different registers. These include writings on woman as well as the "riffraff" or historical "nobodies."

In 1927, when Mao Zedong remarked that the peasants might also address the patriarchal structure of feudalism, he drew upon the legacy of the May Fourth and New Culture Movements in which various forms of gendered representational politics and temporal modalities informed Chinese intellectuals' engagement with socialist ideas.¹⁷ The grammatical parallelism of the statement that aligned patriarchal ideas and institutions with local tyrants, evil gentry, corrupt officials, and bad practices and customs, on one hand, supports the conclusions offered by scholars of gender in twentieth-century China who emphasize a conflation of gender and class in Chinese socialist revolutionary theory and practice. On the other hand, the mutual articulation of class and gender liberation was premised upon a particular form of dialectics and transformative politics that rendered both dynamic sources of social revolution.

When Mao returned to the theme of peasant political activism in 1955, he once again drew upon a gendered imagery of feudalism when he addressed class struggle as the mode of historical progress. References to "tottering" women with bound feet who were "constantly complaining 'You're going too fast'" proved rhetorically powerful for Mao Zedong as a means to dismiss

the predominantly male leaders who opposed implementation of his policies on agricultural cooperation in 1955.¹⁸ Mao utilized as shorthand for feudal elites and feudalism, a negative effeminacy embodied by feudal women. This positioned them in the "past present." The rhetorical reference was an effort to render oppositional voices historically irrelevant by placing them in a temporal moment that would be overcome by the future. Maoist representations of feudal women drew upon a longer history of representation of feudal women since the turn of the twentieth century that had rendered these women products of a socio-political system doomed to decline and failure.¹⁹ Their bound feet signified the violence of oppression, historical silencing, and irrelevance to modernity. These women had no voice; but in Maoism their bodies "spoke" as the "past present" of transformation. In the process they acquired historic relevance in a temporal dialectics of death/life/birth that produced the categories of peasant and woman.

The rhetorical appearance of feudal women in Mao's 1955 "On Agricultural Cooperation" functioned politically to de-legitimize leaders within the CCP who opposed Mao. Because these leaders sought to control the pace of agricultural cooperative formation and continued to uphold a position in which socialization of the peasantry presupposed urban industrialization, Mao insisted that they stood in the way of "the people" and outside history. It was not so easy, however, to banish these elements within the party to the past and to embrace a linear temporal framework. The difficulty arose not only because of competing political factions but, as evidenced by the gendered rhetoric through which Mao delineated his position, because historic possibility for the peasant emerged out of the "untimely." As such, the past/present/future coexisted as modalized presents within "On Agricultural Cooperation" just as it did in "On the Hunan Peasant Movement." Modalized presents and the dialectics of struggle were what made change possible, even if Mao sought to lead the transformation in a particular direction. Because peasant and woman existed as occulted categories, neither peasant nor woman could exist independently of the other, nor be contained to past, present, or future. Rather, the historic possibility of any given moment and group of people depended upon the evolving iterations of the categories such that the haunting forms of the past remained "present."

NEW FORMS OF SUBJECTIVITY AND POLITICS: FROM AGRICULTURAL COOPERATIVES TO *DREAM OF THE RED CHAMBER*

Analyzed through the lens of the untimely of woman and peasant, the evocative gendered rhetoric with which Mao began "On Agricultural Cooperation"

appears as much more than rhetorical flourish. Rather, it demonstrates the inseparability of the historic possibility of peasant from that of woman.²⁰ "On Agricultural Cooperation" not only produced a full endorsement of Mao's rural policy; it also promoted an alliance between CCP and peasants premised upon active leadership of the peasants in the transition to socialism. The historic possibility invested in the peasant in 1955 benefits by cross-referencing this essay with other mid-1950s texts preoccupied with transformations of subjectivity, gendered ghosts, and temporal conditions productive of revolutionary change.²¹ Moreover, it also returns us to the important intersection noted in Mao's 1927 "On the Hunan Peasant Movement" between the subject of a movement and the mode of politics it demanded. In each case, the transformation of subjectivity of the "nobodies" and the CCP's claim to represent these nobodies occupies a central position. That is, in addition to prioritizing Mao's rural policy, as Maurice Meisner notes, "On Agricultural Cooperation" signaled a new era in CCP politics. Mao sidestepped the Central Committee and the leadership's emerging consensus for gradual and controlled expansion of the number of cooperatives.²² When Mao delivered this speech to the provincial and regional Party secretaries, Mao located revolutionary political energy in the countryside and insisted that the peasants were to be the judges of the revolutionary sufficiency of the Party. Notably, this was not the only text in the mid-1950s in which Mao addressed the political voice of "the nobodies."

The gendering of feudal ideas and relations as past present, and the championing of the political voices of "nobodies" found in "On Agricultural Cooperation" echoed the sentiments expressed in Mao's 1954 "Letter on *Honglouloumeng* Criticism."²³ This short letter, at first glance, seems distant from Maoist rural policy and theorizing of the peasant. After all, the letter was directed at bourgeois idealism within the field of literary studies, particularly the interpretations by Yu Pingbo and Hu Shi of the Qing-era novel, *Honglouloumeng* (*Dream of the Red Chamber*). Yet, recognizing shared preoccupations in both texts and accompanying political campaigns highlights the embedded gendered positions and productive "clash" of temporalities through which Mao understood class struggle.

As discussed above, Mao insisted in 1919 that Miss Chao's suicide was an embodied form of martyred political potentiality, in 1927 that peasant associations were the basis of social transformation, and in 1955 that agricultural cooperatives consolidated the historic possibility of transformed peasant subjectivity. In the 1954 "Letter on *Honglouloumeng* Criticism," Mao extolled youth and students as those whose distance from established power rendered them embodiments of revolutionary change. While not classic examples of the advantages of backwardness, a theory usually grounded on the bodies of

women and peasants, the two students whose voices Mao championed in the "Letter" acquired historic relevance based on a similar logic. Mao's 1954 letter—and the controversy that became known as the *Wenyi bao* Affair—reveals that Mao's interest in *Honglougong* criticism was linked to questions of revolutionary authority, political reliability of the "inner circle," and sublimation of gendered cultural referents into newly articulated class categories.²⁴

In the short letter addressed primarily to the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the CCP, Mao wrote:

The whole thing has been set in motion by two "nobodies." As for the "big shots," they usually ignore things or even obstruct them, and they negotiate a united front with bourgeois writers on the basis of idealism and are willing captives of the bourgeoisie. This is almost the same situation as when the films *Qing gong mishu* [Inside story of the Qing court] and *Wu Xun zhuan* [The life of Wu Xun] were shown. . . . We have the strange situation in which Yu Pingbo's idealism is tolerated, and lively, critical essays by "nobodies" are obstructed. This deserves our attention.²⁵

The subsequent "attention" led to the publication of self-criticism by Yu Pingbo and *Wenyi bao* editor-in-chief, Feng Xuefeng, the removal of Feng from his post, and a campaign against Hu Feng after he criticized the "sectarian-oriented control of the CCP" over literary work, particularly the role played in this controversy by Zhou Yang and Yuan Shuipai.²⁶

In this instance, the championing of criticism from "nobodies" as a means to launch a campaign constituted both a political maneuver as well as a theoretical position. Both were based on Mao's suspicion of establishment intellectuals or bureaucrats and his belief in the ongoing nature of class struggle within socialist society. The marginalization of established power in the name of youth and peasants who embodied untainted revolutionary commitment underpinned Mao's comments on the seemingly narrower debate over interpretations of *Honglougong*.²⁷ This mode of politics informed his advocacy of peasant revolutionary potential since 1927. It is this consistent effort to ensure a political legitimacy and historical relevance to voices "on the margins" that brings together diverse texts that Mao produced for different segments of society. It is also what makes the historic possibility of women, peasant, and now also students inseparable in Maoist theory and praxis. Importantly, as discussed at the outset of this chapter, historic relevance entailed disrupting the temporal conditions of subjectivity that located certain people *a priori* outside historic time, or in the early stages of their incorporation into history. Mao's approach to transforming peasants, woman, and youth into political actors was not simply to substitute one group for another. Rather the radical politics of Maoism entailed recognition of the co-temporality of peasant,

women, and youth with established political leaders associated alternately with feudal, bourgeois, and/or CCP power. This then rendered as generative *modus operandi* the dialectical struggles between these groups and the modalized presents occupied by different forms of their bodies.

Mao promoted a vision of revolutionary progress premised upon subjective and social transformation in which peasant and woman came into being through struggle and constant reiteration of their multiple forms. The oppressed body of feudal woman and peasant, therefore, was constitutive of *funü* and *nongmin*. The consensus since the turn of the twentieth century that feudal female bodies belonged in the past made this body an essential part of Maoist discourse.²⁸ On one hand, the feudal female body could prove useful rhetorically to "banish" others to the past and then "use the past to serve the present."²⁹ On the other hand, however, such an instrumentalist understanding fails to address how the female body as shorthand for feudalism as class system ensured that woman's historic potentiality was always "present" in the bodies of oppressed women as well as their counterpart, the new woman. The point I am developing is that Maoist references to feudal women may appear to be another instance in which a male leader mobilized the imagery of women's oppression to serve political projects divested of any feminist goals. Yet, regardless of what one concludes regarding the variant of feminism articulated by Mao Zedong, the transformation of women's subjectivity could not be delinked from the transformation of peasant subjectivity, nor by the mid-1950s that of youth/students. As such, the untimely haunting by women of Mao's writings against bourgeois idealism and in favor of agricultural cooperatives also invests these struggles with the dual objectives of class and gender liberation.

Even though Mao, in the 1954 "Letter on *Honglougong* Criticism," did not explicitly refer to the content of *Honglougong* or specific characters within the story, the mere mention of the story ensured that the gendered characters representative of feudal China instantly became references through which contemporary political campaigns were understood. The ways in which class struggle was premised, for Mao, upon productive clashes produced by the untimely of haunting specters becomes evident when we think about how *Honglougong* criticism in the mid-1950s cross-fertilized the articulation of peasant revolutionary potential.³⁰ Moreover, by focusing on how historic potentiality was conceptualized we can also begin to appreciate that the outcomes of this conjoined struggle were never predetermined. Rather it was a constant political process that simultaneously celebrated and disciplined the "untimeliness" of woman and peasant as figures of historic possibility. As such, we need to bring into conversation the celebration of agricultural cooperatives and achievements of woman as workers that appeared in 1955³¹ with

the dialectics of "death" and emergence of the peasant and woman as collective categories. As will be developed below, the forms of death and birth of woman and peasant differed from the 1920s to the 1950s, but the structure of Maoist logic and politics that interlocked the categories and their radical potential remained consistent. This entailed the claiming of historical relevance for these presumed "nobodies" and foregrounding subjective transformation at the individual and collective levels as essential to any program of social transformation.

BUDDHIST SPECTERS AND THE PEASANT OF MAOIST THEORY: HONGLIUMENG'S BAOYU AND ZHUFU'S XIANGLIN'S WIFE

It is not mere coincidence that in the mid-1950s as Mao advocated renewed energy for a peasant revolution and proclaimed the completion of the liberation of women, the political voice of nobodies reverberated not only in the campaign against Hu Feng but also in the new visual representation of Lu Xun's *Zhufu* (New Year's Sacrifice). The 1956 state-produced filmic adaptation of Lu Xun's 1924 short story functions as part of a set of conjoined texts from the 1920s and 1950s in which Mao worked through the meaning of peasant and woman, revolutionary and subjective transformation, and the demands of particular historic moments. The film, along with *Hongliumeng*, is instructive as a means to distinguish the dialectic mode of historic potentiality advocated by Mao from Buddhist and Daoist cycles of birth, death, and rebirth that appeared in the original text.

Both the new studies of *Hongliumeng* (known as "*Xin Hong xue*") of the 1920s associated with Hu Feng and Hu Shi that focused on Cao's critique of the degeneration of feudal families and Lu Xun's original short story provided a poignant critique of feudal patriarchy by richly describing its human costs. These 1920s critiques operated largely through individualistic frameworks, but one can identify within them alternative political possibilities.³² That is, as Mao's 1920s writings implicitly suggested and as he made increasingly explicit by the 1950s, one could read *Hongliumeng* or *Zhufu* for seeds of class-consciousness appropriate to a particular historic moment. For *Hong xue*, then, the 1950s emphasis was to study *Hongliumeng* as commentary on the social depravity and corruptness of the feudal elite that, through its use of the vernacular, was a product of "the people" projected back into history. In terms of Lu Xun, Marxist critics read *Zhufu* as allegory for the failure of a Chinese Enlightenment and an argument for class struggle as the means to achieve human emancipation. Beyond the realm of literary criticism, I suggest that the ambiguity of death and despair characteristic of Lu Xun's works

folded into a radical dialectics that was central to the making of peasant and woman as historical subjects.

With the founding of the PRC, and certainly by the mid-1950s, Mao sought to develop a legacy of Lu Xun that prioritized the moment of becoming occasioned by newly formed consciousness, revolutionary rupture, and collectivism. In the 1920s, Lu Xun's critical realism had played an important role in subjective transformation because of the emotionally driven responses it elicited for class struggle against patriarchal feudalism, embodied by landlords. Yet by the mid-1950s following the implementation of Land Reform and the Marriage Law (albeit in truncated fashion), conditions shifted and the narrative of "standing up" was already well entrenched in the discourse of the PRC. The time had come, as Mao projected in 1927, for attacks on religion as well. What remains to be analyzed, however, is why these attacks found expression alongside the championing of the revolutionary agency of peasants, renewed calls for class struggle, and a celebration of women's accomplishments.³³

For Mao, even when peasant as a collective category was projected back into history, the existence of peasant and woman depended upon their constant refinement and struggle. As such, he privileged the nexus at which modalized presents existed in creative tension and produced the political subjectivities necessary for a new society. This does not mean that the past present, now present, and future present remained fixed. These, too, were dynamic. As the material conditions of class and gender oppression were addressed in the post-1949 period, the socio-cultural dimensions of feudalism, namely religion and superstition, became the primary elements associated with the feudal body. The existence of the peasant of Mao's agriculture cooperatives thus emerged through dialectical struggle with the female embodiment of pre-socialist practices, as well as the subjects of the political project that included women and peasants.

These theoretical points suggest a different approach to understanding Lu Xun's works and *Hongliumeng* criticism in the 1950s, and to the importance of a comparative analysis with the 1920s. Specifically, reading the 1956 filmic adaptation of *Zhufu* in terms of feudal woman as untimely specter constitutive of radical dialectics only makes sense when the gendered rhetoric of "On Agricultural Cooperation," the "Letter on *Hongliumeng* Criticism," and the film are considered as linked texts preoccupied with key theoretical questions. These texts need to be read for the ways they worked out new forms of subjectivity and politics required by a political project premised upon claiming historic relevance for peasants and woman. Otherwise, the filmic adaptation appears simplistically as the placing into the past of feudal woman, an interpretation I argue that fails to grapple with the modalized presents that

conjoined peasant and woman to radical historical contingency. This point then takes us back to the 1920s.

In order to consider how the protagonist of *Zhufu*, Xianglin's Wife, shifts our understanding of the peasant in Maoism, it is useful momentarily to engage Lydia Liu's recent analysis of Lu Xun's short story.³⁴ Liu situates the questions within *Zhufu* regarding the soul posed to the narrator by Xianglin's Wife within the debates on Science and Metaphysics (1923–1924). Citing Marston Anderson, Liu remarks upon the ironic stance of the narrator within a student-teacher relationship such that “the realist narrative, by imitating at a formal level the relations of oppressor to oppressed, is captive to the logic of that oppression and ends by merely reproducing it.”³⁵ Second, Liu draws attention to the ways in which Marxist and postcolonial readings of *Zhufu* are based upon the assumption that Xianglin's Wife is superstitious and therefore her questions regarding the existence of a soul are not taken seriously. Third, Liu proposes that the primary literary prototype for Xianglin's Wife is a Brahmin woman Bhiksuni Suksma, a woman featured in the Buddhist *Sutra of the Wise and Foolish* who is visited by a set of calamities including the death of her first husband and her infant son being eaten by wolves. This suffering woman, as one of Buddha's primary disciples, then repeats her story to enlighten mankind. Fourth, by foregrounding this Buddhist connection and refusing to dismiss the questions posed to the narrator by Xianglin's Wife, Liu argues that *Zhufu* “places the problem of life at the threshold of biomimesis, where the rational mind—that of the narrator, author, or reader—is continually framed and contaminated by invisible or occulted knowledge (from elsewhere) such as life is always foreshadowed by death. Herein lies the ultimate challenge to life as form.”³⁶ From this Liu argues that Lu Xun did not maintain silence during the Science and Metaphysics Debate (1923–1924) and that *Zhufu* was Lu Xun's contribution to the debate.

Liu provides a compelling historically situated reading of *Zhufu* that develops out of the structure and themes of the short story. By linking this story to the Science and Metaphysics debate, Liu exposes the complicity of reader and narrator when operating in the mode of Marxist analysis to silence the querying oppressed woman. She asks us to consider how *Zhufu* spoke to the raging attack in the early 1920s on “metaphysical ghosts.” This then brings this text into the broader relation between scientism, socialism, and romanticism in China. For the purpose of this chapter, Liu's analysis proves productive because she draws out the ways in which the threshold of death and life operates as ambiguous and provocative space in *Zhufu* both within the literary text and within the framework of debates that came to inform the sinification of Marxism.

I am interested in the historical relevance accorded to Xianglin's Wife in the 1920s and 1950s, and the logic that folded her into Maoist articulation of

the peasant and woman as categories of historic possibility. Along these lines, it is not sufficient simply to note Xianglin's Wife's location at the threshold of life and death. The issue becomes how she haunts, in the sense of the untimely specter, humanity itself. This returns us to the point with which this chapter began: specifically that the historic relevance of woman and peasant depended on an intertwined understanding of their simultaneous existence as oppressed being, revolutionary actors, and creations of social transformation. They were, in short, signifiers of the death of humanity (as Marxist critics have read *Zhufu*) and arrival of a new humanity.

The Maoist understanding of humanity, moreover, was coded through the 1920s debates on science and metaphysics. According to scholar Wang Hui, one of the results of the 1923 debate was that “by borrowing certain categories, methodologies, and forms of training, they [the community of scientists in China] asserted that humanity could understand the world, which included themselves in it; humanity thus became part of the objective world.”³⁷ Given the common themes in Mao's early writing on peasants and women, as well as the ways in which the 1923 debate became part of Party history and historiography, we can also understand Mao's 1927 essay as a call for inclusion of peasants and women within the objective world of humanity. Such an inclusion necessitated more than an expansion of the category of humanity, but a radical rethinking of humanity and its temporal conditions in which the inhumanity of earlier oppression is what legitimated and produced the peasant and woman as newly emerged historical actors. This point returns us to the conditions of emergence of the categories that made up humanity—namely peasant and woman—and that were rooted in modalized presents and radical dialectics.

Foregrounding the conditions of historic possibility for the peasant and woman that Mao expressed entails distinguishing Mao's radical dialectics from other cycles of birth, death, and rebirth. Liu's analysis of the short story *Zhufu* suggests points of convergence with *Honglouloumeng* as a contemporaneously circulating literary work in both the 1920s and 1950s. Both texts contemplated existential questions of form through Buddhist and Daoist concepts, even as they were understood as important condemnations in the vernacular of feudal tyranny. For *Honglouloumeng*, the title metaphorically refers to desire for the material world and its benefits; the mysterious monks are messengers from beyond; and the old servant who appears at the beginning of the novel reappears at the end as prophet.³⁸ The ambivalence expressed by the narrator of Lu Xun's *Zhufu* toward the existence or non-existence of ghosts and demons is echoed in *Honglouloumeng*'s use of Buddhist salvation as the prize for renouncing “worldly effeminacy” embraced by Baoyu.³⁹ In what manner, then, did women (or the effeminate Baoyu) who sought deliverance from oppression through Buddhism assume almost supernatural stature as

figures of the pre-socialist past that haunted mid-1950s China and developments within Maoism?

The targeting of “backward” ideas and practices including religion were a recurrent theme in Maoist China. Generally, however, this aspect of the Anti-Rightist Campaign and the Cultural Revolution tends to be discussed as the result of factional struggles, purges, or irrationality. The frequent references to “ghosts and demons” are seen as hyperbolic political rhetoric aimed at countering superstition in instrumentalist fashion.⁴⁰ But, if we locate this political rhetoric within the project of making peasant and woman as subjects of a political movement, we can see how locating ghosts and demons in the past present was about subjective transformation that would render woman and peasant the now/future present. It was also about ensuring the radical evolution of the categories themselves, and their continuous mutual articulation.⁴¹

This happened at two intertwined levels: first, disarticulation of the collective category of peasant and woman from its individualized and oppressed historical predecessors; second, radical reconceptualization of political power so that emergent peasant forces, akin to those of 1927, were the wave of the future and constituted a new form of politics. This occurred by making explicit the different forms peasants and woman occupied. On one hand, the death of superstitious beings, in a similar fashion to Miss Chao, acted as an alarm for the future. On the other hand, the death of feminized political opponents as called for in the opening lines of “On Agricultural Cooperation” reconfigured who occupied the political arena in favor of the “nobodies.” By the mid-1950s, moments of death were still a necessary part of the present because of the political potentiality inherent in these moments; but the attitudes, economic formations, and subjectivities slotted for death had changed. The rising political voice of the “nobodies” Mao stressed in the 1950s sounded the familiar themes of voluntarism, peasant agency, and social transformation, yet also recognized the figures of peasant and woman already generated through this process.

The simultaneous recognition of the existence of woman and peasant as new political subjectivities and an assertion that these categories needed to be made cannot be separated from the temporal conditions Mao identified as essential for historic potentiality. The interpretation of *Honglouneng* as the vernacular of a peasant “class-in-the-making” reminds us of this point. Moreover, this dynamic is clearly evident in the 1956 Beijing Film Studio color film adaptation of Lu Xun’s *Zhufu* (dir. Sang Hu, script by Xia Yan). This film appeared in the context of the Hundred Flowers movement and the March 1956 termination of centralized control of screenplay production. Zhang Yingjin identifies the return of May Fourth Literature like Lu Xun’s *Zhufu* to the screen as one result of this policy.⁴² The decentralization of

scripts, script continuities, and synopsis certainly allowed for a broader range of films and a marked increase in PRC film production. Yet, when one examines the functioning of class and gender in *Zhufu* their appearance seems less a reflection of the Hundred Flowers Campaign *per se* and more an artistic contribution to revolutionary theory premised upon rural socialist transformation, creation of a gendered peasant class and “the people,” and reassertion of the Maoist line in party and national history.

Unlike Lu Xun’s story that begins with the narrator and his unsettling encounter with Xianglin’s Wife as Buddhist “ghost,” the film script opts for a conventional chronological narrative that follows Xianglin’s Wife from one calamity to the next. It is only at the end of the film that Xianglin’s Wife, reduced to the state of a beggar invisible to those around her, asks into the swirling snow and gusting wind: “Tell me, does an individual have a soul after death?” The forces of nature swallow up her voice almost before she finishes uttering the sentence, and she does not expect a reply as she staggers to her death on the threshold she donated in the belief this would cleanse her sins. Against the swirling snow, the staggering then inert body of Xianglin’s Wife, the film concludes with an off-screen male voice-over stating, in a kind but authoritatively distant voice:

Xianglin’s wife is an industrious and kind person. She died after enduring much suffering and insults. This is something that happened over forty years ago. Yes, this is something belonging to the past. We should rejoice that such things have become part of the past and that they will never again happen in the present or future.

The filmic narrative provides authoritative closure to the story of Xianglin’s Wife such that the viewer can only read Xianglin’s Wife as representative of feudal oppression and its erasure by the forces of history. The film refuses the unsettling dimensions that allow Lydia Liu to read Lu Xun’s short story in relation to questions of life form, alternate authorities for knowledge, and Buddhist prototypes. Rather the film participates in “drawing clear lines of demarcation” to control the haunting of the present by “ghosts.” Xia Yan explained that having Xianglin’s Wife mutter the question about the existence of a soul to empty space at the end of the film (rather than at the beginning as in the short story) was a device to ease audience comprehension. The same logic justified, for Xia Yan, the use of an off-screen (male) narrator to conclude the film.⁴³

The audience comprehension to which Xia Yan referred can be understood as audience education concerning the prehistory and preconditions for production of a historically relevant “the people.” The existence of individualized suffering embodied by Xianglin’s Wife, as well as feudalism and its

supporting superstitions, are firmly located in another historical moment. *Zhufu* as film, therefore, provides closure on one era in order to open up the socialist present and future. But it is not an erasure of the moment. It is an attempt to tame the untimely, while also embracing its productive tensions. The oppositional temporality of the narrator's comments and his general summation of Xianglin's Wife's life as "full of suffering and insults" invites the audience to revisit these sufferings and insults as portrayed in the film, place them alongside one another in "the past" and then imagine the present/future as the historic potential of men and women freed from these conditions.

This construction of historical moments and socio-economic trajectories makes explicit the ways in which comments on patriarchy, policy on agricultural cooperation, literary criticism, and socialist theory were mutually articulated and mediated through each other. The taming of the past was critical for the subjective transformation Mao championed. But it was not a form of discounting or forgetting; rather the past embodied by Xianglin's Wife appeared as untimely specter. It thus functioned to remind all that the categories of the present and future—the peasant and woman—had to be imagined, created, and brought into being. Even though a female body associated with feudal ideas and elite practices provided the visual reference for discounting those who resisted full-scale formation of agricultural cooperatives, we thus cannot simply conclude that all female bodies were relegated to the past. When in 1955 (much like in 1927) Mao admonished those who lagged behind the mass movement, he had already imagined a new class that exemplified the future—and whose existence was intimately tied to the revolutionary potential of the peasant and woman, and the willingness of the CCP to take inspiration from this revolutionary potential.

CONCLUSION

As Meisner and others have noted, Mao's insistence on allying the political goals of the Party with the Chinese peasants constituted one of the most significant innovations for Marxist revolutionary theory. As this chapter has explored in different valences, peasants' suffering, backwardness, and death proved useful for mobilizing productive energies as well as in the realm of ideological struggle and representational politics. Rey Chow remarks: "the Chinese Communist Party seized upon peasant backwardness and let it 'sing.' . . . [T]he peasants' naiveté, poverty, deprivation, and hopelessness become tools of party propaganda and the backbone of party power."⁴⁴ We could, of course, supplement this with the death moan of feudal woman and its counterpart the "singing" of liberated women. But, as this chapter has argued, if we are fully to appreciate the gendering of the peasant as a revolutionary

category, it is not a question of adding women to the list of those to be liberated by the CCP and Maoism or whose oppression legitimated the political movement of the CCP. Rather, it entails an appreciation of the ways in which women in different guises and social positions haunted the very formation of peasant as a category. Recognizing this allows us to see the intimate connections between the politics of claiming historic relevance for peasant and woman, and the political claims of "the nobodies" who would lead history.

By approaching peasant and woman as constituted through a series of texts in conversation across time and political campaigns, we can rethink "the peasant" and its relationship to "woman" in terms of a politics of embodied transformation, and a gendered haunting constitutive of "the peasant" in Maoism. Engendering "the peasant class" from its inception was integral to the claims made for the revolutionary potential of the class, and its attendant theoretical interventions in Marxism-Leninism. We thus need to supplement the excellent scholarly work that has interrogated what the conjoining of class and gender did to the category of woman in China with serious inquiries into what this meant for "the peasant" as revolutionary category. Moreover, because the transformations enacted through and by peasant and woman as conjoined categories rest upon historic contingency, we are reminded that there was no predetermined or necessary relationship between woman and class within Maoism. There was a practice that evolved and had consequences for the lives of millions of peasants and women, and for which Mao as the leader of the PRC from 1949 to 1976 bears responsibility. At the same time, Maoist theory sought to imagine a world in which the collective forces of men and women, peasants and workers, were continuously reiterated. This point is one that is worth remembering in an era when the radical politics of the untimely and historic contingency is too often relegated to the past in the name of a present and future in which alternative projects for class and gender liberation are themselves denied historical relevance.

NOTES

* My thanks to Rebecca Karl and Tani Barlow for feedback on an earlier version of this chapter, as well as to all the participants in the June 2009 conference at the University of Wisconsin–Madison.

1. Tina Mai Chen, "Female Icons, Feminist Iconography? Socialist Rhetoric and Women's Agency in 1950s China," *Gender and History*, vol. 15, no. 2 (August 2003), pp. 268–95.

2. Tani E. Barlow, *The Question of Women in Chinese Feminism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), chapter 1.

3. Barlow, p. 34.

4. Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx, The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, Peggy Kamuf, trans. (New York and London: Routledge, 1994), p. 11.
5. Shu-chin Wu, "Time and Marxism in China: The Case of Li Dazhao," paper presented at the conference, "June 4, The Twentieth Anniversary: Reflections on History and Contemporary Change in China Before and After Tiananmen," Madison, Wisc., 4–7 June, 2009.
6. Maurice Meisner, *Marxism, Maoism, and Utopianism* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1982), pp. 225–227.
7. Harry Harootunian, "Some Thoughts on Comparability and the Space-Time Problem," *boundary 2*, vol. 32, no. 2 (2005), pp. 23–52.
8. http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/china/modern/rev_stu.htm (accessed 23 April 2010).
9. Lu Xun's place in the canon of the People's Republic of China has been the subject of much attention. See the introduction by Julia Lovell to a recent translation of Lu Xun's works that focuses on Mao's "commandeering" of Lu Xun for the revolution. Julia Lovell, *The Complete Fiction of Lu Xun* (forthcoming). Also, "Rang Lu Xun de wenben ziji shuohua—Zhang Xudong fangtan li" [Let Lu Xun's writings speak for themselves—an interview with Zhang Xudong], *Wenyi yanjiu*, no. 4, (2009).
10. Lu Xun, *Diary of a Madman and Other Stories*, William Lyell, trans. (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press: 1990), p. 41.
11. Mao Zedong, "Miss Chao's Suicide," <http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/works/1919/miss-chao.htm> (accessed 1 November, 2009). Also see Roxanne Witke, "Mao Tse-tung, Women and Suicide in the May Fourth Era," *The China Quarterly*, no. 31 (July–September, 1967), pp. 128–147; Rebecca Karl, "Journalism, Social Value, and a Philosophy of the Everyday in 1920s China," *positions: east asia cultures critique*, vol. 16, no. 3 (2008), pp. 539–66.
12. On feminism and *duli rengen* in May Fourth discourse, see Wang Zheng, *Women in the Chinese Enlightenment: Oral and Textual Histories* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).
13. Mao Tse-tung, "Report on an Investigation of the Peasant Movement in Hunan," *Selected Works*, vol. 1 (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1967), pp. 44–46.
14. Maurice Meisner, *Mao Zedong: A Political and Intellectual Portrait* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007); Nick Knight, *Rethinking Mao: Explorations in Mao Zedong's Thought* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2007).
15. "As to the authority of the husband, this has always been weaker among the poor peasants because, out of economic necessity, their womenfolk have to do more manual labour than the women of the richer classes and therefore have more say and greater power of decision in family matters. With the increasing bankruptcy of the rural economy in recent years, the basis for men's domination over women has already been weakened. With the rise of the peasant movement, the women in many places have now begun to organize rural women's associations; the opportunity has come for them to lift up their heads, and the authority of the husband is getting shakier every day" (Mao Tse-tung, "Report on an Investigation of the Peasant Movement in Hunan," pp. 45–46).

16. Maurice Meisner, "Utopian and Dystopian Elements in the Maoist Vision of the Future," *Marxism, Maoism, and Utopianism*, p. 198.
17. On time in the thinking of Li Dazhao, also see Claudia Pozzana, "Spring, Temporality, and History in Li Dazhao," *positions: east asia cultures critique*, vol. 3, no. 2 (fall 1995), pp. 283–305.
18. Mao Tse-tung, "On the Question of Agricultural Co-operation" [31 July, 1955], *Selected Readings from the Works of Mao Tse-tung* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1971), p. 389.
19. On feudal woman in Maoist discourse, see Gail Hershatter, "The Gender of Memory: Rural Chinese Women and the 1950s," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, vol. 28, no. 1 (2002), pp. 43–70.
20. On the practices associated with the conjoining of woman and peasant in the revolutionary imagination see, for instance, Gao Xiaoxian, "'The Silver Flower Contest': Rural Women in 1950s China and the Gendered Division of Labour," *Gender and History*, vol. 1, no. 3 (2006), pp. 594–612. Gao contextualizes the cotton production contests in Shaanxi going from "the goal of industrialization [as] intimately connected to agricultural development" to explaining the dual measures of controlling the supply of cotton and raising cotton production. While I find Gao's analysis of the gendered dynamics of the "Silver Flower Contest" to be superbly nuanced, the article is also symptomatic of the ways in which contesting theories of economic production and political roles for peasant class have been overlooked in gender history.
21. Late 1955 through early 1956 marked a turning point for the status of peasants. With agricultural cooperatives, distinctions between peasants and workers were partially collapsed. This was a practical issue of Party membership, advanced in part by Deng Xiaoping in 1956, with the relaxation of the selection procedure for non-workers in the new Party Constitution. It was also a theoretical issue as the category of "proletariat" was redefined based on commitment to socialist revolution and the CCP, and on participation in production under (state) collective control. Membership in the "working class" no longer was contingent upon prior achievement of a certain minimum level of (urban) industrialization. Stuart Schram, *The Thought of Mao Tse-tung* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 118–22.
22. Maurice Meisner, *Mao's China and After* (New York: Free Press, 1999), p. 149.
23. The context of Mao's letter included the publication in 1952 of Yu Pingbo's "Research on *Dream of the Red Chamber*" [*Honglouloumeng yanjiu*]. In 1954 Li Xifan and Lan Ling, two young graduates of Shandong University, criticized Yu's book for using a bourgeois idealist perspective and bourgeois methods of textual analysis. Mao praised Li and Lan as "the first serious fire in over thirty years of erroneous views of a so-called authoritative figure in the study of *A Dream of the Red Chamber*." See Henry Yuhuai He, *Dictionary of the Political Thought of the People's Republic of China* (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 2001), p. 298.
24. On the issue of the sublime and aesthetics in *Honglouloumeng*, see Wang Ban's analysis of Wang Guowei's essay "A Critique of *Dream of the Red Chamber*," in Ban Wang, *The Sublime Figure of History, Aesthetics and Politics in Twentieth-Century China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), pp. 27–34.

25. Mao Zedong, "Letter on the Problem of *Honglouloumeng yanjiu*," in Michael Y. M. Kau and John K. Leung, eds., *The Writings of Mao Zedong, 1949–1976* (Armonk: M. E. Sharpe, 1986), p. 483.

26. For an excellent study of Hu Feng and his challenges to CCP bureaucratic and political control of writers and literary production, including the Anti-Hu Feng Campaign of 1955, as linked to tensions around Chinese modernity and the discourse of collectivism see Kirk A. Denton, *The Problematic of Self in Modern Chinese Literature: Hu Feng and Lu Ling* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998).

27. Criticism of *Honglouloumeng* was summarized in Mao Zedong, "Letter on the Problem of *Honglouloumeng yanjiu* (16 October 1954)," in Kau and Leung, pp. 481–85.

28. See Louise Edwards, *Men and Women in Qing China: Gender in the Red Chamber Dream* (Leiden: Brill Publishing, 1994), p. 3.

29. For a less instrumentalist analysis of Mao's phrase "Use the past to serve the present," see Tina Mai Chen, "Use the past for the present; the foreign to serve China (古为今用, 洋为中用)," in Ban Wang, ed., *Words and Their Stories: Essays on the Language of the Chinese Revolution* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), pp. 205–226. During the Great Leap Forward period (1958–1961), the phrase "Use the past to serve the present" was at the center of debates that conjoined philosophical concerns regarding materialism and idealism to political campaigns that sought to create revolutionary subjects as the motive forces of history. In 1958, notice was given to historians and others in the literary realm that their work could not be separated from the politics of mass mobilization, revolutionary praxis, and historical contextualization. The concern was with those who "*zhonggu qingjin*" (take the past seriously and dismiss the present), for which a proclivity for teaching *Honglouloumeng* over modern works (including the Soviet socialist realism novel featuring Pavel Korchagin) was considered symptomatic.

30. Mao's "Letter on *Honglouloumeng* Criticism" held further significance for understanding the push toward agricultural cooperativization and its impact on Maoist theory because of the ways in which the criticism of *Honglouloumeng* studies intersected with theoretical debates regarding the sinification of Marxism-Leninism and Maoist understanding of materialist dialectics. This aspect, however, is outside the scope of this chapter.

31. In 1955, Mao wrote in "Women Have Gone to the Labour Front" (reproduced in the *Red Book*): "In order to build a great socialist society it is of the utmost importance to arouse the broad masses of women to join in productive society. Men and women must receive equal pay for equal work. Genuine equality between the sexes can only be realized in the process of the socialist transformation of society as a whole." At this time, proclamations regarding the success of agricultural cooperativization appeared alongside new directives that increased women's work hours in agricultural production and concerted efforts to promote female agricultural labor heroes. Mao Zedong, "Introductory note to 'Women Have Gone to the Labour Front'" [1955], *The Socialist Uprising in China's Countryside*, Chinese ed., vol. I. <http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/works/red-book/ch31.htm> (accessed 23 April 2010).

32. Kirk Denton argues that Chinese (socialist) modernity did not develop out of an antithesis between May Fourth individualism and Yan'an revolutionary collectivism, despite the use of this opposition in the 1955 Anti-Hu Campaign and the repro-

duction of the antithesis in recent scholarship on Hu Feng. Rather, as Denton asserts both were "as much intertwined as antagonistic" in the literary arena. Denton, p. 10.

33. Tina Mai Chen, "Re-forming the Chinese National Body: Emulation Campaigns, National Narrative, and Gendered Representation in the Early Maoist Period," PhD Dissertation, University of Wisconsin–Madison (1999); Gao Xiaoxian, "'The Silver Flower Contest': Rural Women in 1950s China and the Gendered Division of Labour."

34. Lydia H. Liu, "Life as Form: How Biomimesis Encountered Buddhism in Lu Xun," *Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 68, no. 1 (2009), pp. 21–54.

35. Marston Anderson, *The Limits of Realism: Chinese Fiction in the Revolutionary Period* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), p. 91; cited in Liu, p. 45.

36. Liu, p. 49.

37. Wang Hui, "Discursive Community and the Genealogy of Scientific Categories," in Madeline Yue Dong and Joshua L. Goldstein, *Everyday Modernity in China* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006), p. 116.

38. Judith Zeitlin analyzes the banishing of Lin Siniang's ghost by Cao Xueqin in *Dream of the Red Chamber*. She writes: "Lin Siniang's ghost is banished in *Dream of the Red Chamber* because the Qing bureaucratic machine portrayed in the novel permits no gaps in the 'edifice of memorialization' through which the unsettled dead from a previous dynasty could reappear." Judith T. Zeitlin, *The Phantom Heroine, Ghosts and Gender in Seventeenth-Century Chinese Literature* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007), p. 106. The gendering of ghosts and their role in seventeenth-century literature is a point for further exploration in relation to the *Honglouloumeng* criticism of the 1950s.

39. On reading *Honglouloumeng* as a Buddhist quest and enlightenment, see Li Qiancheng, *Fictions of Enlightenment: Journey to the West, Tower of Myriad Mirrors, and Dream of the Red Chamber* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2004).

40. In the 1 July 1957 *People's Daily* (*Renmin ribao*) editorial "*Wen hui bao's* Bourgeois Orientation Should be Criticized," Mao wrote: "The purpose was to let demons and devils, ghosts and monsters 'air views freely' and let poisonous weeds sprout and grow in profusion, so that the people, now shocked to find these ugly things still existing in the world, would take action to wipe them out. In other words, the Communist Party foresaw this inevitable class struggle between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat."

41. The Anti-Hu Campaign associated with *Honglouloumeng* criticism is interesting in this regard because it ended Hu Feng's claim to be the soul of Lu Xun and the legitimacy of his self-conscious portrayal as heir to Lu Xun's spirit. This freed Lu Xun for others to claim. See Kirk Denton, <http://mclc.osu.edu/rc/pubs/institutions/denton.htm> (accessed 23 April 2010).

42. Zhang Yingjin, *Chinese National Cinema* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), pp. 205–6.

43. Xia Yan, *Zhufu: Cong xiaoshuo dao dianying* [New year's sacrifice: From novel to film], p. 123. Cited in Paul Clark, *Chinese Cinema: Culture and Politics Since 1949* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 201.

44. Rey Chow, *Primitive Passions: Visuality, Sexuality, Ethnography, and Contemporary Chinese Cinema* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), p. 91.