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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Wang Meng and Self-censorship: Cultural Unity and Socialist Values in 1950s China

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The early work and experience of writer (and later Minister of Culture) Wang Meng provides a useful study in the “slow creep” of active, optimistic efforts on behalf of both political authorities and the people to create a unified cultural subject, as they move toward a more recognisable form of censorship and control. Although parts of Wang Meng’s first novel *Long live youth* were published in the late 1950s, it was not published in its entirety until 1979. The plot revolves around a group of high school girls who value spontaneity and freedom, rather than discipline and organisation. The small group of main characters develop strategies of inclusion and exclusion, mimicking society at large while shielding themselves from the contamination of politics and national affairs. By the time he wrote the novella *A Young Man Arrives at the Organization Department* in 1956, Wang Meng had reformulated his protagonist to recognise the insidious danger of self-censorship. Lin Zhen retains the values of “good cheer” and hard work but falls into doubt and confusion. The story’s portrayal of Lin’s colleagues in the Organization Department as lazy, cautious, and unenthusiastic is also part of a literary investigation into the kind of censorship that is woven into daily work life, emerging from the structures of bureaucracy.

上世紀 50 年代曾任文化部長的王蒙寫的兩部小說《青春萬歲》和《組織部新來的年輕人》呈現了中國 50 年代積極向上的樂觀主義精神。《青春萬歲》寫的是一群追崇自由，隨性爛漫，不喜被組織和紀律約束的高中女生。她們對他人包容和排斥的策略，既是當時社會制度和風氣的體現，又展示了年輕人未經政治風雨及世俗侵染的青春和純潔。《組織部新來的年輕人》揭露了官僚機構中逐漸滲透到日常工作中的審查制度。王蒙塑造了一個能自我審查隱患的主角林震。雖然其組織部的同事在小說中被描述為懶惰、謹慎並缺乏熱忱，林震自己也時常陷入懷疑和困惑，但他保留了“打起精神”和努力工作的價值觀。通過研究王蒙這兩部小說中所展現出來的樂觀主義精神，本文揭示了那個時代的當權者和民眾是如何將這種樂觀向上的價值取向逐步演變成政治審查的要素，從而構建起一個統一的文化主題。

**Keywords:** Wang Meng, China censorship, 1950s China, Socialist bureaucracy, Chinese socialist novels

**關鍵詞**：王蒙，中國審查制度，中國五十年代，社會主義官僚主義，中國社會主義小說

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## Introduction

Severe and obvious censorship may be easy to recognise and condemn, whereas the more ambiguous aspects of social engineering—encouragement or discouragement through recognition, opportunities, and the allocation of resources—are difficult to pin down. Recent research understands censorship as a complex concept within knowledge-production involving actors from every organisation, small and large—the state, religious institutions, the university, and so on—as well as individuals and the community. It can work objectively and subjectively. Without the benefit of hindsight, differences between censorship and allegiance to a unified vision, which can involve many different parties fully or partially committed to the same goal, can be difficult to analyse, especially before extremes are reached.

This ambiguity and sophistication concerning censorship muddies the water in terms of identifying the "line crossed" at any historical period. Yet from our present vantage point, we can identify clear strategies and practices of literary censorship that emerged in China during the 1950s, following principles developed earlier. The desire to extract "unconditional loyalty" from artists and writers was plainly expressed at the Yan'an Conference on Literature and Art in May, 1942 (Fisac 2012, 131). The most basic guidelines for literature in the PRC were set at that time, and the overarching goal was to "serve the masses" (*wei renmin fuwu* 为人民服务). However, this phrase was an abstraction that demanded constant attention to exactly what would serve the masses, and how. Although some principles regarding topic, style, language, and perspective eventually were developed, the process of establishing literary practices for serving the masses was neither simple nor easy. Even more onerous was the problem of how to identify and deal with writers whose works did not fulfill the demand to serve the people.

Publishers in China were under state control beginning in 1950, and Party committees were quickly established to review upcoming publications. Texts published earlier could be revised or banned. Censorship occurred through many layers of literary practice, including the establishment of a style readily accessible to everyone. Within the three categories that Taciana Fisac (2012) establishes in her study of Ba Jin 巴金

(1904–2005)—self-censorship by authors, publisher intervention, and decisions by the Chinese Communist Party—the first, self-censorship, offers several advantages. It requires no unsavoury intervention, it can be communicated indirectly, and, most importantly, it can create a thick grey line between anything that can be called actual censorship and the desire to create and live by communal guidelines. It is this muddy realm of doubt—where both writers and their literary characters barely begin to sense that their enthusiasm for unity and cooperation has occluded clarity and gutted ideals—that my inquiry lands. This focus is solidly located in concern about the present rather than in allowing or encouraging the discomfort of the past to bubble up in image or speech.

In her work on media censorship, Sei Jeong Chin (2018) argues that the reason censorship in 1950s Shanghai was so effective was exactly because of the inability of journalists to draw a line between self-censorship and the ability to understand and follow party policies. Pre-publication censorship was prohibited for Party newspapers and freedom to report "truthful news" was guaranteed by the Common Programme of the Chinese People's Consultative Conference in 1949 (961).[1] In the 1950s, there was no official body responsible for enforcing censorship. Instead, an informal system developed that held newspapers and their editors responsible for content, emphasising self-censorship.[2] Chin's conclusion is that the informal self-censorship system caused the term "censorship" to disappear from the public realm (971). Chin recognises that punitive methods also could be enforced, while arguing that media control was largely achieved informally. For literary texts, the publishing system also was gradually nationalised over the early years of the PRC, with official institutions for professional writers—such as the China Writers Association (*Zhongguo zuojia xiehui* 中国作家协会, founded in 1949)—functioning as the bureaucratic apparatus through which self-

[1] Chin (2018) details the anti-censorship position that the CCP held throughout the Sino-Japanese War and the Civil War, whereas the Nationalist government implemented censorship, which was criticised by the CCP as fascist (961–962).

[2] Some newspapers were allowed to send representatives to attend meetings of the Shanghai propaganda department and read party documents, giving them an inside view of which direction to take the articles in the newspaper.

censorship could be nurtured.[3] In his study of literature under socialism, Perry Link (2000) also argues that self-censorship was the most common and pernicious method of controlling writers, detailing the strong relationships between journal editors and state propaganda departments. Like Chin, Link notes that the way to put the Party's directives into play in texts was not clear, producing a guessing game for both writers and editors. Both Chin and Link state that coercive methods could be invoked if self-censorship did not produce the desired results.

The dominance of a well-developed system of self-censorship, which is supported by ample historical evidence, may partially explain another 1950s experience. Many contemporary Chinese writers, critics, and ordinary people regard this post-war nation-building era—at least until the Anti-Rightist Movement in 1957—as a time when Chinese socialism was more unified than coercive. They recognize flaws but also insist that a valuable communal life, which disappeared in post-Mao China, existed in the 1950s.[4] What we now would call self-censorship was often engaged in voluntarily and based on a genuine desire to create and participate in a common culture, they argue. The government's role in building a unified society by setting and enforcing guidelines seemed justifiable to many, and with some important exceptions, was generally supported by writers.[5] As Chin explains, "censorship was not necessarily perceived as something to evade or resist" because there was no necessary antagonism between the state and the media (Chin 2018, 958). The perpetually optimistic gaze, focused on the future, the self-sacrificing socialist literary hero, and the overall good cheer in the face of difficulties and challenges embodied genuine, shared emotional states. With this

[3] Hong (2007) argues that although participation in the China Writers Association was supposedly voluntary, its actual purpose was to "exercise political and artistic leadership and control of a writer's literary activities, and to guarantee that literary norms were implemented" (27).

[4] This kind of conflicted sentiment runs through Cai Xiang's 蔡翔 well-received 2010 book, *Geming/Xushu* 革命/敘述: 中國社會科學主義文學—文化想像 (Revolution/narrative: Chinese social-scientist literature—cultural imaginaries), which has been edited and translated into English by Rebecca E. Karl and Xueping Zhong.

[5] See Fokkema (1965). Fokkema deals with the period leading into the Anti-Rightist Movement, when persecution of writers was at its most serious. However, some writers were branded as enemies of the people and persecuted in the early days of the PRC or before. See also Goldman (1969). One of the most famous cases of literary persecution involves the writer Wang Shiwei 王实味 (1906–1947), who was executed in 1947 when he criticized Mao Zedong's relationships with women and the privileges of the Communist Party in his essay "Ye baihehua" 野百合花 (Wild lilies). See Dai Qing (1994), and also Cheek (1984), who details the argument about national forms in literature between Wang Shiwei and Chen Boda 陈伯达 (1904–1989), Mao's personal secretary, in the early 1940s, tracing a history of dispute that predated Wang's execution.

mixed and often contradictory situation looming before us, how should we think of censorship in the 1950s literary realm?

The early work and experience of writer (and later Minister of Culture) Wang Meng 王蒙 (1934 – ) provides a useful study in the "slow creep" of active, optimistic efforts—by both political authorities and the people at large—to create a unified cultural subject, as they move toward on one hand the set forms of cynical governance, and on the other, hesitation and doubt. Although parts of Wang Meng's first novel *Qingchun wansui* 青春万岁 (Long live youth, henceforth *Long Live Youth*)—written in 1953 when he was only 19—came out in the late 1950s, it was not published in its entirety until 1979. The plot revolves around a group of high school girls who value spontaneity and freedom, rather than discipline and organisation. This novel, full of the naiveté of youth, cannot tell us much about censorship. Only when put up against Wang's later controversial novella, *Zuzhibu xinlaide qingnianren* 组织部新来的年轻人 (A young man arrives at the organization department, henceforth *A Young Man*), which was published in 1956, do the structures and themes of censorship become apparent. *A Young Man* expresses the author's growing sense that something is no longer right, although it may not be exactly clear what is wrong. Protagonist Lin Zhen 林震 retains the values of "good cheer" evident in the early work, but a confusing atmosphere throws him into an ambiguous mental state.[6] The story's portrayal of Lin's colleagues in the Organization Department as lazy and cautious shows a kind of censorship—of enthusiasm, hope, and vigour—that emerges from the structures of bureaucracy, is woven into daily work life, and bleeds out into other realms.[7]

Below, I first discuss contemporary approaches toward censorship, with special attention to censorship under socialism. The volume *China Learns from the Soviet Union, 1949–Present* amply demonstrates that socialism as developed by the Soviet Union was a powerful model that widely influenced Chinese society in the 1950 (Bernstein

[6] The novella was originally published in *Renmin wenxue* 人民文学 and was translated into English by Hualing Nieh (1981), along with several important pieces of criticism. Translations in this paper are by Nieh unless otherwise noted, with names changed from Wade-Giles to *pinyin*.

[7] Wang Meng's memoir, *Wang Meng: A Life* was published in an abridged edition in 2018. Some chapters in the memoir had been published as separate essays; I have made use of several in this paper. Unless otherwise noted, the translations are by me.

and Li, 2010). In her chapter on literature, Donghui He explains that after 1949, the Chinese equivalent of the Western notion of great books, as well as a generalised notion of progressive culture, came from the Soviet Union.[8] Yan Li (2018) traces heavy Soviet influence in architecture, fashion, music, food, imagery, language study, film, and literature. As authorities tried to focus on models of party allegiance and collective ideals, the consumption of Soviet culture in China became a gateway to the world, functioning as a government-sanctioned pathway into the outside: "It is therefore no exaggeration to say that the Soviet Union meant the whole world to [those growing up without alternatives]" (9). Identification with and fondness for Soviet culture far outlasted the political relationship. Li aptly quotes Wang Meng to begin her introduction: "To me, youth is about revolution, about love, about literature, and about the Soviet Union…The Soviet Union is my nineteenth year, my first love, and the beginning of my literary career" (1).[9] This deep subjective affinity makes it easier to see that the lines between unity and purpose versus self-censorship may have been difficult to recognise and interpret.[10] This short history of literary censorship in socialist countries provides insights about censorship theory or ways to analyse and think about censorship; as I show below, it also is relevant in my analysis of Wang Meng's early work.

In the second part of this article, I lay out the background of the two literary pieces, which were written at a time when political leaders were trying to build a world-vanguard society that would simultaneously lift China out of wartime deprivation and establish its position as a leader in global socialism. Within a literary context, these socialist ideals were rarely challenged, although writers did discuss the best ways to meet their demands. Third, I analyse the novel and novella in relationship to each other, with a focus on *A Young Man*. In the transition from *Long Live Youth* to *A Young Man*, Wang Meng suggests that the emphasis on being part of a unified

[8] The title of He's chapter is "Coming of Age in the Brave New World: The Changing Reception of *How the Steel Was Tempered* in the People's Republic of China" (393–420). Her research highlights the importance of Soviet literary models that were sanctioned by nationalised presses and writers' organisations.

[9] The quote is from Wang Meng's *Sulian ji* 苏联祭 (A tribute to the Soviet Union), 2006, i, 21.

[10] For a related and yet different concept and practice of "public secrecy," see Hillenbrand (2020). Arguing that a focus on censorship "treats enunciation as a preeminently public act," Hillenbrand develops "public secrecy" as, among other things, the subject's lack of an urge to speak out about the past because of "pain, fear, complicity, guilt, or shame" (13–14). In this provocative analysis, public secrecy overlaps with self-censorship, but can also include the protection of private secrets.

communal society is exactly what later becomes the basis of censorship in all its forms. He highlights the role of language modification in creating a strange bureaucratic atmosphere within which a tense, murky mood contributes to pernicious self-censorship. The creation of confusion in *A Young Man*, with its implications on how to belong, becomes a literary strategy that engages a darker side of the same collective consciousness that inspires joy and creativity in *Long Live Youth*.

## Censorship Under Socialism

Modern approaches to censorship generally reject the idea that it occurs solely or primarily in authoritarian regimes, although it may take more extreme forms of expression under such governments. The fact that censorship exists all over the world is basically accepted, and a vast literature documents its forms.[11] As Sue Curry Jansen (1988) explains,

> Canons of Enlightenment thought maintain that the abolition of censorship was the decisive achievement of the Enlightenment...According to the dominant wisdom, then, the Enlightenment set thought free from the distortions of church and state censorship and patronage. This wisdom maintains that Enlightenment severed the knot that had always bound knowledge to power. It made free inquiry, scientific progress, and objectivity possible...In short, Enlightened discourse views censorship as something others do: a regressive practice of un-Enlightened (non-Liberal) societies. (4)

Arguing that censorship is an "enduring feature of all human communities," Jansen rejects the idea that the Enlightenment abolished censorship, claiming instead that

[11] A few examples of general treatment of the concept in monographs available in English: Jansen (1988); McCormick and MacInnes (1962); Amey and Rasmussen (1997); Long (1990); Haraszti (1987). See also Holquist (1994), who argues that "the persecutor-victim model is inadequate" in many censorship cases and that it is a mistake to assume that "censorship is a vice to be overcome through morally guided will" (16). As with Jansen, Holquist believes that censorship always exists; the question is how repressive it is. For an example of how censorship can be recognised in contemporary culture, see Halberstam (2017). Halberstam discusses recent requests from college students to remove texts on the syllabus that they found objectionable. For censorship in music, see Anttonen (2017). Anttonen discusses the association between violence and metal music, and the meaning of censorship in a genre that presents itself as subversive.

church and state censorship were replaced with market censorship (4). This contemporary understanding of censorship is based on the conviction that knowledge-power systems always have both emancipatory and repressive elements. As the most powerful socialist force in the world for a long time—and certainly the biggest influence on 1950s China—the Soviet Union eventually became highly restrictive, while justifying censorship through Marxist theory. Jansen contends that although Stalinism was a perversion of Marxism, Stalin's interference in the arts was not a perversion of Marxist theory. It was rather a logical extension of principles within Marxist-Leninism, which fix on control of communication as an essential part of the development of socialist culture. Western Marxists have tried to explain the betrayal of critical Marxism through reference to Russia's underdeveloped economy or the tradition of Czarist censorship but Jansen believes the key lies in the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, a slim book often known as the *Communist Manifesto* (written by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in 1848), which called for the centralisation of communication in the hands of the state.

Because of these foundational origins, Jansen argues, Soviet censorship developed as both restrictive and prescriptive. In cultural areas, this process began in the 1930s, but often is traced to Lenin's contradictory 1905 essay "Party Organisation and Literature," where he both recognised individual autonomy while stating that literature must become "party literature" (Jansen 1988, 106).[12] Marx was ambivalent toward Western concepts such as literary freedom and style, whereas Lenin argued that real freedom comes only with a tight relationship between the writer and the proletariat. Because "words are action," literature and the arts were important instruments of socialist development (107). Jansen also credits Maxim Gorky (1868–1936)—who was a major literary figure in 1950s China—for helping to develop the ideas behind the control of literature and the prescriptive elements of literary policy. Getting rid of noxious elements, including those embedded in language itself, was a strategy to promote the development of the positive hero crucial to socialist realism.

Whereas Jansen lays out some well-known but relevant aspects of Soviet literary censorship—especially the attention given to the correct language—Dominic Boyer (2003)

[12] Jensen credits André Gide (1937), "Party member and tourist of the revolution," for stating that critical Marxism had disappeared by the 1930s (1988, 106).

goes one step further, questioning the separation of censorship from other forms of intellectual activity. Working with another socialist regime, the German Democratic Republic (GDR), Boyer takes advantage of the fact that archives have been opened, examining in detail the role played by the censor him-or-herself. Publishing only fifteen years after Jansen, Boyer accepts without question the once controversial notion that censorship is part of all knowledge-building.

Expanding on the restrictions imposed on language that Jansen details, Boyer argues that, in the GDR, the perfection of a "public language" was indicative of "the natural vehicle of the incipient *Volk*'s awareness of itself" (Boyer 2003, 515). The concept of the *Volk* roughly maps onto the Chinese Communist idea of the "people." Like Miklós Haraszti in *The Velvet Prison* (1987), Boyer explains that censorship was seductive and alluring as often as it was frightening: "The everyday life of censorship in the GDR was, from the perspective of its practitioners, suffused with a gentle, progressive aura not unlike the elusive vestiges of vocationalism present in any intellectual profession embedded in an institutional context" (515). After all, censorship contributed to the "greater welfare of the Volk," for whom a concept of Germanness was crucial (515). And just as the People's Republic of China (PRC) developed *Putonghua* 普通话 (Mandarin, or the common language) to unify all Chinese speaking peoples, GDR intellectuals objectified the German language, which would anchor a set of principles and traits crucial to being German. Therefore, mass cultural production was rationalised and centralised, to a degree much greater than occurred during the Nazi regime: "The incontrovertible first maxim of the socialist cultural programme states that all *Kultur* belongs to the *Volk*."[13]

These near-transcendent aspects of cultural production explain why intellectuals in the GDR participated "so actively and unapologetically" in activities that in the West were considered mindless and repressive (Boyer 2003, 520–521). The focus on consciousness—so reminiscent of 1950s Chinese socialism—melded perfectly with the high-minded goals, or to quote Stalin, the "engineering of the soul" (Jansen 1988, 109). Because the soul had to be engineered for a higher collective purpose, self-censorship,

[13] This embedded quote by Boyer (520) is from Hans Poerschke and Harry Grannich (1983), 230.

or the individual's constant effort to live by the ideals of the day, was the logical conclusion. The self-censored mind then became the collective consciousness of the real world as well as a guarantee of "wholeness" in social experience (Boyer 2003, 540). Boyer's astute recognition of the close relationship between a subjective sense of unity and self-censorship is useful in helping us understand why many, including Wang Meng, refuse to wholly condemn the so-called Seventeen Years from 1949 to 1966. As I will show, this conundrum informs the ambivalence and bewilderment of the main characters in *A Young Man* as they try to sort through their contradictory emotions.

In Rome, the censor had the ability to decide who was a member of the community. Likewise, in 1950s Chinese terms, inclusion within the category of the "people" was crucial to membership in the new nation. Yet, as Michael Holquist (1994) has explained, censorship creates parabolic texts and sophisticated readers that always seek to fill in what is missing. This aspect of censorship is often noted in the context of Chinese literature at different times, but particularly in the 1950s and 1960s, where reading between the lines and protesting in subtle ways were common. Censorship can function in blunt and subtle ways, as Michaela Wolf's (2002) work on the Habsburg Monarchy has shown; her term "cultural blockage" describes the far end of censorship, perhaps intersecting with the spot where Margaret Hillenbrand's (2020) "public secrecy" begins to be more relevant. From the perspective of cultural unity, with its mandatory and desirable collective consciousness and sense of inclusion, translation—or the introduction of ideas and sensibilities from the "outside"—can be a dangerous act. Translation can open doors, but it also can close them or simply define their shape. Translators must make a range of decisions about what to keep, what to omit, and how to phrase; they can work as gate-keepers and censors.[14]

Censorship in socialist China has not been as widely or deeply studied as censorship in the GDR, probably because archives are not completely open, and because China

[14] There is a solid literature on translation and censorship. The Canadian journal *TTR: Traduction, Terminologie, Rédaction*, which published Wolf's 2002 article, devoted two issues to the topic of censorship and translation (N.2, V.15, 2002; N.2, V.23, 2010), and several monographs on the topic have been published. The journal *Translation Studies* also conducted a forum on translation and censorship (V.4, N.3, 2011; and V.5, N.1, 2012). Holquist (1994) suggests that all translations are acts of censorship.

continues to engage in much more overt censorship than is evident in Western countries. Investigations tend to revolve around the concept of "banned books" (*jinshu* 禁书), which is preferred to "censorship" (*shencha zhidu* 审查制度 or *jiancha zhidu* 检查制度). Zaixi Tan (2015) places the focus of research in five areas that span the banning of books from early times to the modern period, with emphasis on histories, novels, and later media. Tan also notes that severe banning of books occurred during times when "there was a lack of self-confidence in the ruling class" or when "culture experienced no or little progress" (315). In the 1950s, China maintained active ties with the Soviet Union and its satellites. Soviet literary influence was powerful, with over 3,500 literary pieces from the USSR translated and a circulation of more than 82 million copies, "amounting to over 60% of the total amount of translated foreign literature across the country" (332).[15] During the same period, only 460 works by British or American authors were translated, and most were the authors of classic texts. Since the late 1990s, the PRC has loosened its approach toward censorship in translation, especially as concerns the representation of erotic relationships or material that used to be considered decadent or bourgeois.[16] Political challenges to the regime, whether in printed literature or on the internet, are still widely censored, and self-censorship is common.[17]

## From *Long Live Youth* to *A Young Man Arrives at the Organization Department*

Wang Meng began writing *Long Live Youth* in 1953, when he was only nineteen years old, and finished it in 1956.[18] It was based on his experience as a member of the

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[15] For a discussion of how translators tried to adopt a global rather than national context in their work, see Volland (2017).

[16] For a list of banned books in China, see Ruan (1995).

[17] See Ng (2015). As Ng details, Yan Lianke felt he had no choice but to engage in self-censorship to get his works published (236).

[18] For a longer discussion of Wang's first novel, see my unpublished paper "The Socialist Bildungsroman and Global Youth: Wang Meng and Jack Kerouac," presented at the conference *Coming of Age in Sinophone Studies* at the Institute of Asian and Oriental Studies, University of Zurich, March 20–23, 2017. As the title suggests, my approach

Communist Youth League from the ages of fifteen to nineteen. Despite the author's efforts, only part of the novel was published in the 1950s. He revised the manuscript in 1956, and portions were published in 1957 in *Wenhui bao* 文汇报. When he undertook revision for publication in 1979, Wang felt embarrassed at the naiveté of the fictional characters and the juvenile energy of the writing. But in that same year, the novel was developed into a film, directed by Huang Shuqin 黄蜀芹, and by 1981 was recognized by middle schoolers as some of their favorite reading. A version more closely following the 1953 original was published in 2003.

This information comes from a 2013 essay in which Wang Meng laid out a detailed description of the novel's publishing vicissitudes, pinpointing the writing's appeal and its ability to grasp and express a transformational moment:

> The reason that we young people of that era could make a fresh start is because from our childhood to our teens, we were in the midst of the earthshattering transformation of old China into new China. We were living in a crucial historical moment. We caught the right moment! And then we caught the historical shift from the victorious song of revolution to the peaceful times of [national] construction. I saw it with my own eyes, I personally experienced the disintegration of old China, the atrocious power of reactionaries, the revolutionary crushing of the rotting wood, the way new China undertook the rejuvenation of everything left undone. Everything became new and fresh. (Wang 2013b, 5)

Wang goes on to note that when he started writing, he knew that in the long term, the exuberant mood could not form the basis of daily life over the long duration. But he felt it was his duty to record a "history of the heart of youth" (*qingnian de xinshi* 青年的心史) (5). Wang's novel went through multiple levels of vetting. After asking his younger sister and a co-worker to copy the manuscript out for him, Wang asked for his father's assistance in passing it on to Fan Zhiding 潘之汀 (1913–2005), a friend at the Beijing Film Company. Fan praised the manuscript and Wang's talent and sent the manuscript on to the China Youth Press, where it was handed to Liu Lingmeng

toward the novel in that paper is to compare the youthful exuberance in *Song of Youth* with the radical depiction of youth in Jack Kerouac's novel *On the Road* (1958), with the goal of analysing "ways of being in the world that reject the centering of historical progress, with its powerful notions of improvement and the future" (4).

刘令蒙 (1920–) for reading. But it turned out that Liu was unfavourably involved in the Anti-Hu Feng campaign and, eventually, Wang Meng received notice that his manuscript had been turned over to the associate director of the China Writers Association, Xiao Yan 萧殷 (1915–1983). Xiao Yan invited Wang to his house and told him that although the novel had a fine literary sensibility, it lacked a main thread and needed more work.

Wang was able to get three months of vacation, supported by the Writers Association, to work on the revisions. He had already published the story "Xiao Dou'er" 小豆儿 (Little Dou'er) in *Renmin wenxue*, and another story, "Chunjie" 春节 (Spring festival), was published in *Wenyi xuexi* 文艺学习 (Literary research). Wang participated in a conference for young writers in spring, 1956, where he asked the poet Shao Yanxiang 邵燕祥 (1933–) to read the introductory poem to *Long Live Youth* and was happy to get a positive response and some useful suggestions. In 1957, *Wenhui bao* published some sections of the novel, amounting to 70,000 words. China Youth Press accepted the entire novel for publication, and the final proof was ready to go.

The Hundred Flowers Movement began in April, 1956 with Mao Zedong's proclamation to "let a hundred flowers bloom" (Nieh 1981, xii). It lasted for around one year. Questions of literary content and value were openly debated, as was the relationship between politics and writing. But when the debate became threatening, the Party shut it down and followed with the repressive Anti-Rightist Movement in mid-1957. Wang's emergence as a writer occurred exactly at this time, and political turbulence delayed the publication of *Long Live Youth*. Wang relates that in 1961, literary restrictions loosened, and he tried again to publish the novel. But editors were concerned about the book's positive sentiments toward the Soviet Union—which China had broken with by 1960—and with its inattention to class struggle. Ultimately, no one was willing to risk recommending the novel's publication.[19]

Wang's novella *A Young Man* was published in 1956, just when he was trying to get *Long Live Youth* published. Because Chairman Mao seemed to be on the side of

[19] For a history of the Anti-Rightist Movement that places it within historical autocratic Chinese tradition, see Fu (1993).

debate and discussion, and stated as much in March, no one was sure what would happen. In his memoir, Wang quotes Mao as directly addressing *A Young Man* at a meeting, and commenting "I do not know this Wang Meng, he is no relative of mine, but I cannot agree with the criticism heaped on him...How can anyone claim there is not bureaucratism in Beijing?" (Wang 2018, 77). And although Mao seemed open-minded at first, the second phase of the Hundred Flowers Movement that began in May launched heavy criticism directed at the Party. It was followed in June by a clamp-down (Nieh 1981, xxv–xxvi). For Wang Meng, the result was disastrous. He was branded a Rightist, was sent to the countryside for labour reform, and eventually took a position at the Xinjiang Writers Union, where he lived and worked for some twenty years.

The criticism directed at *A Young Man* shows the confusion of the times, which also is reflected in Wang's autobiographical account.[20] Critics went back and forth on the merits of the novella, recognising problems while also finding literary merit. They struggled with Wang's devastating portrait of the work of the Chinese Communist Party and lazy, inefficient cadres, because as even Mao Zedong seemed to recognise, this unflattering picture was at least to some degree based on reality. In criticism today, *A Young Man* is generally considered to be a critique of the excessive bureaucracy that developed within the Party during peaceful times after 1949. The language and behaviour of the character Liu Shiwu 刘世吾 is often at the center of the debate, although other characters and issues are discussed. In the next section, I will analyse relevant parts of both *Long Live Youth* and *A Young Man* with the goal of uncovering the metamorphosis of the ideals of community and fellowship that we see in the earlier novel into the hesitancy and doubt that occurs in the latter. This trajectory identifies a transformation that sheds light on both the way in which censorship develops and on the process through which a society and individuals normalise and naturalise its mechanisms. Unsurprisingly, it also suggests that bureaucracy under socialism should be viewed as a powerful form of social control much as it is in capitalist societies, an issue that I discuss in my conclusion.

[20] Several critical essays are translated in Nieh (1981), 519–563. For a summary of critique over fifty years, see Wen (2006).

## Collective Consciousness, Constructive Unity: Building the New China

*Long Live Youth* tells the story of several young women in their final year of high school during the early period of the PRC's existence, from 1952 to 1953. The novel's presentation of Communist youth is unique in China. The conventional model generally featured an immature, politically unaware young person who, through arduous experience, learns to understand the new political regime, deeply grasping its logic and recognizing its superiority. This project of individual transformation with clear ideological implications is replaced by another story, within which characters are transferred into "the world of sensuality," where they innocently celebrate the energy and newness of youth (Song 2009, 135). If we consider the novel from the perspective of censorship, we can identify yet another dynamic and theme: the importance of sociality, or the heightened value of the community. Strategies of inclusion and exclusion are seminal to social cohesion; the enthusiastic efforts at inclusion in the first novel become the techniques of self-censorship in the later novella. An important element in the development of constraint or censorship is language: whereas the language in *Long Live Youth* is lively and raw, in *A Young Man* it becomes formalised, working as a vise that traps the expression of thought, at the same time confusing mental processes and emotions.

Although the new China was just emerging as Wang Meng finished a draft of *Long Live Youth*, the novel is far from a political tract. While the young women who are at its centre are not anti-government protesters, nor do they show much interest in the socialist ideas of class consciousness or struggle. Even the character who is the most involved in politics, Zheng Bo 郑波, rarely discusses political topics. Instead, it is the daily life they share and the emotions that they experience that take centre stage. The feelings of the energetic main character, Yang Qiangyun 杨蔷云, are central to the plot. Several members of this small society have problems that must be resolved by deeper inclusion within the group. They include Wu Changfu 吴长福, a plump and buoyant classmate who pathetically wants to please; Su Ning 苏宁, from a wealthy family; Hu Mali 呼玛丽, raised in a religious orphanage and still a believer; and Li

Chun 李春, who refuses to put group dynamics first, instead fighting for personal academic achievement. These half-in, half-out women represent historical situations—a lack of confidence, vestiges of the old bourgeois society, the presence of religion, a focus on self-achievement—that must be rectified by the values of new nation. Within these characters and their relationships, therefore, the structure for a conventional ideological transformation is in place.

Yet what the outsiders are absorbed into is not a new nation bound by political solidarity, but rather the intense emotional connection of a group of young women whose energy is invested in the here and now of lived experience, grasping life as it is lived. An in-the-moment approach that defies emphasis on the past and the future, this feeling of being fully in the world also is reflected in fresh and expressive language:

> Then the sun came up and a new day began. The girls welcomed each day in the camp, each day was a priceless moment in the lives of youth. Everything was newly discovered, everything belonged to us. The blue sky was there to lie over us, the clouds were there to dazzle us, the earth was there for us to run on, the lakes and rivers were there for us to swim in, the bugs and birds were there to enjoy the pleasure of life together with us. From morning to evening, we hiked, picnicked, caught dragonflies, went fishing and rowing, picked wild grasses and flowers, climbed high to look far away… …until we were exhausted to the bone. So many happy things under the sky, things we had never done before! We couldn't finish them all in a day, time went by so quickly! (Wang Meng 2013a, 5)

The animated, emotive words merge with a sense of immanence to suggest authenticity in life, work, and human relations.

It is only from the perspective of *A Young Man* that the drive toward group inclusion, the focus on correct language, and the importance of consciousness can be understood as clues to the emergence of self-censorship. Written only a few years after *Long Live Youth*, *A Young Man* revolves around the story of Lin Zhen, a young teacher and new Party member who is assigned to the Organisation Department. Lin Zhen has trouble figuring out what kind of work the organisation does and what he should be doing, but he is soon assigned to recruit and develop Party members at the Second Factory Party

Branch. His immediate supervisor is Han Changxin 韩常新, chief of the Party Building Section. On his fourth day at work, Lin goes to the Tonghua Gunny Sack Factory to investigate Party recruitment, where he learns that Factory Director Wang Qingquan 王清泉 has exhibited problematic behaviour many times. No one seems willing to discipline Wang. Lin takes on the problem, first reporting to Han Changxin and then to Liu Shiwu, without results. Although Lin becomes increasingly disillusioned, eventually he convinces a superior to post a letter about the problem. The letter—signed by a group of workers—is printed in the *People's Daily*, Liu Shiwu initiates an investigation, and Wang is dismissed from his post in the factory and his Party membership.

The novella begins with Lin Zhen's arrival at the District Party Committee worksite. The pedicab driver sees the sign and says, "No charge, if that's where you're going" (Wang 1981a, 473). This apparently innocent gesture of support for the Chinese Communist Party takes on new hues as the story goes on. By the end, it is impossible to avoid the implication that this initial act could be either a bribe or an expression of fear. These three options—that the Party inspires admiration, that it can be manipulated through bribing its representatives, or that it induces fear—form the framework within which an aura of censorship and self-censorship develops. Minimally, those working in the Party organisation get special privileges, a clear separation of cadres from the people.

Anyone familiar with the work of George Orwell (1903–1950) or with others who have written about the compression of language under socialism will not be surprised to see that by 1956, China had its own form of linguistic censorship. The notion of "Maospeak" (Maoyu 毛语 or Mao wenti 毛文体) was developed by the critic Li Tuo 李托 to critique the language used by Chinese writers.[21] Geremie R. Barmé's (2012) article on "New China Newspeak" or Maospeak argues that this kind of language evolved long before 1949, and notes that Mao Zedong traced it to the May Fourth

[21] Li Tuo wrote many essays on the topic, for example, Li Tuo (2019 [1993]).

period and derided it in 1942 as "Party eight-legged essays" (Dang bagu 党八股).[22] One of Mao's comments relevant to *A Young Man* is that Party language "strikes a pose in order to intimidate people" (Barmé 2012). Indeed, the issue of language comes up very quickly in *A Young Man*, and we see how it both reassures and confuses Lin Zhen. The linguistic liveliness of *Long Live Youth* makes an appearance in *A Young Man*, when Lin Zhen arrives at work and is met by the Organisation Department Secretary Zhao Huiwen 赵慧文, whom he knows from his earlier work in the primary school. Zhao's eyes express a friendly welcome, and she speaks in common language about topics familiar to everyone in their daily lives, reassuring Lin that he has arrived at a healthy, well-functioning workplace: "Lin Zhen was happy that the moment he had entered the gate of the District Party Committee to begin his new life, he had met a very warm person" (Wang 1981a, 474). But what immediately follows is his first meeting with Liu Shiwu, who seems to speak first with an irony that cannot be interpreted, and second in stock, formal phrases that he rattles off:

> If the house isn't well cared for, the Party loses strength...What do we do to the house? We develop the Party and consolidate it. We augment the Party organisation and enhance its fighting power. We build Party life on the basis of centralised leadership, criticism, and close ties with the masses. If we do this well, the Party organisation will be solid, lively, with the power to fight. The Party will be capable of leading the masses in fulfilling better and better the task of socialist construction and transformation... (Wang 1981a, 475).

Although Lin recognizes the "very profound" concepts, he cannot figure out what Liu is saying (475).

There are many examples in *The Young Man*, such as the strangeness introduced by set phrases such as "the five links in the classroom" or "intuitive visual aids" (Wang 1981a, 437). Han Changxin stuns Lin Zhen with a blatantly false report about recruiting filled with clichés and platitudes: "The broad mass of activists rallied around the Party factory branch; educated by the model deeds of Chu Xxx-xxx and Fan Xxx-xxx

[22] Barmé also has a chapter on Maospeak in his book *Shades of Mao: The Posthumous Cult of the Great Leader* (1996), especially see pages 224–227. See also Theodore Huters (2011), who suggests that constricting language leads to a repression of original ideas and thought.

and urged by their determination for Party membership, they developed their positiveness and creativity and magnificently completed or exceeded their production quotas for the quarter" (485). When Lin Zhen rereads the report, he doubts that he went to the factory at all. However, the story does not so much expose this common form of linguistic corruption and censorship-from-above as it addresses the mind-numbing qualities the language produces in someone who believes fervently in socialist ideals: "Strangely, Lin Zhen was unable to say clearly whether his new environment was good or bad" (487). Overall, what later became known as Maospeak creates the complex mental and social environment within which Lin cannot decide what is right and wrong. His ability to judge his colleagues is made more difficult by their occasional ability to cut through the cloudiness and come up with good ideas:

> Lin Zhen sat at one of the work sessions of the organization department and found it strange. The discussion was over a temporary task assigned by the Municipal Party Committee; everyone smoked, joked, digressed. It dragged on for two hours with no results. Then Liu Shiwu, having meditated for some time with knitted brows, put forward a proposal. An animated discussion ensued and filled Lin with amazement and respect. Many people contributed such brilliant ideas that the final thirty minutes of the meeting were ten times more effective than the first two hours. (486)

Wang portrays linguistic manipulation as a form of human engineering with bizarre results. Because it directly articulates the group's collective beliefs and commitments, the deceptive transformation of language is difficult to recognise and, even when recognised, hard to decipher. The novella emphasises the way in which Lin Zhen's consciousness is muddied through the expression of the right ideals stuffed into a rigid framework, which itself becomes a form of constriction. This environment becomes intractable through the second part of Wang's attempt to describe Lin's situation in his new work place, focusing on the inclusionary and exclusionary aspects of human community, or human sociality. The combination of fervent ideals, pervasive control on expression, and the pressure of community tells us how censorship—especially in the form of a deep, all-inclusive, cloudy self-censorship within the subject—evolves and is slowly accepted as the normal way of life.

The officials in charge of the Organisation Department spend their work time reading novels, playing poker or chess, smoking and chatting, and churning out unreal reports. Lin is expected to go along or to insert himself into the group of bureaucrats fully adapted to their work. He often cannot figure out why nothing is happening, why a report is hyped or simply false, and in general how things work. When he tries to say directly what he thinks and describe what he observes, Lin is criticised as being young, emotional, and rash. When the case against Factory Director Wang is finally resolved, things come to a crisis when Lin directly states his views: "…I feel our indifference, our procrastination, our irresponsibility in our work, is a crime against the masses" (Wang 1981a, 506). Responding to a colleague's stilted response, Lin comes close to bursting into tears. There is simply no way to speak directly and honestly. Lin Zhen's inability or refusal to join the group could be a sign of his residual innocence or/and a suggestion that something has gone awry in the heart of the CCP. Critics have interpreted it both ways, although it is the critique directed at the Party, and the implication that Wang's portrayal of the Party is meant as a large-scale, general critique, that landed Wang in Xinjiang.[23] In a discussion with Literary Commissar Zhou Yang 周扬 (1908–1989), Wang denied that he developed Lin Zhen as a positive hero (Wang Meng 2018, 76).

Lin Zhen has multiple opportunities to position himself within the environment of the Organization Department or, in other words, to proclaim his membership within the community. But the mixed and contradictory environment of laziness and discipline, stupidity and intelligence, obfuscation and clarity, inaction and action create a plethora of puzzling emotions. This perplexity produces in Lin an affective roadblock and an inability to determine a clear path forward. The perfect clarity of ideals existing with a lack of an affective foundation behind them—testified to by both Lin Zhen and Zhao Huiwen—slowly dampens their enthusiasm, destroys their will, and makes them question their abilities and even their sanity. Although he cannot put his finger on the problem, Lin suspects the emotional core that sustains Party work has been irreparably damaged. He believes that Liu Shiwu suffers from "a terrible indifference" despite his

[23] The issue of typicality and literary representation, which was hotly debated in the 1930s, is relevant; see Wen 2006, 65. For an analysis that treats the portrayal of Lin Zhen as more in line with the novels centring on youth than on critique, see Wei (2010).

oft sharp analyses (Wang 1981a, 496). Zhao agrees, adding, “He no longer loves and he no longer hates” (496). These comments speak to a deadening of the youthful spirit of engagement and reconciliation that motivates the characters in *Long Live Youth*.

However, what baffles Lin Zhen even more is his recognition that Liu Shiwu is a complicated person with a complex history, who despite his weaknesses can often can be an excellent leader. Challenged by Lin at a meal, Liu directly defends himself:

> “Aren’t you young and zealous anymore?” Lin asked tentatively...Liu toyed with his empty cup. “Of course I’m not,” he said. “But the point is I’m really so busy that everything has become a tiresome habit. I haven’t slept eight full hours on a single night since liberation. I have to deal with this man and that man, and I haven’t had time to deal with myself.”...Lin Zhen was moved by Liu’s deep sincerity. Liu continued in a depressed voice: “...We Party workers have created a new life but, as a result, this new life is incapable of arousing us...” (Wang 1981a, 503)

This self-awareness and directness in Deputy Director Liu inspire admiration and respect in Lin Zhen. He wants to speak, but Liu stops him with a wave of his hand. Instead of going forward with his personal confession, Liu mentions to Lin that Zhao Huiwen is becoming fond of him.

Deputy Director Liu’s deferral and subsequent segue into Lin’s personal life signals the deeply censoring influence of the corrupted environment. And yet, as Cai Xiang (2010) has suggested, a critical binary of public/private will not help us understand the literature of the Seventeen Years. Private life during this time was not erased, as is commonly thought, but rather was reconceptualised within the emerging ethos of communality. Implicitly understanding this new vision, Wang Meng juxtaposes its late 1950s degraded state with Lin’s affection for a married colleague, and hers for him. Zhao is a few years older than Lin. She has gone through the same process of disillusionment, leaving her silent and frustrated. Although they like each other, Zhao is married to a man who has completely sold out to the deadening bureaucratic system around them, and she also has a child. When Zhao invites Lin to join her for a meal,

the novella remarkably joins the sense of loss and alienation that infiltrates the work environment with their mutual desire:

> "Well, actually, I've just eaten," he said hesitantly.
>
> Zhao refused to believe him and went to get the chopsticks. He repeated that he already had eaten. She had to eat by herself, unhappily. Lin sat uneasily at one side. He looked here and there, rubbed his hands, shifted in his seat. That same indescribable feeling of warmth and pain welled up in him again. His heart ached as though something had been lost. He simply did not have the courage to look at her beautiful face, which was reflecting the pink of her red dress.
>
> "Lin, what's wrong?" Zhao stopped eating. (Wang Meng 1981a, 507)

Lin tells Zhao about his frustrations in the Department. He gets up his courage to ask Zhao if she is happy, telling her that Liu Shiwu had mentioned that she seemed to like Lin and he should be cautious. Although Zhao makes it clear that she does like Lin, she also tells him that she is married, and anyway, he is just a child. The language is meandering and poetic. When Lin leaves, he is beset by feelings of loss and confusion, which mirror his feelings about his work: "A strange feeling came over him. He felt he had lost something precious. During the past few months, the work he had done was too little and the progress too slow...No, for the first time, he seemed to have tasted the bitterness of love" (Wang 1981a, 510).

The novella conflates the murky work atmosphere with the emotional frustrations of the love relationship. In this section, Lin can just barely grasp the life-changing qualities and existential consequences of the damaged linguistic and affective environment. The writing is replete with the unease of attempts by both Lin and Zhao to position their emotions in relation to the failings of the Organisation Department.

Writing for *The People's Daily* in 1957, Wang Meng admitted that the general import of the story is the "glamourisation of Lin Zhen and Zhao Huiwen; they have the author's loving care and sympathy" (Wang 1981b, 513). Yet Wang also mentioned that he did not describe Lin's antagonist Liu Shiwu as fully and simply bureaucratic, but "chose to emphasise his spiritual attitude of taking everything for granted" and used "his mastery of the rules governing his work to protect and disguise his indifference"

(513, 514). Although Liu is clever and capable, Wang argued, he became a cadre without a strong connection to the masses. "I am opposed to the separation of the spirit of socialism from the realities of life," Wang stated (516). This comment brings us back to the central issue of censorship in Chinese socialism, its implications, and the novella's contribution to understanding how it worked.

## Censorship within Bureaucracy

*A Young Man* appears to be such a clear indictment of the evils of bureaucracy that reading it through the broad concepts of censorship and self-censorship may seem to be a stretch. A short discussion of the problem of bureaucracy in socialism will help clarify the relationship between bureaucracy and censorship. Long a topic of discussion within Marxism, theorists took various approaches to understanding the role of bureaucracy. Although Marx thought bureaucracy, a form of political alienation, eventually would vanish with class-based states, for Leon Trotsky (1879–1940) bureaucrats would play a central role in socialist societies, as indeed they did (Krygier 1985).[24] The Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China both vastly increased the number of bureaucrats working for the government; in China there were eight times as many state cadres in 1958 as in 1949 (Bianco 2018, 172). Bureaucracy can be regarded as both enabling and coercive, as it was by different commentators (Adler 2012).

Writing in 1978—before the devastation of the Cultural Revolution was completely apparent to Westerners—Francis Hearn's work on bureaucracy is particularly relevant to *A Young Man*. Hearn noted that the Maoist approach to avoiding such evils contributed to a Marxist theory of bureaucracy. The relationship between bureaucracy and revolution always plagued Marxist theory, because of the suspicion that "rational decision making within a large-scale organization [can] only come at the direct expense

[24] For detailed research into Trotsky's theories of alienation and a solid bibliography on the subject, see Twiss (2014). Twiss notes that although the views of Marx and Engels on bureaucracy evolved over time, the term was always used "as a pejorative for a state apparatus that had come to stand over and dominate society as a whole" (16).

of participatory democracy" (37). Some of the questions that swirl around this problem could spring directly from *A Young Man*:

> Can this movement become bureaucratized and still retain its enthusiasm and moral force? And, after the revolution, when problems of coordination, communication, integration and development urgently present themselves as requiring an expeditious response, is bureaucracy inevitable? Must the ideals which guided and sustained the revolutionary movement then be sacrificed to bureaucratic imperatives? (37)

According to Lenin, the bureaucratic state should wither away after the transition to communism, a prediction that no country has been able to actualise. Max Weber (1864-1920) claimed that modernisation is the extension of rationalisation and bureaucratisation, a prediction that seems to have come true. Is there no modernisation without an "elitist, unresponsive and oppressive bureaucratic apparatus," a "centralized, specialized and hierarchical structure" that promotes efficiency through demoralisation and impersonalisation (Hearn 1978, 38)? If bureaucracy is the most appropriate form of organisation for capitalism, what works for socialism?

In Hearn's analysis, Marx's treatment of bureaucracy as transitory is insufficient, and Lenin erred in limiting worker control to the administrative aspects of organisation and leaving expertise to experts, or outside the realm of politics. Thus although party and industry experts were able to modernise Russian society, they did so by detaching themselves from "the political will of the masses" and creating a powerful, repressive, and elitist bureaucratic state (Hearn 1978, 42). The theoretical problem lies in the existence within Marxist theory of two kinds of rationality, that of technique and of consciousness. The technical experts were to concern themselves with problems in the material world, whereas a politicised consciousness was supposed to be part of everything else. Workers in any given area would be heavily engaged with the decisions that did not require specific expertise that they did not have. This rationalisation of consciousness would prevent the separation of society into classes and thus avoid the domination of one class by another.

But Lenin did not realise that any kind of "domination or unfreedom," not just technical, can result in social fracturing (Hearn 1978, 43).[25] Contrasting work on bureaucracy by Max Weber and Lenin, Hearn showed how Maoism resolved the contradiction between bureaucracy and revolution through the concept of cultural revolution. Chinese socialists, Hearn argues, attacked the problem through their rationalisation of consciousness. This move valorised consciousness in all citizens, including "experts". Thus modernisation could not occur at the expense of political consciousness. Along these lines, Meisner argues that Maoism "replaces the Marxist belief in objective laws of history with a voluntaristic faith in the consciousness and the moral potentialities of men as the decisive factor in sociohistorical development" (Meisner 1982, 61). This insistent emphasis on the value of political consciousness—which, Hearn states, somewhat lessened in the 1950s—is precisely what lay behind cultural revolution, or "that aspect of modernization which concerns the rationalization of consciousness" (Hearn 1978, 46). The goal is "an ideologically infused bureaucracy in which revolutionary spirit, mass participation and extensive discussion of alternatives furthers the rationalization of consciousness and, by doing so, harnesses the rationalization of technique to the quest for emancipation" (47). In struggling to make this theory a reality, the CCP underwent a series of movements that involved first establishing a strong Party, and then subjecting it to attack. As Hearn wryly notes, this method is both "risky and disruptive" but may be the only way to reconcile democracy and centralism in an underdeveloped society (50).

*A Young Man* appears to be working within these theoretical parameters. Liu Shiwu presides over a Party organisation riddled with inefficiency and demoralisation. For a very long time, he cannot or is unwilling to address the abusive and ineffective behavior of Factory Director Wang Qingquan. Meetings are mostly a waste of time, and their work time often is frittered away. A more complex character than his colleagues, Liu Shiwu could be the author's inquiry into the failure of the Maoist vision of modernisation, with its bureaucracy as both red and expert. In other words, Liu has genuinely

[25] Habermas also interpreted rationality, suggesting that the red-vs-expert binary could be resolved by developing a bureaucracy where "technicians are joined with workers in meaningful dialogue, and technical expertise is circumscribed by political discourse" (Hearn 1978, 44). See also Habermas (1970).

tried (and therein lies his melancholy and complexity), but he also has seen that there is no hope. With a heavy workload and not enough cadres to help, Liu has resigned himself to doing what he can and fudging the rest. His statement, "We Party workers have created a new life but, as a result, this new life is incapable of arousing us" is deeply troubling (Wang 1981aa, 503). As for Lin Zhen, despite Wang Meng's disclaimer, he indeed is a kind of positive (if naïve) hero. He and Zhao Huiwen represent the theory that insists on the subordination of technical experts—here Party cadres—to political imperative, i.e. the benefit of the masses or working *for the people*. Lin and Zhao embody the radical continuation of revolutionary spirit under the conditions of peace, or the theory of permanent revolution.[26]

Perhaps the novella should be considered a tale of dueling rationalities and their bureaucracies, with Lin and Zhao slowly losing to the tilting of power toward "expert" and away from "red." From this perspective, it is easy to see that all bureaucracies put various regimes of censorship in place. However, the story also shows how it is none other than communal life that becomes a vehicle, embodiment, and enforcer of censorship. Under the demands for unity, correct language can quickly become censoring language.

And finally, the novella brings out the deep affective damage that is both a cause and a result of censorship and self-censorship. As a final example that shows all three elements of censorship—language, community, and consciousness—I turn to the description of Lin's attempt to address inadequacies in the Organisation Department after Factory Director Wang is dismissed. Although the result has been reached, the oppressive environment does not dissipate. In discussing the gratitude of the factory workers when the dismissal of Wang Qingquan was announced, Liu Shiwu implies that things worked exactly as they should have:

> "One old worker burst into tears while he was speaking at the rostrum. Everyone spoke of their gratitude to the Party and to the District Party Committee."
>
> "Yes," said Lin in a subdued way. "Just for those reasons, I feel our indifference, our procrastination, our irresponsibility in our work, is a crime against the

[26] For more on the historical development of the concept of permanent revolution, see van Ree (2013); Löw (1981); Skilling (1961); also Xue, Xin, and Pan (1984), especially pages 106–173.

> masses." He raised his voice. "The Party belongs to the people, the heart of the working class. We don't permit dust in the heart, we can't permit defects in the Party organs."
>
> Resting his clasped hands on his knees, Li Zongqin spoke slowly as if deliberating, forming words while speaking. "I believe there are two main bones of contention between Lin Zhen, Liu Shiwu, and Han Changxin. One is the question between abiding by the national law and taking the initiative, the other—"
>
> "I hope you will not confine yourself to just making a cool, well-rounded analysis—" Lin butted in audaciously but was unable to continue for fear he would burst into tears. (Wang 1981a, 506)

Lin Zhen cannot speak freely, because to do so marks him as an outsider in the new communal society that is striving for the unity of the new nation. Maospeak creates a framework for linguistic control in which all the words are correct, but overall the sentiment is wrong. This passage shows the profound emotional wound that censorship produces in the most idealistic. On this last point, Zhao Huiwen is like a ghost from the future. She has long ago given up trying, confining herself to a self-improvement project which she describes as a "competitive system for myself, pitting myself today against myself yesterday" (Wang 1981a, 510). For Zhao, thinking of herself as a participant in communal work is a long-gone ideal. The once-grand national and global project has become a system of improving her work only as an individual, with a sharp dividing line that has effectively censored her voice and cut her off from the community.

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