"Non-People" in the People's Republic of China: 
A Chronicle of Terminological Ambiguity

Michael Schoenhals
Stockholm University

AND

The Politics of Persuasion: 
Communist Rhetoric and the Revolution

Patricia Stranahan
Texas A&M University
Indiana East Asian Working Papers Series on Language and Politics in Modern China

Jeffrey Wasserstrom and Sue Tuohy, Editors

The Language and Politics in Modern China working papers form part of a collaborative research project, "Keywords of the Chinese Revolution: The Language of Politics and the Politics of Language in 20th-Century China," funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities and the Pacific Cultural Foundation. Core project members include: Timothy Cheek (Colorado College), Joshua L. Fogel (University of California-Santa Barbara), Elizabeth J. Perry (University of California-Berkeley), Michael Schoenhals (University of Stockholm), and Project Director Jeffrey Wasserstrom (Indiana University). The Keywords project seeks to present an account of the ways that the language of politics has shaped and, in turn, has been reshaped by the Chinese Revolution from the early decades of this century to the present.

The working papers will use methodologies and theories drawn from a variety of disciplines to explore the shifting meanings of politically-charged symbols and terms. General topics associated with the politics of communication will also be examined.

For information on ordering papers in the series, please see the back cover. The articles in the series are intended as working papers, and the authors welcome comments from readers. Please address your comments to the editors:

Jeffrey Wasserstrom and Sue Tuohy, editors
Language and Politics in Modern China
East Asian Studies Center, Memorial W207
Indiana University
Bloomington, IN 47405
Phone: 812/855-3765; Fax: 812/855-7762
"Non-People" in the People's Republic of China: A Chronicle of Terminological Ambiguity

Michael Schoenhals
Stockholm University
The notion that sequences of real events possess the formal attributes of the stories we tell about imaginary events could only have its origin in wishes, daydreams, reveries.

Hayden White, "The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality"

The central subject of what follows is a cluster of terms employed by the Chinese Communist party (CCP) to refer to People (renmin) and non-People (fei renmin). Initially, it was to have been a properly "closed" historical story with a moral meaning. For now, however, I have decided that I am unable to determine what the true or most plausible story to be told about these terms and their functions ought to be. The use and abuse, currency and obsolescence of individual terms still retains the form of a myriad of unfinished stories. Here and there these unfinished stories seem to come together, and briefly one glimpses the possibility of a closure as particular terms are solemnly relegated to the dustheap of history by no less an authority than the CCP Central Committee. But while the lives of non-People as "rightists" or "capitalist roaders" may well be over for good—and the stories of their lives have revealed themselves to be tragedies or for that matter comedies—these terms as such do not simply become archaisms because the Party wishes them to. Once honorific words, rather than disappear, may go in hiding among the vaguely ironic, reappearing to irritate and confuse; and dysphemisms pronounced dead by one generation are revived by the next to curse their ancestors. Because of this, what follows is a chronicle of the uses of terms—not a fully realized historical discourse on political discourse. It terminates, abruptly, during the Cultural Revolution.

Founding the People's Republic: Separating the People from Other Nationals (guomin) and Citizens (gongmin)

"The Chinese People, comprising one-quarter of humanity, have now stood up," CCP Chairman Mao Zedong declared in his opening address at the First Plenary Session of the Chinese People's Consultative Conference on 21 September 1949. "We have stood up,"
he repeated, assuming the role of the People’s spokesperson, and added, “We have friends all over the world.”

The important point that many of Mao’s “friends all over the world” appear never to have fully appreciated is that the seemingly innocuous People (in what follows, the English word is capitalized throughout and used exclusively as a translation of the Chinese term renmin) meant something quite different from what one might have expected, i.e., men or women indefinitely; persons. Mao’s People were not quite the same as his “quarter of humanity” either, as the next decades were to show. There were significant segments of China’s population that were non-People, who neither got an opportunity nor the CCP Chairman’s permission to “stand up.” “At the present stage in China,” Mao had said three months prior to the founding of the People’s Republic, the non-People who forthwith were to be subject to “People’s democratic dictatorship” included “the running-dogs of imperialism—the landlord class and bureaucrat-bourgeoisie, as well as the representatives of these classes, the Guomindang reactionaries and their accomplices.”

1. “Zhongguo renmin zhanqilai” [The Chinese people have stood up], in Mao Zedong xuanji [Selected works of Mao Zedong], vol. 5 (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1977), p. 4. An often reiterated myth has it that Mao uttered his now famous words about the Chinese People having stood up while himself standing on the Tiananmen Rostrum on 1 October 1949. In Jan Myrdal’s “A Feast in Liu Lin or a New and Different Chinese Millennium” (Aftonbladet Kultur, no. 3-4, 1994), we come across the following passage purporting to represent the historical truth:

Forty-five years ago when my son was about to be born . . . I spent the nights with my shortwave receiver, a Philletta, listening to the news from Asia . . . On the night of the first of October 1949, I heard how the chairman of the victorious communists from the top of the Gate of Heavenly Peace in Beijing announced to the assembled masses the founding of the Zhongguo [sic] Renmin Gongheguo, the People’s Republic of China. He said:

—China has again stood up!

I entered the other room and woke up my wife.

—China is red! I said.

In fact, Mao did not say anything at all about “standing up” in his famous address in Tiananmen Square. Compare the original recording on Juren zhi sheng: Mao Zedong jianghua yuanshi luyin [Voice of a great man: Original recordings of speeches by Mao Zedong] (Shenzhen: Xianke Yule chuanbo youxian gongsi, 1993).

"Non-People" in the People's Republic of China

That the term People was part of an expanding ickylex peculiar to the Communist movement was, not surprisingly, neither denied nor affirmed. Still quite a few official explanatory texts published at the time of the founding of the PRC addressed the crucial issue of who is and who is not of the People. To the student of political keywords, the most interesting texts are those that explain by comparison to already familiar concepts, rather than by way of pseudo-sociological analyses or references to canonical texts. In the following excerpt, CCP Central Committee member Bo Yibo explains the meaning of "People" to a group of newly trained journalists:

I think its meaning is quite obvious. "People" is not the same as "nationals" (guomin). In the past, we generally used to say that "nationals" include the landlords and the other antagonistic classes. In any case, persons (ren) living on the national soil are all [sic] "nationals," and are all called "nationals." Then there is another term, called "citizen" (gongmin). "Citizens" are different from "nationals" and from "People." Politically and legally there are such things as "citizen's rights," the most important of which are the right to vote and the right to be elected. So much for "citizens." With "People" it's different. For example, the People's Democratic Dictatorship with the worker-peasant alliance as its main body: here "People" includes workers, peasants, the urban poor, intellectuals, etc., but certainly not landlords and comprador bourgeois elements.4

It became the task of the journalists that made up Bo's audience to act as the propagators of an entirely new political discourse centered on a distinction between People on the one hand and non-People on the other. In this context, it could not be taken for granted that the People itself would realize by itself and for itself that the new state was "theirs." Thus in October 1949, the New China News Agency (NCNA) asked journalists to employ every available popular form of communication to educate (jiaoyu) the People to correctly understand (renshi) and cherish (aihu) their own state and to make them grasp the following point: Old China was a state in which the imperialists, landlords, and bureaucrat-capitalist class oppressed the

3. "Ickylex n [ichytology a branch of zoology dealing with fish+lexis; literally 'fishy language']: A series of rhetorical devices, stock phrases, and syntactic structures that reveal to trained observers the presence of unsavory or suspect intentions." From Jack Hitt, ed., In a Word: A Dictionary of Words That Don't Exist, But Ought To (New York: Dell, 1992), p. 88.

4. Bo Yibo, "Renmin ribao de mingcheng he baotou de youlai" [The origins of the name and title of the People's Daily], Xinwen zhanxian, no. 7, 1981, p. 3.
People; we are now going to create in accordance with Chairman Mao’s instructions a People’s democratic dictatorship, i.e., the People’s own state.\(^5\)

In the “Old China,” Chiang Kai-shek’s government had been the non-People’s government. Zhou Enlai’s government was now the People’s Government. In a directive to the Chinese media the CCP pointed out that “People’s Government (\textit{renmin zhengfu}) is the formal designation of the democratic government at all levels (e.g., the North-China People’s Government), while democratic government (\textit{minzhu zhengfu}) itself is a general term.”\(^6\)

**1953: Voicing Popular and Non-Popular Opinion**

In a report on improving propaganda directed at overseas audiences, a senior editor told the Third NCNA National Conference in December 1953 of a spate of letters he had received from a certain Englishwoman [sic] by the name of McGraw. In one of her letters, Ms. McGraw said “I am overjoyed knowing that today the People of China lead a happy life. You deserve to enjoy happiness more than any other People on this earth.”\(^7\) After citing this and other similarly enthusiastic letters from “friends all over the world,” the editor reminded his audience of how important it was to adapt the wording and contents of overseas propaganda to the “mental state” (\textit{sixiang zhuangkuang}) of foreigners. When describing the improvement of the livelihood of the Chinese People brought about by the CCP, the media’s domestic “formulations” (\textit{tifa}) had to be suitably modified to produce the desired effect:

---


6. “Zhonggong zhongyang guanyu siying baokan tongxun she deng wenti de zhishi” [CCP Center directive concerning privately owned newspapers and news agencies etc.], in \textit{Xinhua she wenjian ziliao xuanbian} [Selected NCNA documents and materials], edited by Xinhua she xinwen yanjiubu, 3 vols. (Beijing, n.d.), vol. 2, p. 3.

For instance, one must not put too much stress on the extension of working hours, on doing without rest or sleep, on women taking part in heavy physical labor, etc. This is because in the minds of Western readers, circumstances like these easily create the impression of labor being made more and more intense and of a lack of concern with [the well-being of] the individual. This in turn provides the enemy with opportunities to spread rumors.8

The problem of formulations—for domestic and foreign consumption respectively—was to persist for many years, as journalists all over China grappled with the how People and non-People alike were to be written up for one audience or another. Both the NCNA and provincial newspapers were criticized again and again by the CCP Central Propaganda Department and its deputy director Hu Qiaomu for failing in this respect.

Perhaps the most serious problem had to do with voice, as in who was entitled to voice an opinion on behalf of the People of China? In theory, the CCP as a whole represented the ninety-five percent or so of China’s nationals that, according to Mao four years earlier, had stood up. But in specific instances, this did not mean that party-run newspapers were free to turn this power (quanli) of representation into quasi-first-person narratives and actually state what the Chinese People did or felt. Ultimately, this important right (n.b., again quanli) was one that belonged exclusively to the CCP Center. But quite often this was forgotten, and hence some of the criticisms were directed against the provincial press in particular.

Between January and October 1953, the NCNA Head Office in Beijing issued some 177 “corrections” of no less than 243 domestic news items.9 One of these concerned a telegram from the Shenyang NCNA branch on 17 February in which the Chinese People were mentioned in conjunction with the recent shooting down of five American fighter jets over northeast China. Part of the concluding paragraph of the telegram read: “The People of China . . . express their extreme indignation . . . and are already closely and vigilantly monitoring this plot by the American imperialists to expand the war [in Korea].”

---


words prompted Hu Qiaomu to inform the NCNA head office of the obvious: “Aside from the People in the area, the ‘People of China’ had no knowledge whatsoever of this event having taken place. They were even less in a position to feel ‘indignation’ or to be ‘vigilant’.” In matters such as these, only the Center could express the feelings of the “People of China.”

One unintended and perplexing consequence of the CCP Center’s criticism of the media for voicing opinions on behalf of the People “in general” was that it became safer for journalists and editors to represent the sinister essence of what China’s non-People, rather than China’s People, did or felt. Domestic “running-dogs of imperialism” had no agents who protested a misrepresentation or falsehood attributed to them.

1954: The People Are Nothing Without the Communist Party

A second practice that disturbed the CCP Center was when journalists neglected to mention the role of the Party when discussing the achievements of individual representatives of the People. In a 1954 self-criticism produced by the editorial board of the *Inner Mongolia Daily*, this practice was attributed to a failure on behalf of the staff concerned to realize that the individual “can accomplish nothing in isolation from the leadership of the Party and the power of the collective.” The self-criticism (circulated nationwide by the Central Propaganda Department) cited an article that had ascribed the “startling feats” of a labor hero from the ranks of the People solely to “his stubborn refusal to be daunted by difficulties and his willingness to study assiduously.” The problem with this article, according to the *Inner Mongolia Daily* editorial board, was that “it made no mention of the Party having fostered and helped him.” In a second article, a journalist had written about a humble peasant who had become a labor hero thanks to his “outstanding moral qualities.” This was also deemed problematic, since what was

described "could not possibly have taken place without the Party’s fostering and education, and the help of the masses."\textsuperscript{11}

1955: The Logic of Popular "Happiness"

In the summer of 1955, the \textit{People's Daily} was able to declare with confidence that: "In short: A day of joy for the People is a time of woe for counter-revolutionary elements. Each year on our National Day, this is what we celebrate above all else."\textsuperscript{12} In denunciations of the so-called "Hu Feng counter-revolutionary clique," the Party media repeated the message over and over again. The things that "terrify" the enemy are precisely the things that "make the revolutionary masses of the People happy."\textsuperscript{13}

When the population in parts of China refused to abide by this logic–formulated by none other than Mao Zedong himself—the CCP promptly ordered the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) to intervene. In southwest China, agricultural collectivization presented a case in point. In a brief to journalists, the NCNA had recently described it as "a step taken by our Party to resolve China’s ethnic problem . . . about which propaganda should be made to hearten and educate the People."\textsuperscript{14} But in December 1955, more than 100,000 less than "happy" members of the Yi and other ethnic groups in forty-three counties along the Yunnan-Sichuan-Tibet border rebelled against the forced imposition of land reform and (trial) rural collectivization. The CCP responded by mobilizing no less than thirty-four regiments from the Kunming and Chengdu Military Regions. Today’s official history books note that "more than 6,000 battles were fought, more than 20,000

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item[12.] "Guanyu Hu Feng fangeming jitian de di er pi cailiao" [About the second batch of materials on the Hu Feng counter-revolutionary clique], \textit{Renmin ribao}, 24 May 1955.
\item[13.] "Guanyu Hu Feng fangeming jitian de di san pi cailiao" [About the third batch of materials on the Hu Feng counter-revolutionary clique], \textit{Renmin ribao}, 10 June 1955.
\item[14.] "Shaoshu minzu diqu de huzhu hezuo yundong he nongye shengchan baodao ying zhuyi minzu tedian" [When reporting on the co-operative movement and agricultural production in ethnic minority areas attention must be paid to ethnic peculiarities], in XinhuaShe xinwen yanjiubu, vol. 3, p. 384.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
rebels were shot, more than 20,000 rebels were taken prisoner, while more than 40,000 masses were able to return to their homes.”

The dead and imprisoned had been sacrificed for the sake of keeping the Chinese People “happy.” The value of non-People’s lives was miniscule indeed. In fact, in his address to the Eighth CCP Central Committee’s Second Plenum in November 1956, Mao Zedong implied in metaphorical language that even expending them for the sake of comforting beasts was a legitimate political option: “If we did not suppress counter-revolutionaries, the working People would be unhappy. So would the oxen and the hoes, and even the land would feel uncomfortable, all because the peasants who put the oxen and hoes and the land to use would be unhappy.”

**February 1957: Popular Contradictions**

“The People does not exercise dictatorship over itself,” Mao Zedong declared in February 1957. In one of his most systematic—though not necessarily very coherent—discourses on the relationship between and among People, non-People, and the CCP, the Chairman made numerous remarks like this one. In a rare statistic concerning China’s non-People, he noted that between 1950 and 1952, some 700,000 persons had been done away with, but that “beginning last year . . . the killing basically stopped altogether.” The now dead had constituted an impediment to the development of China’s economy. “If that bunch [the 700,000 persons just mentioned] had not been killed, the People would not have been in a position to raise their heads. The People demanded they be killed, in order to liberate the forces of production.”

---


17. “Guanyu zhengque chuli renmin neibu maodun de wenti” [On the correct handling of contradictions among the People] [Speaking notes], in *Mao Zedong sixiang wansui* [Long live Mao Zedong thought], edited by Zhongguo renmin daxue san hong (Beijing, 1967), pp. 25; 32-33.
These statistics were not included in the published version of Mao’s speech. The precise reference to the non-People who perished at the hands of the People’s democratic dictatorship was also changed to read very generally “counter-revolutionaries.”

Originally, it had been a brief, but to an insider rather more informative, “five categories of counter-revolutionaries” (wulei fangeming). So as to preempt any confusion on this point, it needs to be noted that these five “kinds” were not the non-People mentioned by Mao and Bo Yibo in 1949, nor were they identical to what after June 1957 were to be called the “black five categories” (hei wulei). Mao’s five categories were “bandit chieftains, professional brigands, local tyrants, special agents, and leaders of reactionary secret societies.” These were but one-third of the fifteen kinds of “counter-revolutionary elements and other bad elements” defined and described in detail in two important policy documents from 1956 titled “Explanations by the CCP Center’s ten-member small group concerning counter-revolutionary elements and other bad elements” and “Supplementary explanations by the CCP Center’s ten-member small group concerning counter-revolutionary elements and other bad elements.”

At Mao’s insistence, in the wake of the speech mentioned, the Chinese media began publishing accounts of how the CCP was solving not contradictions between People and non-People, but “among the People.” At first, journalists and editors hesitated for fear of committing mistakes. In its editorial guidelines, the NCNA acknowledged that their task as such was now a new one. Rules were laid down concerning what could and could not be written up, and one of these (altogether eight) rules suggested that for the People not to be informed about everything the People were doing was only for the best of the People:

In general it is inadvisable to report on disturbances by the People, including strikes, interruption of classes, demonstrations, and petitioning of higher authorities. This is because such phenomena are extremely rare, if looked at from our undertaking as a whole. They may only be reported on selectively (once they have been successfully resolved by the departments concerned) if their general didactic


19. “Zhonggong zhongyang shi ren xiaozu guanyu fangeming fenzi he qita huai fenzi de jieshi” and “Zhonggong zhongyang shi ren xiaozu guanyu fangeming fenzi he qia huai fenzi de buchong jieshi,” in Guanya qingli jieji duivu de cailiao huibian [Collected material on cleansing the class ranks] (N.p., 1968), pp. 21-23.
significance is so great that the Center has concluded that open reporting would serve to educate the People of the entire nation.\textsuperscript{20}

It was hardly surprising that the media found propagating the “correct handling of contradictions among the People” a difficult task. But these difficulties would soon be over, as the CCP leadership chose to redefine its priorities altogether.

\textbf{March-June 1957: “Freaks”}

In the English language there is the four-letter word; in Chinese there is the four-character term of abuse. In 1955, Mao Zedong had publicly denounced “Right opportunists inside the Party who . . . act in concert with the forces of capitalism” by calling them “evil spirits and monstrous freaks” (\textit{yaomo guiguai}).\textsuperscript{21} In early 1957, he began speaking of “ox-monsters and snake-demons” (\textit{niugui sheshen}), an expression that does not occur in the first four volumes of \textit{Selected Works of Mao Zedong} but eventually gained widespread popularity. On 12 March, Mao first used it when touching upon traditional operas in an address to a national propaganda conference:

\begin{quote}
To let some—but not too many—ox-monsters and snake-demons appear on stage is all-right with me. . . . It’s dangerous to forbid people from watching ox-monsters and snake-demons. But I’m by no means recommending that we now should let the ox-monsters and snake-demons take over the stage altogether. Then we’d have a mess.\textsuperscript{22}
\end{quote}

In conversation with Central Propaganda Department Deputy Director Zhou Yang, Minister of Culture Mao Dun, and prominent representatives of China’s literary and operatic circles attending the conference, Mao used the expression metaphorically not just

\textsuperscript{20} “Guanyu ruhe baodao zhengque de chuli renmin neibu maodun wenti de yijian” [Opinion on how to report on the correct handling of contradictions among the People], in \textit{Xinhua she wenjian ziliao xuanbian} [Selected NCNA documents and materials], edited by Xinhua she xinwen yanjiusuo (Beijing, n.d.), vol. 4, p. 43.

\textsuperscript{21} “Zhongguo nongcun de shehuizhuyi gaochao de anyu” [Prefaces to \textit{Socialist upsurge in China’s countryside}], in \textit{Mao Zedong xuanji}, vol. 5, p. 233.

\textsuperscript{22} “Zai quanguo xuanchuan gongzuo huiyi shang de jianghua” [Speech at a national conference on propaganda work], in \textit{Zhongguo renmin daxue san hong}, pp. 86-87.
to speak of the stage but referring as well to "large numbers of ox-monsters and snake-demons out there in society."^{23}

Part of the tension in Mao's remarks at around this time arose from his conception of China's revolution as a play with only a vaguely realized script rather than, as was customary, a journey towards a fairly well-defined, though distant goal. The actors who normally controlled the (political) stage were increasingly uncomfortable with the growing number of "monsters and demons" given highly visible roles, but in April, Mao defended himself:

Let them assault us! Assault us for a year! Who permitted us to be dogmatic in the first place? Once their assault has made us get rid of dogmatism, then things will be fine. Even if their assault is too fierce, we'll let all of the ox-monsters and snake-demons come out and stir up trouble. The Communist party will allow itself to be cursed for awhile. Let them curse for a couple of months, while we do some thinking.^{24}

As always, Mao ultimately justified his actions and the direction in which he was permitting the plot to develop by referring to the Chinese People, or as it were in this case, "the audience":

Who says we want the ox-monsters and snake-demons? It's the masses who want to see them. We must not suppress them, but rather perform even more and better plays ourselves. We should permit society to gain somewhat in complexity.^{25}

Concordances to Mao's writings published after his death do not tell us where the late Chairman got the key expression from in the first place, but note that it occurs in Du Mu's preface to the *Collected Works of Li He*. The poetry of Li He (A.D. 790-816), which Mao is known to have been fond of, is here described as "even more absurd and fantastic

---

23. "He wenyijie de tanhua" [Conversation with literary circles], in Zhongguo renmin daxue san hong, suppl. 1, p. 34.

24. "Zai Shanghai ju Hangzhou huixi shang de chahua" [Interjections at the Hangzhou meeting of the Shanghai bureau (sic)], in Zhongguo renmin daxue san hong, suppl. no. 1, p. 131.

than ox-monsters and snake-demons.”26 Eventually, the concordances note, the expression “came to be used to describe bad people of all kinds.”27

“Freaks” firmly entered the public realm of politics three months later. In an editorial written for the People’s Daily, Mao used it together with yet another four-character term of abuse when describing the final month of the combined “hundred flowers” and rectification campaign that had lasted until 7 June:

The purpose was to let the forest-demons and swamp-spirits (chimei wangliang) and the ox-monsters and snake-demons “air views freely” and let poisonous weeds sprout and grow in profusion, so that the People, now shocked to find these things still existing in the world, would take action to wipe them out.28

At this point, the expression “ox-monsters and snake-demons” became synonymous with China’s non-People, conveniently defined with the help of yet another four-character phrase, i.e., di fu fan huai which in English is commonly rendered as “landlord elements, rich-peasant elements, reactionary elements, and hooligans.” Mao’s “forest-demons and swamp-spirits” never gained widespread currency, in all likelihood partly because many Chinese did not know how to pronounce it. Concordances to Mao’s works and even ordinary dictionaries of “easily mispronounced words” typically state as follows: “Chimei. Not pronounced ‘liwei.’ In fairy tales, a forest demon capable of hurting people.”29

July-August-September 1957: The Lexicon Expands

In the months of July, August, and September 1957, the brunt of CCP propaganda turned from contradictions among the People to the “heinous crimes” of the “bourgeois


rightists” (zhàn jì jì yǒu pái). According to Mao Zedong, this new label represented a “scientific and true-to-fact definition” of those “bourgeois reactionaries” who “oppose the CCP, the People, and socialism.” After the summer of 1957, the “ox-monsters and snake-demons” became synonymous with the original four categories of non-People plus the “bourgeois rightists.”

No other political movement in the history of the PRC—save for the Cultural Revolution—witnessed such an outburst of creativity in the use and abuse of political dysphemisms in the official media. A quick glance at newspaper headlines alone will illustrate this more than well. Literally hundreds of new labels were invented to refer to the new non-People. Variants on the simple “rightist” label included rightist hard-core element, old-line rightist, rightist pathbreaker, vicious rightist “counsellor,” rightist careerist, utterly evil rightist element, rightist wolf in sheep’s clothing, and sinister and ruthless rightist element. Variants on the “anti-” theme included utterly arrogant and utterly reactionary and utterly despicable anti-Party element, anti-Communist and anti-People conspiratorial activist, anti-Party buffoon-gang accomplice, anti-Party careerist, traitor and spy turned anti-Communist vanguard, anti-Communist specialist, anti-Party “eulogist,” anti-Communist “valiant general,” anti-Communist black gang strategist and Hu Feng counter-revolutionary clique rank-and-file, old-line anti-Communist, anti-Party clique “military counsellor,” anti-Communist “rocket gun,” and rightist element oozing anti-Communist toxin from the depths of the soul. General political slander included political slave of a foreign master, utterly reactionary political conspirator, bourgeois political careerist and “valiant general” assaulting the Party, loyal and obedient servant of

30. Xinwen ribao, 8 September 1957; Jiefang ribao, 7 and 19 September 1957; Xin Hunan bao, 20 September 1957; Renmin ribao, 3 August 1957; Anhui ribao, 18 August 1957; Henan ribao, 6 August 1957; Gansu ribao, 20 July 1957.

31. Renmin ribao, 8 and 21 August 1957; 4 September 1957; Gansu ribao, 9 and 18 August 1957; Zhejiang ribao, 27 July 1957; Guangxi ribao, 30 July 1957; Jiefang ribao, 14 and 19 August 1957; Guangming ribao, 27 July 1957; Liaoning ribao, 4 September 1957; Fujian ribao, 27 August 1957.
imperialism, political conspirator donning the robes of the progressive scholar, double-faced conspirator, and overwhelmingly ambitious conspirator.  

Western students of languages and their implications have suggested that languages of “sub-political” activities (e.g., theology, law, economy, etc.) may migrate into the political speech, bringing with them paradigms of their own. In such cases, these languages no longer merely perform authoritatively within a limited subcommunity, but encourage new definitions and distributions of authority within the political community at large. It would appear as if something along these lines had happened in China by 1957, when the kind of language one previously would have expected to encounter among uneducated ruffians had been fully assimilated by the Party intelligentsia responsible for headlines in the nation’s major newspapers. The sub-political act of simply calling down curses on one’s perceived foes was now legitimate. Dysphemic political neologisms (constituent parts of which still hinted at politics, e.g., “right” or “left,” “progressive” or “reactionary”) like those listed in the preceding paragraph were surrounded by words that were merely offensive. Common terms of abuse included double-dealer, scum, renegade, turncoat, wolf, monster, garbage pile, hooligan and trickster, shameless literati, black sheep, and arsonist. Animal, insect, and poison images were popular in references to intellectuals in particular, and included zhuchong (an insect that eats books, similar to a moth), zhuchong of the soul (a play on Stalin’s “engineers of the soul”), poisonous snake, poisonous insect, “poisonous weed in the Sun Yat-sen Botanical Garden” (in a reference to a botanist in Nanjing), and all-out-toxic conspirator and careerist (literally wudu juquan,

32. Gansu ribao, 19 July; Jianshang bao, 2 August 1957; Henan ribao, 7 September 1957; Jiangxi ribao, 22 August 1957; Wenyibao, no. 9, 1957; Guangming ribao, 18 September 1957; Renmin ribao, 20 September 1957.


34. Xinhua ribao, 9 and 12 August 1957; Xingang, no. 9, 1957; Gansu ribao, 27 July 1957; Henan ribao, 7 August 1957; Fujian ribao, 11 August 1957; Shaanxi ribao, 6 August 1957; Renmin ribao, 4 and 11 August 1957; Xin Huan bao, 15 August 1957; Zhongguo qingnian bao, 27 July 1957; Beijing ribao, 6 August 1957; Anhui ribao, 21 August 1957. As explained by the wife of the Party Chairman to an audience of “literary and art workers” in 1966, “Although we still go on using some of the [old] words, their content is now entirely different . . . We’re still using them, but their class content is the very opposite [of that given them by the exploiting classes].”
i.e., containing the five toxins of the scorpion, viper, centipede, house lizard and toad.\textsuperscript{35} Female rightists were called rightist woman general, ferocious woman general, anti-Party clique woman general, and fierce and tough rightist woman general.\textsuperscript{36}

1959: "And Still They Don’t Rebel!"

The People of China (as distinct from “the Chinese”) are incapable of self-emancipation. On this point the CCP Central Propaganda Department is explicit in its instructions to Party censors noting that the People “easily become ideologically confused” by alternative and heretic accounts of the truth. “The true history” of post-49 events may only be discussed when the CCP Center judges the timing and setting to be right. This applies even to works of fiction. In 1983, a censor with a Shanxi publishing firm informed a writer who had submitted a novel set in the China of the 1950s and 60s that: “The People must be told the true history of the anti-rightism of 1957 and the three bad years, but even so it is (at least for the moment) inadvisable to take the wraps off everything just like that and to write it up in the form of an exposé.”\textsuperscript{37}

The People (not China’s population) are openly masochistic. They will put up with any amount of abuse as long as their tormentor is a real Communist. In the words of a former President of the CCP Central Party School, describing the situation in the Henan countryside on the eve of the worst famine in modern Chinese history:

Some cadres are hounding the common people to death. They exploit them, and deprive them of every single possession they have. They treat them the way Tibetan slave owners treat their slaves, only they don’t actually flay them. When they don’t beat the masses, they curse them. They’re even worse than the Japanese. . . . And still [the common people] don’t rebel.\textsuperscript{38}

\textsuperscript{35} Wenyibao, no. 9, 1957; Shanxi ribao, 24 August 1957; Xinhua ribao, 31 July; 11 August 1957; Xinwen yu chuban, 25 July 1957.

\textsuperscript{36} Guangming ribao, 19 August 1957; Renmin ribao, 9 August 1957; Gansu ribao, 9 August 1957; Yunnan ribao, 11 August 1957.

\textsuperscript{37} Huang Yi, Zuo jia pian (Taiyuan: Shanxi renmin chubanshe, 1986), p. 68.

No wonder the Party loves the People! Here is a semantic entity that by definition is incapable of rebelling against the CCP. In the same way that a member of a silent majority changes her status the instant she opens her mouth to protest an injustice, a member of the People joins the ranks of the non-People if she rebels against a Party cadre who treats her “worse than the Japanese.”

1960: I Think Correct Thoughts, Therefore I Am

“Humanity” (renlei) constitutes a subject matter on which leading CCP figures discourse only on the rarest of occasions. The official Party newspaper has also used the word sparingly, and mostly in quite narrow contexts. In the 1950s, “humanity” figured in the Chinese media mainly in the contexts of the international peace movement (“The Common Hope of Humanity” was the title of one People’s Daily editorial devoted to the movement in 1957) and Soviet proposals to stop the testing of nuclear bombs (“The Intuitive Knowledge of Humanity Must Emerge Victorious” and “The Gospel of Humanity” are the titles of two People’s Daily editorials on this topic from 1957 and 1958, respectively). In the following rare digression on what it means to be “human,” the speaker is Mao Zedong’s close comrade-in-arms Marshal Lin Biao. Lin was by his own admission not a talented speaker, and it is unlikely that he wrote the notes for this speech from 1960 himself. But a transcript of it was subsequently published in his name and circulated inside and outside the PLA for “study and emulation.”

As might have been expected from someone who is on record as having called a “revolution in one’s thinking” the “most basic of that which is the most basic, the very core of that which is at the very core, and the very soul of that which is the very soul,” the idea of thinking or thought (sixiang) is of central importance to Lin:

Thought, one could say, is the distinguishing feature of humanity. Only humans think. Thinking is what distinguishes humans from animals. Human, of course, does not refer to individuals in isolation. Humans are social beings, they make tools, and they think. Humans have a pair of hands, but in the absence of a brain, in the absence of thought, those hands are unable to create. Hands without a brain are unable to do anything, and will produce nothing. In the absence of correct thought, it is impossible to organize a [political] party bringing together all
the heroes and braves [yingxiong haohan]. There will be no party, and no correct [political] movement. This will all become impossible.39

The simple distinction between thinking humans and non-thinking animals is blurred just slightly when Lin goes on from here to speak of lowering and raising the requirements for being human. In the following passage, a distinction between “vulgar” and “lofty” humans is introduced, again linked solely to their thought:

Having thought is one of the main requirements [tiaojian] for being human. The more we lower this requirement, the more we become vulgar [diji] humans; the more we raise this requirement, the more we become lofty [gaoji] humans. We Chinese, if we want to stand at the forefront of the world, and not resign ourselves to a backward position, then we must raise the level of our thought. Raising the level of our thought is the most important thing we can do in order to raise the position of our nation.40

If “thought” at this point were to be equated with “education” or “high moral standards,” then Lin’s argument might still be regarded as conventional, allowing for some friendly interpretation of ambiguous passages. But Lin’s “thought” is something out of the ordinary:

But the thought we have in mind is not ordinary thought—the thought of the natural sciences—but political thought. Political thought and apolitical thought are two different things, and we are not referring to that apolitical thought, but to political thought. . . . In its entirety, we call this kind of political thought of ours class thought or the thought of class struggle.41

We are thus prototypical humans (i.e., not animals) to the extent that we have correct political thought, “class thought,” or “thought of class struggle.”

1963: More “Freaks”

From 1963 to 1966, ox-monsters and snake-demons were among the designated targets of the rural so-called “Four Cleanups” movement. In one of the very first programmatic

documents of that movement, it was said that one must “expose all the ox-monsters and snake-demons who do damage to socialism.” Commenting on the progress of the movement in Zhengding county, the Hebei Party Committee declared in February 1966 that:

one must be skilled at accelerating the revolutionization of the thinking of cadres and the broad masses by way of the cleansing of class statuses, the review and judging of the four kinds of elements, the sweeping away of ox-monsters and snake-demons, and other kinds of work and practical struggle.

In Zhengding county, “sweeping away ox-monsters and snake-demons” had officially been named as one of four “kinds of work and practical struggle” to be carried out during the movement.

It is difficult to determine to what extent the sweeping away of ox-monsters and snake-demons meant the actual execution of non-People “who do damage to socialism.” During the initial trial phase of the movement in Hunan, in the winter of 1962-63, some seventy-six such persons lost their lives. When the movement got under way in Hubei, in the second half of 1963, the death toll in the “first batch of experimental sites” was over 2,000. In Xiangyang county, one of Hubei’s “second batch of experimental sites,” seventy-four non-People lost their lives during the first twenty-five days of the movement. In the autumn and winter of 1963, the Four Cleanups in rural Guangdong led to no less than 602 suicide attempts, of which 503 were successful.

At the end of 1968, the CCP Politburo suggested in circular Zhongfa [1968] 170 that “ox-monsters and snake-demons” belonged to an “ambiguous and vague terminology that

42. “Zhonggong zhongyang guanyu muqian nongcun gongzuo zhong ruogan wenti de jueding (caoa)” [CCP Center decision (draft) concerning some problems in present rural work] in Wuchanjieji wenhua dageming wenjian huibian [Collected documents from the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution], edited by Beijing huagong xueyuan Mao Zedong sixiang xuanchuanyuan (Beijing, 1967), p. 106.

43. Hebei siqing tongxun, vol. 148, p. 3.

44. Bo Yibo, Ruogan zhongda juece yu shijian de huigu [Recollections of some major policy decisions and events] (Beijing: Zhonggong zhongyang dangxiao chubanshe, 1993), pt. 2, pp. 1111-1115.
is likely to result in the confusion of the two kinds of contradictions.\textsuperscript{45} In a Chinese encyclopedia of words and events from the Cultural Revolution published by the CCP Central Party School in 1989, the relevant entry states: “After the smashing of the ‘Gang of Four,’ the expression ‘ox-monsters and snake-demons’ is no longer used when referring to individuals.”\textsuperscript{46}

1964: Who’s Who in PRC Politics?

When the Chinese population was first bifurcated, the CCP insisted that to tell People from non-People was if not easy then at least possible by applying certain criteria. By 1964, the initial confidence had worn thin, and the following admission by Liu Shaoqi suggests that in some cases (Which ones?) the persons who acted and spoke just like the People might in fact be the most dangerous representatives of the non-People:

Over the past fifteen years, . . . the class enemy has become thoroughly familiar with our way of struggle and knows all our methods. He understands our policies even more clearly than we do ourselves. . . . He hides his class status and appears as a middle peasant, a poor peasant, or a worker. . . . We are no longer able to spot him. All we see are cadres and Communist party members. The enemy uses our own policies and our own slogans in his struggle against us. . . . He accepts (yao) the CCP and socialism, and even the Four Cleanups and the Five Antis. He accepts all the slogans, and all the methods, but it is to be under his leadership.\textsuperscript{47}

It is no small wonder CCP policies became extremely ambiguous during the months leading up to the Cultural Revolution.


\textsuperscript{46} Jin Chunming, Huang Yuchong, and Cheng Huimin, eds., \textit{“Wenge” shiqi guaishi guaiyu [Strange words and strange events from the “Cultural Revolution”]} (Beijing: Qiushi chubanshe, 1989), p. 123.

\textsuperscript{47} “Guanyu shejiao yundong he liangzhong jiaoyu zhidu, liangzhong laodong zhidu wenti de baogao” [Report on the socialist education campaign and the issue of two educational systems and two labor system], in an untitled collection of Liu Shaoqi’s writings (N.p. [Beijing?], n.d. [1967?]), p. 208.
Summer 1966: People Are Fundamental; Non-People Are Incidental

In the late summer of 1966, during a visit to the Beijing Institute of Architectural Engineering, Liu Shaoqi reminded a hostile audience that, according to Karl Marx, "the emancipation of the workers contains universal human emancipation." When Liu asked his audience if "landlord elements, rich-peasant elements, reactionary elements, and hooligans" were part of this humanity to be emancipated, the response he got was that "They count as human beings (ren), but not as People (renmin)." For reasons he was to regret, Liu went on to stress that indeed "They count as humans. They are not animals." Later that same day, he again elaborated on the same topic in conversation with a second group of intellectuals. This time he insisted that "Humanity includes proletarian laborers as well as the sons and daughters of the exploiting classes and any [members of those classes] not executed. . . . Human beings not yet executed are still human beings."

Eventually, Liu's hostile audience forced him to apologize for having made these "erroneous" statements. In a written self-criticism, he had to admit that:

When I tried to explain what kinds of people were included under "universal human" [emancipation]. . . . I spoke too much and too emphatically about the remnants of the exploiting classes. It appeared as if I was putting the incidental before the fundamental. This was another error of mine.


51. "Liu Shaoqi xiang Beijing jianzhu gongye xueyuan geming shisheng yangong de ‘renzушки’" [Liu Shaoqi’s “admission of guilt” to the revolutionary teachers, students, staff, and workers of the Beijing Institute of Building Industry], in Liu Shaoqi xiang Beijing jianzhu gongye xueyuan geming shisheng yangong de renzушки, p. 6.
Not only Liu Shaoqi was accused in 1966-67 by university and high-school students of putting undue emphasis on that which all human beings have in common, and of not paying proper attention to the "fundamental" distinction between People and non-People. The members of the Central Cultural Revolution Small Group—Jiang Qing et al.—were also regarded by some students of elite family background as rather too much in favor of the slogan "all human beings are equal (renren pingdeng)" and not sufficiently concerned with "class line and class imprimatur."\(^{52}\)

**Autumn 1966: Pure Red Blood**

One of many significant developments at the beginning of the Cultural Revolution was an increased emphasis on "purity." Students in Beijing's elite schools called for the expulsion from the capital of any and all persons who were not of the People. "Let us promptly take action," they said, "to make our capital more pure and more red."\(^{53}\) With massive support from the municipal authorities and public security organs, the children of the elite succeeded in forcing thousands of non-People originally from elsewhere in China to return to whence they had come. As one Red Guard ultimatum put it, this expulsion from the capital of "landlord elements, rich-peasant elements, reactionary elements, and hooligans who have done nothing but evil and perpetrated outrages while riding on the backs of the laboring People" was to protect "the interests of the Party and the People." The offending "four kinds of elements" were told to "Piss off right now!"\(^{54}\) According to statistics subsequently compiled by the municipal authorities, some 77,000 persons were expelled from Beijing city in the three weeks leading up to 15 September. The internal composition of this massive body of non-People was as follows:

---


53. "Beijing sizhong gemiai shisheng guanyu quzhu sileifenzi de wu xiang mingling" [Five orders from the revolutionary teachers and students at Beijing no. 4 middle school concerning the expulsion of four kinds of elements] (Handbill dated 24 August 1966).

54. "Zuibou tongdie—jiashu zhong de silei fenzi li ji gundan!" [Final ultimatum: Family dependents belonging to the four kinds of elements must piss off now!] (Handbill dated 23 August 1966).
“Five kinds of elements”  ≥37,000

Enemy and puppet military, government, police, and military police personnel ≥600

Capitalists ≥5,500

Petty property owners, proprietors, peddlers ≥200

Indecent or larcenous persons with a politically problematic past or dubious lifestyle ≥2,400

Others ≥500

Dependents of any of the above ≥30,000

Later in the autumn of 1966, the movement to “purify the People’s capital” gradually subsided in intensity, as did similar copy-cat movements in other Chinese cities.

The emphasis on the “purity” of the People was not only ideological and social, but also biological. In August 1966, “all revolutionary comrades” in the Beijing Municipal Blood Transfusion Center east of Beihai Park put out an “urgent letter of appeal” to city residents, informing them of among other things the following:

From now on, no hospital is permitted to give blood from proletarian class brothers to persons like landlord elements, rich-peasant elements, reactionary elements, hooligans, rightist elements, capitalists, and black-gang elements. The ranks of new blood donors must on no account include landlord elements, rich-peasant elements, reactionary elements, hooligans, rightist elements, capitalists, and black-gang elements.56

The emphasis on pure blood also was reflected metaphorically in the use of dysphemisms like “vampire” (xixuegui). In a public letter of appeal to Red Guards from “all revolutionary comrades” in the Beijing No. 2 Casting and Soldering Factory dated 27


56. “Shoudu Baiqian xuezhan quanti geming tongzhi zhi quanshi jinji huyushu” [Urgent appeal from all the revolutionary comrades with the Capital Norman Bethune Blood Center to the citizens of the entire city] (Handbill dated 25 August 1966).
August 1966, “vampires like landlord elements, rich-peasant elements, reactionary elements, hooligans, rightist elements, capitalists, and petty proprietors” were immediately to be denied all further access to social services like nurses, public baths, and subsidized haircuts.\textsuperscript{57}

**The End of the 1960s: Humans or Beasts?**

On the basis of the prototypical theory of “what it means to be human” subscribed to by Lin Biao et al., persons whose political thought was altogether “incorrect” came to form not merely a human sub-species, but something bordering on a sub-human species. Zhang Zhiyong, a philosopher imprisoned for seven years during the Cultural Revolution for having committed an unspecified thought-crime, has recalled the following incident which taught him this lesson:

I tore down the “Rules for Criminals” from the wall in my cell. My cadre [guard] asked: “What are you doing?” I said: “I used to write the character for ‘criminal’ (fan) in the past without ever noticing that it has a ‘beast’ (quan) radical. It’s quite offensive.” The cadre roared in my direction: “Criminals just aren’t human. You’re dogs.” The criminal is a dog. That was my first lesson while in solitary confinement. “Criminals are dogs.”\textsuperscript{58}

Some prison guards might have contested the idea that “criminals are dogs.” Prison guards too, after all, are only human. In another exchange, in a different prison, two guards of the deposed PLA Chief-of-Staff Luo Ruiqing had the following conversation as recalled by one of them years later. Luo had broken his legs in a failed suicide attempt and had to be carried to the toilet on the back of one of his guards every day. The guard wanted to move Luo to a cell closer to the toilet:

[A fellow guard remarked] It is not appropriate for you to do this out of concern for Luo Ruiqing. . . . Do you know what he is?

\textsuperscript{57} “Beijing zhuhanjian orchang quanti geming tongzhi zhizuo ‘Hongweibing’ de jianqiang houdun” [Revolutionary comrades with the Beijing casting and soldering factory no. 2 pledge to be the firm backup of the Red Guards] (Handbill dated 27 August 1966).

\textsuperscript{58} In Celebration of Blasphemy: The Strange Musings of Zhang Zhiyong, a special issue of Chinese Studies in Philosophy 25(3) [Armonk: M. E. Sharpe, Inc., forthcoming].
[I replied] It does not matter what he is, he is still a human being [ren]. If he is to be arrested then he should be arrested, if he is to be shot than he should be shot, but he has to be given something to eat. Until he is executed you have to let him eat, and if you let him eat, then you also have to let him go somewhere to shit!^59

This position of maintaining that even “non-People” deserve to be treated like human beings was typically held by the lesser educated. The intelligentsia—about whom V. I. Lenin once said they “fancy themselves the nation’s brain. In fact they are not the brain but the shit”^60—in turn harbored the shrillest critics of that position.

Some Observations on the Period of “Reform” (1979-)

One consequence of the major policy changes enacted by the Eleventh CCP Central Committee around the time of its third plenum in December 1978 was the gradual demise of the discourse that pitted People against non-People. The de-accentuation of “class struggle” and increasing importance attached to harmonious cooperation across social boundaries made some political keywords of the preceding thirty years obsolescent and instilled others with new and different meanings. The People, slowly and almost imperceptibly, ceased to be used with reference to only the ninety-five percent “on our side” and became (again) synonymous with the entire population or citizenry.^61 Semantic surgery of the kind in which so many CCP propagandists had come to excel during the preceding years was used to remove a battery of dysphemic references to non-People from

59. Liu Yang, *Tejian yishi* [Anecdotes from the special prison] (Beijing: Renmin Zhongguo chubanshe, 1992), p. 188.


61. Mao Zedong is on record as stating, on numerous occasions, that the People in terms of numbers make up some ninety-five percent of China’s total population. As a historical aside, it is worth mentioning that not just in China has the 95/5 ratio of “good” versus “bad” been popular among the politically active. Compare the following testimony by Adolphe Menjou in front of a subcommittee of the Un-American Activities of the US Congress in 1947: “I believe that ninety-five percent of the people in California are decent, honest American citizens. The Communist Party is a minority, but a dangerous minority. I believe that the entire nation should be alerted to its menace today.” Quoted in Eric Bentley, ed., *Thirty Years of Treason: Excerpts from Hearings before the House Committee on Un-American Activities, 1938-1968* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1972), p. 126.
the media. At the same time, the non-People that had survived three decades of abuse were themselves finally accepted among the ranks of the equally human.

Deng Xiaoping was to promote the use of a whole new lexicon in an effort to change political perceptions. Like Mao Zedong before him, he appears to have believed that it was possible to make one see things differently by intentionally manipulating the tools with which one sees. That habits of thought and speech to some extent were enemies of political change was something he had noted already in 1962. In the context of rotating Party cadres he had argued that:

[After awhile] one becomes insensitive to things, and one begins to react slowly. The language becomes habitual. [When this happens] one must adopt new habits and a new language. . . . When one’s language becomes routine, one’s way of approaching problems becomes casual.62

This adoption of a “new language” was to be instrumental in bringing about a break with the “casual” approach to China’s problems that had dominated so much of the recent past.

The “black categories” to which members of the non-People had belonged were abolished. The formal names of most categories were no longer to be used with reference to the present but only to the past. One of the first categories to be abandoned, together with its formerly “scientific” label as the figment of misguided imagination, was that of which Deng Xiaoping had once himself been publicly identified as China’s second-most villainous representative. “There are no people who are capitalist readers,” a senior Party theorist stated confidently in 1979. The very concept was un-scientific and part of a fallacious political theory.63

The new regulations governing how the “class status of one’s family” (jiating chushen) was to be specified in identity cards and the like were fundamentally different from the

62. “Zai zuzhi gongzuo huiyi quanguo jiancha gongzuo huiyi shang de baogao” [Report to the national congresses on organization and supervisory work], in Fangeming xiuzhengzhu yi fenzi Deng Xiaoping fandong yanluun [Reactionary utterances by the counter-revolutionary revisionist element Deng Xiaoping], edited by Beijing daxue wenhua geming weiyuanhui ziliaozu (Beijing, 1967), p. 68.

past in that they no longer allowed for the use of terms ("elements") like "landlord" and "rich-peasant." Only those persons who prior to land-reform had been landlords or rich-peasants themselves could still be referred to thus, and even then they were in all other respects to be treated no differently from their more impoverished brethren. Everyone else was simply to be listed as of "peasant" stock.64 Semantically, with the death of the older generation, the elements in the first two black categories of non-People would be wiped out once and for all.

If existing terminological conventions had been the sole determining factor, the non-People in the original fifth black category would have enjoyed so-called "rehabilitation" (pingfan). But for reasons explained to a national conference of Party historians in 1980, the cases of some 539,000 "Bourgeois Rightists" were subject to "correction" (gaizheng) instead:

With respect to the Rightists, we don't use the term "rehabilitation" but speak of "correction." What is the difference between these two terms? Answer: None. They mean the same thing. [The different term was chosen] most likely because comrade Mao Zedong originally had said there can be no question of rehabilitating the targets of the Anti-Rightist Struggle. All-right, if you say there must be no "rehabilitation" there will instead be "correction." Either way it's the same thing.65

At the same time as it systematically corrected one Rightist's case after the other, the CCP continued to insist that the Anti-Rightist Movement as such had been "entirely necessary." It had "clarified the basic issue of major rights and wrongs among the People all over China." Without it, "all of China would have been lost in massive political and ideological confusion." But in the course of the movement too many members of the People had been reduced to non-People status. According to the official version of events, only a mere 11,000 persons (or "an extremely small number") really deserved to be called


“bourgeois Rightists.” This target had been exceeded by some four thousand nine hundred percent!\textsuperscript{66}

With most of its negations altered, redefined or destined soon to become anachronisms, the People itself became a progressively less clear-cut concept, and it began to mean what Bo Yibo in 1949 had said specifically it did not, i.e., the citizens of China. As a result, the keyword “Liberation” (which, when used with reference to the establishment of the PRC, had implied that historical event was tantamount to the liberation, by the CCP, of People from repression by non-People) lost some of its popularity, with those who still cared, to the expression “founding of the nation” (\textit{jianguo}). Statements about the People that in an earlier era would simply have been dismissed not just as patently untrue but as by definition impossible began to appear in the most authoritative fora. So, for instance, in an analysis of the composition of the population of China’s labor reform camps published in \textit{Law Journal} in 1984:

\begin{quote}
Historical development has significantly altered the subject of coercive transformation (\textit{qiangzhi gaizao}). At present, an absolute majority of criminal offenders belong to the working People (\textit{laodong renmin}) and the children of working People. . . . There is a huge difference between the state of today’s criminal contingent and those who were the subject of reform prior to the Ten Years of Turmoil.\textsuperscript{67}
\end{quote}

Two decades earlier—when Liu Shaoqi had warned CCP members of how cleverly the class enemy was usurping and perverting the Party’s policies, how he accepted the slogans and methods of the CCP “but under his leadership,” and how he was literally invisible, appearing here in the guise of a poor peasant and there as a worker—the above statement could only have been made as an indictment of a revolution gone terribly wrong. The meaning ascribed to the keyword People ruled out the possibility of the statement actually referring to a “liberated” country. By definition, any country where an “absolute majority” of the People was subject to state-administered “coercive transformation” was either feudal, capitalist, fascist, or revisionist or all of the above!


The Politics of Persuasion:
Communist Rhetoric and the Revolution

Patricia Stranahan
Texas A&M University
Introduction

One of the essential ingredients of the Chinese Communist party's (CCP) revolution in China was propaganda. Convincing people of the rightness of the cause, bringing them into the fold, and forging programs of acceptance were all impossible without propaganda. To Communist leaders, propaganda was more than the promotion of certain ideologies particular to their interests. It was a means to educate and mobilize a mass of people in the real or perceived benefits of Party programs. The constant state of crisis, first with Guomindang (GMD) and foreign suppression, then with the Japanese invasion, and finally with the civil war, made it doubly important not only for cadres to know and understand the goals of the Party but also for the masses to understand them. "Once the masses know the truth and have a common aim," said Mao Zedong, "they will work together with one heart."¹

In our world, the term "propaganda" has negative connotations, but in the Chinese context, the term xuanchuan means more to publicize or make known than to manipulate for a specific purpose. The importance to the CCP hierarchy of "making known" its policies cannot be overestimated. It was so important, in fact, that all levels of Party hierarchy from the Standing Committee down to the district committees and branches had their own propaganda committees.

Propaganda can be conveyed in many ways, but in the world of the CCP between 1927 and 1949—a world of illiterate peasants and workers; a world where constant danger made mobility vital; and a world where such things as printing presses, ink and paper were luxuries—it was essential to deliver the message in the simplest, most direct way possible. That meant devising an understandable and appropriate message that could be related verbally, or through slogans and stories. Language became the critical tool cadres used to disseminate information to the masses. Nevertheless, the words themselves were not as important as the way in which they were made understandable and appropriate to the targeted group.

Much of the Keywords Project to date has focused upon revolutionary words. This paper diverges from that framework to examine how Party leaders assembled the words of revolution into a language that they hoped would lead to the desired result when transmitted to the appropriate audience. I plan to do this through case studies of: 1) the labor movement in Shanghai during the late 1920s and early 1930s, 2) the National Salvation movement in Shanghai during the mid-to-late 1930s, and 3) the women’s movement in the Shaan-Gan-Ning Border Region between 1937 and 1945. These three periods were chosen because they represent different audiences and different responses.

The Party’s attempt to win the support of Shanghai’s working class during the late 1920s and early 1930s failed miserably. On the other hand, the Party was quite successful in harnessing the anti-Japanese sentiments of the patriotic elites who joined the National Salvation movement. Finally, the Party at first failed and then, after making its message more appropriate to the targeted audience, succeeded in rallying the peasant women of the Shaan-Gan-Ning Border Region to their cause. Through these studies, I hope to shed light on two questions: 1) What kind of revolutionary language worked? and 2) Why did it work when it worked?

The Shanghai Labor Movement, 1927-1931

The period between 12 April 1927, when Shanghai gangsters joined with Chiang Kai-shek to destroy the city’s labor movement and crush the Communist Party, and January 1933, when the last of the Central Committee fled Shanghai for the safety of Mao’s rural stronghold in Jiangxi Province, was one of severe setbacks in the Party’s labor-organizing efforts. At the time of the 12 April coup, there were, in Shanghai, 800,000 members of trade unions influenced by the CCP. In contrast, Party-sponsored Red unions had only 600 members in 1934.2 Nevertheless, despite the kind of decimation it produced, organizing the working class to lead a proletarian revolution remained the backbone of CCP policy throughout the period.

Having destroyed the CCP’s Shanghai Federation of Trade Unions (Shanghai zonggonghui) in the spring of 1927, the GMD government in Nanjing set about

2. Interview with Shanghai labor historian, Jiang Kelin, 23 May 1989.
reorganizing Shanghai’s labor movement into a network of unions with allegiance to it and not to labor. After forming several unsuccessful organizations, the GMD turned direction of the city’s labor movement over to its People’s Discipline Committee and the newly created Bureau of Social Affairs of the Shanghai Municipal Government. The legislation coming out of these two groups, although revealing a more positive attitude towards labor by the GMD, still failed to better the lot of working people.

Into the void stepped gangster chief Du Yuesheng. Du chose "yellow unions" as his instrument for controlling Shanghai labor. These were government-approved, gang-operated unions which, despite their dubious connections, did succeed in obtaining some concrete benefits for workers.

The labor-organizing activities of the GMD and Shanghai’s gangsters did little to improve the already bleak state of CCP organizing in the city. After 12 April, what was left of the Shanghai Federation of Trade Unions went underground.

When the Central Committee established the Jiangsu Provincial Committee in June 1927 to direct Party affairs in Shanghai and surrounding areas, it considered labor organizing as its most important work. A statement issued at its 7 August Emergency Meeting said, "The labor movement is the basic activity of the Party."

This was the time in Party history when leaders foresaw workers uniting with peasants to overthrow repressive GMD rule and exploitative capitalists. They predicted small economic struggles would become great economic struggles, and great economic struggles would become massive armed uprisings. On 30 April 1928, the Central Committee called for cadres to lead the economic struggle against the conditions of workers’ daily lives using propaganda and agitation to lift workers’ political consciousness. In May and


August, the Jiangsu Provincial Committee issued resolutions instructing cadres to merge workers' economic struggles with the anti-imperialist, anti-GMD movement. It called for expanding workers' organizations and "united fronts" among various groups, broadening workers' organizations, and strengthening labor leadership. Red self-defense forces were to be established.

None of these lofty goals came to pass. Instead of focusing upon economic struggles and the consolidation of the movement, labor organizers followed the Party line and mobilized workers to participate in anti-warlord struggles, anti-imperialist rallies, and demonstrations calling for military aid for the U.S.S.R.

The typical language used in propaganda to unite Shanghai workers in 1928 is illustrated in a statement published in commemoration of 1 May:

Workers and Peasants! Since the GMD has completely changed to become the party of the warlord and capitalist class, workers/peasants/soldiers must immediately rise up, [carry out] armed insurrection, strive for political rights, and organize for the period of the worker/peasant/soldier soviet. Workers! Peasants! [Recognize] the new revolutionary spirit!6

Herein lies the reason for the failure of CCP labor organizing in the late 1920s. Workers wanted higher wages, shorter hours, and less abuse, and they wanted help in achieving those demands. To a certain extent, they got that help from "yellow" and GMD unions. From the CCP, they got calls to rise up in arms, to "strive for political rights," and to "organize soviets." These were ideas far too ideological and political for the average worker concerned with the struggles of daily existence.

That kind of language never changed even in cases where there were blatant wrongs being done to Chinese workers and concrete incidents around which workers could rally. Take the case of the death of a Chinese employee of the French Tramway Company. On a rainy September night in 1928, French marines murdered a company driver named Wu Tonggen. This set off a twenty-four-day strike by Chinese workers. French authorities offered monetary compensation for the death, which the GMD accepted. The CCP

6. Jiangsu Provincial Executive Committee of the CCP, "Jinian wuyi gao minzhong shu" [The 1 May declaration to the masses], 1 May 1928, Jiangsu Provincial Archives, cat. 8, file 53.
immediately capitalized on the incident arguing that it was not a matter of the death of one individual, but a matter of oppression and the violation of workers’ rights.

If the Party had manufactured this incident, it could not have done a better job. Here was the death of a Chinese worker at the hands of imperialists all brushed under the rug for a few dollars by the repressive GMD. Here was the opportunity to rally Chinese angered by the death to demand improvements in working conditions, wages and rights. But the Party failed to see the value of the moment. This is best evidenced by the list of slogans the Jiangsu Provincial Committee issued for use at rallies to protest the death:

"Strike down the French imperialists who murdered a Chinese worker," "Strike down the Japanese imperialists who murder Chinese," "Strike down all imperialists," "Take back the foreign concessions," "Strike down the GMD who abolished the mass movement," and (the only one that probably made sense to the workers) "Institute an eight-hour workday."

Even after Wang Ming and the Internationalists took control of the Party at the Fourth Plenum (January 1931), the language of propaganda changed very little. They continued the policy of opposing imperialism and the GMD, but implemented it through highly visible means such as strikes and demonstrations. Because the Internationalists believed that the Revolution was at high tide, they argued that every struggle possessed the germ of a mass uprising. Cadres were ordered to mobilize the masses for demonstrations and strikes which exposed everyone, including themselves, to extreme danger and resulted in disaffection among the working class. As a result, the Shanghai Communist party was segregated even further from they group they sought to champion.

The Internationalists had not learned the lessons of the late 1920s. Instead of understanding the need to address concrete problems and provide practical solutions, they persisted in conveying ideological propaganda with language such as: "The Revolution menaces the Capitalists who suck the blood of the workmen," "The National Government is a 'chest of filth'," "Let laborers be armed and overthrow all Imperialists under the leadership of the revolutionary war," "Support the motherland of the proletariat—Soviet

7. Jiangsu Provincial Committee, "Zhonggong Jiangsusheng wei huazi tonggao disanshijiuhe fandui Fa diguzhuyi cisha Fashang dianche gongse gongren" [The CCP’s Jiangsu Provincial Committee communication #39: Regarding the French imperialists assassination of the French tramway worker], 24 September 1928, Jiangsu Provincial Archives, cat. 8, file 121.
Russia—and oppose the attack upon Soviet Russia, and a second world war," "Oppose the contracting of foreign loans and the partition of China by imperialists," and "Oppose Christianity and Fascism."

This kind of language meant nothing to workers who were being exploited by capitalists, who had seen their city bombed by the Japanese in January 1932, and who were feeling the effects of the world depression. Even when the Party sought to talk to workers about issues that directly affected them, it failed. Take for example, a widely distributed handbill titled "Letter to Shanghai Juvenile Unemployed Workers in Connection with the International Unemployment Movement Day, February 25" which read in part:

The traitorous [Guomindang] Government has become the loyal running dog of the Imperialists and is spending billions of dollars in the attack on the Red Army of [laborers] and peasants. The [Guomindang] is not relieving our unemployed workers with a single cash, nevertheless it is cruelly oppressing us, destroying our unity, arresting our leaders and hoping that we die of starvation.

The CCP was never strong enough to compete with the GMD or Shanghai’s gangster elements to control the city’s labor movement. Even if it had been, however, it could not have been successful unless it changed its language from the ideological to the practical. This is exactly what it did in the case of the National Salvation movement, and that is our second case study.

The National Salvation Movement

During the National Salvation Movement of the mid-1930s, the Communist party in Shanghai forged a highly successful alliance with patriotic progressives from the city’s middle and upper classes. Many among these classes were bitter at Chiang Kai-shek’s

---

8. "Translation of Items of Interest from French Police Intelligence Report dated March 4, 1932," *Shanghai Municipal Police Records* (hereafter *SMP*), Box 25, Doc. 3323; "Translation of a communist handbill entitled "letter to Labourers [sic] in connection with the anniversary of the International Labour Day (May 1) which was found by the Municipal Police in Yangtszeou District on April 23, 1932," *SMP*, G-2, Doc. 56; "Communist Propaganda," *SMP*, Box 9, Doc. 68.

anti-capitalist financial and political policies and angry at his lack of response to Japan’s aggressive actions in North China. In the mid-1930s, they were ripe for an alliance with any group ready to resist the hated Japanese. The city’s Party organization was just such a group. It seized the opportunity by joining with progressives to form National Salvation associations in late 1934 and early 1935. Their joint efforts convinced many that the CCP was the only force in China strong enough to end the political chaos that had disrupted the country for decades.

Why the change in Party policy? By 1933, the situation in Shanghai had become so dangerous that the CCP’s Central Committee could no longer stay in the city. Therefore, it retreated to the Jiangxi Soviet where it began a sixteen-year stay in China’s hinterlands. Cut off from direct communication with its superiors in Jiangxi and, then, from any kind of communication during the Long March (autumn 1934-autumn 1935), the Shanghai Party depended upon what it knew of Comintern policy for guidance. At this time, the Comintern was calling for anti-Japanese united fronts among patriotic peoples of all classes, a policy not endorsed by the CCP’s Central Committee until the summer of 1936.

Multi-class, anti-Japanese alliances were also a logical step given the political realities of Shanghai. Active labor organizing had simply become too dangerous with one police crackdown after another. This all-too-evident danger caused Shanghai Party leaders to pull their remaining operatives out of factories in 1932. Concerned with protecting what remained of the Party organization, the leadership turned its attention to anti-Japanese activities.

Shanghai citizens had reacted angrily to the Japanese takeover of Manchuria in 1931-32, the subsequent bombing of Shanghai in January 1932, and the lack of GMD response.


11. Foreign and Chinese police in 1934 seized the transmitters that linked the Shanghai Party with Moscow. During the National Salvation movement, information was obtain indirectly through the Soviet Consulate, travelers, and Comintern publications.

12. Considering the fact that the Party organization in Shanghai had been put in place by the Moscow-trained Internationalists, looking to the Comintern for guidance was a natural step.
The anti-Japanese, anti-GMD protests sweeping the city at that time made patriotic mobilization a more promising target for Party organizing than labor. Leaders of the Shanghai Party realized this and, taking advantage of the situation, established a foothold among the city's ever-growing number of patriotic organizations.

The decision to concentrate on the danger at hand is evident in the language of handbills confiscated by Shanghai Municipal Police in 1934. While many handbills continued to be anti-GMD with slogans such as "Do not pay any revenue to the Guomindang" or "Rob the granaries of the rich and intensify guerilla warfare," many were clearly anti-Japanese and much less virulent in nature: "Render assistance to the anti-Japanese Volunteers in the Northeast" or "Surround the soldiers of the White Army and urge them not to fight against the Red Army."13

At first the Party concentrated on a "united front from below" (in conjunction with the policy of the Comintern's Twelfth Plenum) and began to work through the Eight Big Leagues. These were periphery, or fellow-traveler, mass-oriented organizations whose goal was the overthrow of the GMD. Crippling raids by authorities in 1935 effectively put a halt to public demonstrations, the most popular form of League activity, and in September the Eight Big Leagues disbanded.

Given its history and the political realities of China at that time, it is understandable that the Shanghai Party allied itself with the anti-Japanese elite.14 Comintern policy, as the local Party organization understood it, encouraged Party members to join the growing number of middle- and upper-class organizations in educational and cultural circles and in

13. "Communist propaganda obtained in Western Chapei [Zhabei] on October 12, 1935." SMR, Box 10, Doc. 73.

14. Despite what is commonly believed, the CCP's 1 August Declaration (1935), which called for the formation of a united front and an end to the hostilities with the GMD, was not a Maoist document at all. Wang Ming drafted it in Moscow. To make people think it was issued in China and then sent to Paris via Moscow, publication was withheld until 1 October 1935 when it appeared in the Comintern's Paris newspaper Jingsuo shibao [Salvation news]. Mao continued to oppose a united front until after the disastrous Eastern Expedition against Chiang Kai-shek and the warlord Yan Xishan in early 1936. See John W. Garver, "The Origins of the Second United Front," The China Quarterly 113 (March 1988): 34-56; Shum Kui-kwong, The Chinese Communists' Road to Power: The Anti-Japanese National United Front, 1935-1945 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 22, 25, 64.
the professional world that were turning themselves into National Salvation associations.\textsuperscript{15}

Because the majority of association members were non-Party activists from the upper echelons of society, these groups differed from the Eight Big Leagues. Keeping their Party membership secret, cadres worked within these groups, not with the intent of controlling them as the GMD charged, but to stimulate anti-Japanese fervor among Shanghai’s citizens.\textsuperscript{16} Patriotic peoples of all classes became the Party’s allies in the fight against Japan.

Despite efforts by the GMD and Western authorities to crush the movement, it grew rapidly, particularly after the Japanese occupied the Chinese-controlled sections of Shanghai in the fall of 1937. Through demonstrations, performances and boycotts, National Salvation associations rallied Shanghai citizens to oppose the occupier.

Language used in Party propaganda at this time was vastly different from that of the labor movement in the late 1920s and early 1930s. The enemy was concrete—an evil force against whom all people could rally. Reason and patriotism replaced violent words and harsh invectives as ideological propaganda gave way to a practical message of anti-Japanese resistance. This is well illustrated in two handbills distributed by the National Salvation Dramatic Group:

\textsuperscript{15} The first to be formed was the Women’s Circles Salvation Association, followed by the Cultural Circles Salvation Association, the Professional Circles Salvation Association, the Educational Circles Salvation Association, and the Labor Circles Salvation Association. Eventually, the most powerful were the Cultural Circles, the Salvation Union of College Professors, the Union of Primary School Teachers in Shanghai, the Salvation Society of Film Workers in Shanghai, the Educational Society under National Emergency, the Salvation Federation of College Students in Shanghai, the Shanghai Students’ Salvation Federation and the Chinese Students’ Salvation Federation. See Zhang Chengzong, p. 2; Zhao Xian, "Kangzhan de shiqi de Shanghai funu jiawang yundong" [The resistance period’s Shanghai women’s salvation movement] in "Bayisan": Kangzhan shiliao xuanbian (Shanghai: Renmin chubanshe, 1986), p. 377; Wang Yaoshan, p. 52; Hsiang Nai-kuang, "The Trick of Chinese Communists in Taking Advantage of War Against Japanese Aggressors to Expand Their Strength," Symposium on the History of the Republic of China, vol. IV (Taipei: China Cultural Service, 1981), p. 210.

\textsuperscript{16} Even if the Shanghai Party wanted to control the National Salvation movement, it could not have. In 1935, the estimated strength of the city’s Party organization was 100, hardly a number that could take control of a movement as large and pervasive as the National Salvation movement in Shanghai. See Zhongguo gongchandang Shunghaishi zuzhishi ziliao, p. 84.
Dear Brethren in Shanghai,

The nation has undergone a change and the people in Shanghai ought to modify their attitude. Males must banish all frivolous thoughts from their minds and use their energy to the best advantage and not throw it away on enjoyment. Females must undo the waves of their hair, wash rouge and powder off their faces, take off their high heeled shoes and become Chinese citizens of that great nation of ours. If the hot blood of our brethren cannot reach your sympathy and the guns of the enemy cannot make you tense with excitement, then citizens as represented by you are useless and not more than corpses.

Dear Brethren,

The Japanese robbers not only kill people and occupy territory, but they also prohibit the Chinese from having anti-Japanese ideas. We in all sincerity tell her [Japan] that "Those who are superior in armaments can ruin the nation of others and enslave their people, but they cannot, no matter how hard they try, subdue those people nor their spirits." 17

On the night of 9 July 1937, two days after the Marco Polo Bridge Incident, municipal police arrested seven young people for singing National Salvation songs. The next day, police arrested another group of young people, members of the China Amateur Travelling Group, who along with children from a primary school, were singing the popular National Salvation songs, "New Life" and "Hot Blood." The lyrics to "Hot Blood" were:

Who wishes to be slaves? Who wishes to be horses and oxen?
Our hot blood is burning like a stream
For the sake of fraternity, equality and freedom
We shall not regret, paying any price, even sacrificing our skulls
Our hot blood is like a stream of water
We shall not regret sacrificing our lives for the purpose of struggling for equality, fraternity and freedom.18

In October, shortly after the Japanese occupation of Shanghai, the National Salvation Youth Service Group mounted posters around Shanghai with the slogans: "Conduct the war of resistance to the bitter end," "Sever all relations with Japan," and "Let all those who are unwilling to become slaves unite together."19

18. SMP, Box 70, Doc. 8118.
Even though the city’s Party organization had allied with National Salvation groups, it did not cease propaganda work on its own. In October 1938, the Jiangsu Provincial Committee, the governing body of the CCP in Shanghai, issued a handbill titled "A letter to the Brethren and Comrades in Shanghai in connection with the withdrawal of Chinese troops from the Wuhan Area" which reflected the Party’s united front stance and stated in part:

Canton has fallen and Chinese troops have made a strategic withdrawal from the Wuhan Area. We should first of all pay our highest respects to Generalissimo Chiang and the Chinese soldiers for their bravery during the five months’ bloody struggle in the defence of the Wuhan Area for the realization of our final victory. A bright future is in store for us. It is incumbent upon every Chinese to continue the war of resistance in order to crush the Japanese invaders.20

The Japanese occupation of Shanghai changed the rules of the game for the National Salvation movement. An occupied Shanghai was a very dangerous place; patriots could not move about as freely nor work as openly as they had for the past several years. Nor did the foreign-controlled areas of the city offer the safe havens they once had. In addition, for leaders of the Shanghai Communist party, there was a growing awareness that the National Salvation movement lacked organizational unity. This had not been a particularly troublesome issue before occupation, but it endangered operations afterwards.21

More importantly, perhaps, were events within the CCP itself. In the late 1930s, Mao Zedong was establishing his preeminence over rivals Zhang Guotao and Wang Ming. Consolidating his control over all Party organizations was important to Mao, and bringing the maverick Shanghai Party organization back into the fold was a top priority. To that end, Mao dispatched Liu Xiao to the city to take charge. Under a Maoist influence, class issues that had lain dormant in Shanghai during most of the 1930s reemerged, as policy shifted from national salvation to mass organizing (an activity Mao understood well). This did not mean a return to urban revolution but, rather, mass organizing for resistance against Japan in a rural-based revolution. Nevertheless, the bonds created between the


Shanghai Party organization and many among the city’s elite endured and allowed the Party to create a strong base of operations in the city by the war’s end.

**Women in the Shaan-Gan-Ning Border Region**

Mao’s struggle to take control of the CCP and the return to mass organizing form the core of our third case study: policy for women in the Shaan-Gan-Ning Border Region. The last of our studies is an illustration of change. Party leaders considered women a vast reservoir of support for the Revolution, because they were among those who could benefit the most from it. So, when the Central Committee set up its new government in this poverty-stricken and desolate area of Northwest China, women fifteen-years-old and older, like everyone else, were organized into groups whose chief function was to educate members politically and give them the skills they needed to advance the interests of the government.

During the United Front (1937-1941), equality for women was secondary to the resistance movement in the minds of policymakers. Rather than risk upsetting the fragile balance of social forces in the United Front by initiating an aggressive liberation movement, Party leaders exercised utmost caution in carrying out a policy to emancipate women. Officials told women that by contributing to the war effort, they could break away from the traditional system that had oppressed them for centuries. Unfortunately, the Party gave women little tangible advice on how to achieve social equality.

This lack of clarity is characteristic of policy throughout the United Front period. Concerned with the war and getting the area on its feet economically, Party leaders had not yet developed a well-defined policy to raise the status of women. One of the worst problems was that policymakers, who were primarily intellectuals and fresh from the more radical experience of the Jiangxi Soviet, did not know how to talk to these desperately poor, oppressed and illiterate women. As in the labor movement of the late 1920s, another period of uncertainty and ignorance of true conditions, the language was far too ideological for any kind of legitimacy from its audience.

Take for example a statement urging women to vote in the June 1941 elections:

"A woman is not a person" and other such derogatory statements, which have been in use for many generations, fully reveal the feudalistic oppression which
women have received for several thousand years. They also reveal their minuscule position in society. In the whole country women are treated like donkeys, cows and horses. Before the Revolution, it was like this here in the Border Region. Revolution, the beacon fire of the war of resistance, melts old statutes and customs. In reality, the Shaan-Gan-Ning Border Region gives women the right of democratic freedom.\(^2\)

Lacking a clear-cut plan, cadres did not know what else to do except to allow women’s groups to vent their anger at cruel family members. Sometimes the unleashing of pent-up fury took the form of divorce which cadres did not, at first, recognize as a potential threat to society. Rather, they saw divorce as an easy way for women to break their feudal bonds while, simultaneously, striking a blow at the traditional system. Because it touched all classes, moreover, cadres considered divorce a way to liberate women without disturbing the United Front goal of class harmony. Therefore, they allowed women to obtain divorces without first trying mediation—a process which later became mandatory.

This is shown in a "true" story cadres related to women.\(^3\)

A child-bride, looking much older than her eleven years, wandered into the courtyard of the subdistrict government in Anding. When the cadre asked the girl what she wanted, she began to talk haltingly about her difficult life. She said that in her old home there were many mouths to feed, and life was not good. The year before, she had married; but she found life no better in her new home where, she said, the father was a "dragon." Although she watched the children, cooked the food, and cleaned the house, the family still beat and scolded her.

"Do you want a divorce?" the cadre asked.

"No," she replied. "I just want them to stop beating and cursing me. If they don’t stop, then I want a divorce."

The story concludes with the cadre telling the girl to think the situation over and, if she wanted a divorce, to return the next day.\(^4\)

\(^2\) "Dongyuan bianqu funu lai canjia xuanju yundong" [Mobilizing Border Region women to participate in the election movement], _Jiefang ribao_, 21 June 1941, p. 1.

\(^3\) This and stories like it were common. They undoubtedly contain elements of truth but were largely fictitious, devised to illustrate a point or to promote a model.

\(^4\) "Lihun de shensu" [Report on divorce], _Jiefang ribao_, 16 July 1941, p. 4.
Cadres, who understood neither this backward society nor women's roles in it, created more problems than they solved when they offered divorce as a means of liberation. Stimulating women's consciousness was important at this stage, but allowing them to disrupt the family unit was dangerous in an economy which remained family-oriented throughout the Yanan period. Moreover, there was no place in the Border Region socially or economically for the single woman. By not implementing a well-defined policy for women and following a moderate course in order to maintain social harmony, the Party's policy had created the potential for what it had wanted to avoid—social and economic upheaval.

In late 1941-1942, the CCP underwent a serious crisis in confidence which was manifested in the famous Party Rectification movement of 1942-1944. One manifestation of the crisis was the conclusion reached by Party leaders that the economic and social policies they had instituted in the Shaan-Gan-Ning Border Region were a failure. Policy changes were initiated in all areas; women were no exception.

The Central Committee revised its policy for women to one that avoided disrupting the family unit (i.e., the primary economic unit) by encouraging women to divorce. Instead, it asked women to remain within the family and undertook a program to give them tangible skills so that they could raise their status by becoming indispensable economic contributors to the family. The transformation of policy from the ideological to the practical worked, and women in the Shaan-Gan-Ning Border Region began to walk the long road to equality.

In a formal policy statement issued on 26 February 1943, the Central Committee called for women to achieve liberation through production, once a nebulous part of policy but now the keystone. Cadres were told to encourage women to work harmoniously within the family toward common economic goals. The way was now clear; production and cooperation became the watchwords. Cadres knew exactly what they were to do and how they were to do it. Practical propaganda replaced ideological propaganda; "breaking feudal bonds" was rephrased as "raising one's status," and "seeking freedom through

25. "Zhongguo zhongyang guanyu de kangRi genjudi muqian funu gongzuojie ding" [Decisions of the CCP's Central Committee on the present work with women in the anti-Japanese base areas], *Jiefang ribao*, 26 February 1943, p. 1.
"divorce" was rephrased as "seeking freedom through economic independence." Meetings to teach women skills that would allow them to make contributions to the family’s income replaced meetings to vent ire at the inequities of the feudal family system. Certainly, the release of pent-up anger is an important part of any process of change, but officials in the Shaan-Gan-Ning Border Region had allowed it to go on for too long. It was time to make destruction, construction.

Stories about labor heroines—women who had made outstanding contributions to production—became the staple of the new message. There are numerous examples of these in Party publications, all imparting the same message: if you work hard, you will make money; if you add to the family’s income, you will be treated better. One labor heroine Ren Yunni said, "Formerly the government was the yamen, but now it is the people. They gave me one hundred yuan. Should I buy food or clothes?" An agricultural heroine was quoted as saying: "After the Revolution men and women are equal. In the home women aren’t restrained by men and old people. They say I support myself! I don’t have any advantages. . . . I made a profit of five or six thousand yuan from raising pigs and planting cotton."

The most widely written about labor heroine was Liu Guiying, a widow in her fifties who took part in production by spinning. In 1943, Liu began to organize women in Suide into spinning cooperatives, and in the first year, the women spun seventeen hundred jin of yarn. Pleased with the results, Liu was quoted as saying, "Everyone is making money. All women, old and young, have clothes, pocket money, melons, fodder, and they don’t need men to give them money to buy things. Every household is happy!"

In 1943, Liu went to the capital city of Yanan to attend the regionwide meeting honoring labor heroes and model workers held each year after the autumn harvest. Afterward, she related her experience to groups of peasant women:

I went to Yanan to attend the assembly, but I did things there that I had never done before. I even rode in a car! The Communist party cares about those of us

27. "Fangzhi nuyingxiong Liu Guiying zenyang fazhan fufang?" [How did the textile heroine Liu Guiying expand women’s spinning?], Jiefang ribao, 9 January 1944, p. 4.
who have suffered and advises us to eat well, wear warm clothes, and continue to advance. I saw Chairman Mao, and next year I am going to follow his words and work harder to organize women of all ages to spin and weave. I want to take what I saw and heard and return to spread the good word. I want to call upon all women to work to improve their lives.²⁸

Even after policy was revised, problems remained in the policy for women, but as the language became more concrete so did the programs to raise the status of women. And, although they were still a long way from equality, more women than ever before came out to vote, to participate in educational and work programs, and to show their support of the government in various other ways.

Conclusion

We have now looked at three case studies of the ways the CCP used language to convey a desired message to a targeted audience. In some instances, those messages were favorably received by the audience; in some instances, they were not. From these examples, I believe we can draw a number of conclusions which allow us to better understand how revolutionary language was effectively—or ineffectively—used to win support for the Communist Revolution.

1) Propaganda worked best when an abstract cause was made specific. The cries of anti-warlordism, anti-imperialism and anti-capitalism were too abstract for the average worker; so, too, was freedom of divorce for the average peasant woman. Japanese aggression and subsequent occupation, however, was an issue everyone understood, as was the need to produce in order to survive. "Save the nation" or "The more you produce, the more money you will have" worked much more effectively than did "Down with imperialism."

2) The more ideological the language, the less likely it was to be accepted. Imploring people to assist soldiers fighting the Japanese or to unite or become slaves of the invader were clear messages, and they worked. Imploring illiterate peasant women to see the "beacon fires of the Revolution" and stand up for their democratic rights did not. Only

²⁸ "Fangzhi nuyingxiong Liu Guiyong zenyang fazhan fufang?" [How did the woman spinning and weaving heroine Liu Guiyong expand women’s spinning?], Jiefang ribao, 9 January 1944.
when the audience understood what was being said to them would they accept the message.

3) The more confidence the Party had in its policy, the less ideological the message. In the late 1920s, the CCP was in upheaval because of the frequent policy changes made to conform to demands from Comintern leaders in Moscow who had little understanding of reality in China. Attempts to rally the working class were seen as futile by most of the rank-and-file. As Party leaders tried harder and harder to make unworkable policies work, the message became more ideological. On the other hand, in the mid-to-late 1930s, the way was clear for the Shanghai Party organization: all citizens had to unite if the city was to oppose Japanese occupation successfully. That was the message clear and simple.

4) Propaganda was more effective when cadres understood the conditions of those to whom they delivered the message. Most cadres were not workers or from the impoverished classes; they were intellectuals who had no problem whatsoever in talking to Shanghai’s elite. In the Shaan-Gan-Ning Border Region, cadres who had no experience with rural life and little understanding of how peasants lived were unable to talk to them. During the Rectification campaign, they were sent "down to the villages." While unpleasant for most cadres, it was an invaluable experience in learning how to talk to the people.

5) The audience’s level of education did not determine the kind of revolutionary language used. An ideological message was sent to workers with little or no education while a practical message was delivered to Shanghai’s elite, most of whom were well educated. However, in the Shaan-Gan-Ning Border Region, ideological language failed with illiterate peasant women; practical language succeeded.

6) The audience did not determine the kind of language employed; environment and inner-Party struggle did. The degree of upheaval in the Party influenced how radical the language was. Ideological messages indicated instability, while practical ones indicated stability. In the late 1920s and between 1937 and 1941, there was great discord within the CCP, so the message delivered to workers and peasant women was ideological. However, because the Shanghai Party in the mid-to-late 1930s was quite stable, as was the CCP once Mao consolidated his control during the Rectification movement, the message delivered at those times was much more practical.
It is overly simplistic to say that ideological language was universally ineffective, while practical language was universally effective; or that the use of ideological language always indicated inner-Party upheaval and uncertainty in policy, while practical language always indicated stability and clarity. Politics and history are never that clearcut. Nevertheless, the generalizations drawn from the three case studies do point out important differences in the way revolutionary language was employed and allow us to conclude that the success or failure of the message was, in large part, determined by the language used to convey it.
Indiana East Asian Working Paper Series

Order Form

Please send me the following working papers. I have enclosed $2.50 ($3.50 for overseas) for each working paper ordered. (NOTE: Additional working papers will be available in the near future).


_____ 2. Elizabeth J. Perry and Li Xin, "Revolutionary Rudeness: Notes on Red Guard and Rebel Worker Language in China's Cultural Revolution" and Joshua Fogel, "Recent Translation Theory and Linguistic Borrowing in the Modern Sino-Chinese Cultural Context" (Summer 1993)


Name__________________________ Phone__________________________
__________________________ (surname) ______________________ (given name)
Address__________________________

Make payable to: East Asian Studies Center
Mail to: Memorial West 207
        Indiana University
        Bloomington, IN 47405
Information for Ordering

Papers may be ordered from: East Asian Studies Center, Working Papers Series, Memorial W207, Indiana University, Bloomington, IN 47405; phone: 812/855-3765; fax: 812/855-7762. If the order form is missing from your copy, please send a letter with your name, address, phone number, and the title(s) of the paper(s) you wish to receive.

Checks should be made payable to INDIANA UNIVERSITY--EASC WORKING PAPERS. The price for each paper is $2.50 ($3.50 for overseas).

Indiana East Asian Working Papers Series on Language and Politics in Modern China

Titles available as of Summer 1994


2. Elizabeth J. Perry and Li Xun, "Revolutionary Rudeness: Notes on Red Guard and Rebel Worker Language in China's Cultural Revolution" and Joshua L. Fogel, "Recent Translation Theory and Linguistic Borrowing in the Modern Sino-Chinese Cultural Context" (Summer 1993)

