

# MODERN CHINA

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## *Villagers, Elections, and Citizenship in Contemporary China*

KEVIN J. O'BRIEN

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More than five months had passed, but in December 1995, the oversized characters scrawled on a storefront on Wangjiacun's main street were still legible: "We're citizens. Give us back our citizenship rights. We're not rural labor power, even less are we slaves. Former village cadres must confess their corruption." The village leadership had little doubt who was behind this infuriating graffiti—namely, one of the twenty complainants who had accused Wangjiacun's Communist Party secretary and his predecessor of engaging in graft—but felt it was unwise to take any action. The corrupt cadres were said to be afraid that whitewashing the wall would only add fuel to the complaint and confirm their guilt. Instead, they would tough it out: they would refuse to turn over the accounts, stick with their story that the books had been destroyed in a fire, and wait for the summer rains to weather the charges away. But in the meantime, the allegations would stand un rebutted, there for all to see (Lianjiang Li, personal communication, July 1995; author's observation, December 1995).

Claims to citizenship have been a rallying cry for the excluded in many times and many places. In this one North China village, an enterprising farmer framed his critique of power in terms of citizenship rights and in so doing hamstringing a group of extremely hard-nosed cadres.<sup>1</sup> Couching a long-standing grievance in the language of community membership, he made his claim to inclusion unassailable. By

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reworking official "rights talk," he had turned a controversial demand for accountability into a simple plea for respect. Decollectivization had freed him. New political reforms had promised financial openness. As a citizen, he had a right to inspect the village accounts, and as a citizen, he had the right not to be treated as a slave.

In Wangjiacun, claims to citizenship have begun to affect how villagers and cadres interact. But this is only one village. Is the language of citizenship alive in the Chinese countryside today? Are Chinese villagers citizens in anything other than the narrowest juridical sense?

In this article, I assess the state of political citizenship in rural China. After discussing the often local and rural origins of citizenship and the meaning of the term itself, I review the limited reforms that have taken place in the election of high-ranking state leaders and people's congress deputies. I then turn to a more promising avenue of inclusion: the villagers' committee (VC) elections that began in the late 1980s. Here, we see notable efforts to heighten cadre responsiveness and draw rural residents into the local polity. At the same time, sizable obstacles to inclusion remain, not least because many electoral rules and practices do not enfranchise villagers reliably. The inescapable conclusion that villagers enjoy (at best) a partial citizenship needs to be qualified, however, owing to evidence that some rural people are starting to challenge improper elections using the language of rights. Building on a rules consciousness and a sensitivity to government rhetoric that have existed for centuries, as well as exploiting the spread of participatory ideologies and patterns of rule rooted in notions of equality, rights, and the rule of law, these villagers are busy advancing their interests within prevailing limits, forcing open blocked channels of participation, and struggling to make still-disputed rights real. In this regard, certain citizenship practices are emerging even before citizenship has appeared as a fully recognized status, and we may be observing the process by which a more complete citizenship comes about.

#### *RURAL CHINA?*

At first glance, searching for citizenship in rural China promises to be an excursion into the world of make-believe. Since at least Weber's

time, the development of citizenship has been associated with cities—cities mainly in the West (Dagger, 1981: 715-16; Turner, 1990: 194, 203; Bulmer and Rees, 1996: 272; Weber, 1998). Moreover, citizenship is often linked with notions such as political equality, civil society, democracy, and national integration (Marshall, 1976; Turner, 1992; Janoski, 1998) that apply badly (if at all) in Chinese villages. It is also obvious that many of the institutions that support citizenship are missing in rural China. Villagers play no meaningful part in choosing national leaders. Country folk are weakly represented in people's congresses, and those congresses have a limited role in making policy and checking executive authority (O'Brien, 1990; but for recent changes, see Tanner, 1999b; Dowdle, forthcoming).

Still, the subject of citizenship in the Chinese countryside cannot be dismissed with a wave of the hand. Recent studies have shown that the early history of citizenship was often local and parochial as much as it was national and universal. Although citizenship first appeared in the cities of ancient Greece and medieval Europe, it did so in autonomous, relatively small-scale towns (sometimes populated by as few as a thousand people) that were more rural than urban (Riesenberg, 1992: xv, 5). Even in England, the origins of citizenship trace to pastoral regions in the fourteenth century rather than to the industrializing cities of the nineteenth century. Long before the Industrial Revolution, certain rural dwellers had translated community autonomy and solidarity into a capacity for association and participation. It was in distant woodlands, not urban areas, where English peasants first appropriated labor laws and interpreted them as conferring citizenship rights (Somers, 1993: 594-98, 1994: 83). Citizenship, it would seem, can emerge deep in "the local node of a national legal structure" (Steinberg, 1995: 22)—that is, in small communities, where power is unfragmented and manageable size encourages participation and makes it easy to observe one's rulers in action (Dagger, 1981).

An insistence on linking citizenship with civil society, democracy, and equality also has a whiff of the ahistorical about it. Charles Tilly (1995: 233) has noted that the authoritarian regimes of Mussolini, Hitler, and Franco all emphasized bonds of citizenship, and Michael Mann (1996) has identified five varieties of citizenship, only one of which is associated with free association, strong legislatures, and liberal democracy.<sup>2</sup> A cursory review of world history also shows that

citizenship has long been an organizing principle for regimes riven by class, ethnic, and gender distinctions, and feminist scholars have been quick to point out that the idea of citizenship has always implied exclusion and discrimination as well as inclusion and political equality (Vogel, 1991: 61-62; Kerber, 1997; Lister, 1997).

Inasmuch as it is clear that citizenship, cities, democracy, and equality cannot be tied up in one neat bundle, it becomes reasonable to ask whether villagers in contemporary China are becoming citizens. Toiling far from urban centers, living under authoritarian rule, and being subject to institutionalized discrimination do not, in other words, rule out the first stirrings of citizenship. But if citizenship is not invariably associated with a specific location, a regime type, or even equality, what does it entail?

#### *BEING A CITIZEN*

In its most general sense, citizenship refers to a privileged legal status. A citizen is a full member of a community (Marshall, 1976: 84; Barbalet, 1988: 18). As citizens, categorically defined persons perform duties and possess rights, the most basic of which is the right to have rights (Kymlicka and Norman, 1995: 310). In nearly all communities, some residents are complete citizens and others fall short. Citizenship thus excludes at the same time that it includes; it draws boundaries and ranks the populace (Riesenberg, 1992: xvii; Kerber, 1997; Shafir, 1998: 24). Some people, such as children, the insane, and criminals, are excluded (at least temporarily) owing to an incapacity to exercise their rights and fulfill their obligations. Others, such as foreigners, refugees, and guest workers, are excluded because they are aliens (Vogel, 1991: 62). Citizens are in a privileged position vis-à-vis other community members because they possess rights that noncitizens and incomplete citizens lack.

Citizenship rights have evolved over time and have little fixed content. In today's world, however, citizenship is often understood to have three components (Marshall, 1976: 71-72). Civil citizenship involves rights required for personal liberty, such as freedom of speech, the right to make contracts, and the right to a fair trial. Social citizenship entails the right to a decent and secure standard of living, and it

conveys education, health, and welfare entitlements, according to a society's standards. Political citizenship, my main concern here, is associated with the right to participate in the exercise of power. It guarantees a person a place in the polity. In modern times, the sine qua non of political citizenship has become the right to elect state leaders—in the executive, in national parliaments, and in local councils.

*THE OPPORTUNITY TO PARTICIPATE:  
ELECTING TOP LEADERS*

It goes without saying that ordinary Chinese do not enjoy the right to elect their president or other officials near the apex of power. As early as 1953, Deng Xiaoping announced that because most people were unfamiliar with national policies and the names of state leaders, subjecting top Party and government functionaries to a popular vote was impossible (Houn, 1955: 205). In the years since Deng spoke, proposals to revise the constitution and allow general elections have occasionally appeared, only to be rejected on grounds that the time was not ripe (Wang Dexiang, 1979: 6; Xu Chongde and Pi Chunxie, 1982: 58-59). In 1997, President Jiang Zemin once again ruled out national and provincial elections (Tanner, 1999b: 248), and a year later Premier Zhu Rongji professed support for democratic elections but pointedly excluded the presidency and premiership. Such an important reform, Zhu said, needed more study, and it was hard to predict when officials of the first rank might begin to be elected (Spaeth, 1998).

While villagers (and city dwellers) have no direct means to determine who rules China, they are entitled to some say over a number of appointments through their deputies in the National People's Congress (NPC) and local congresses. In Mao Zedong's era, this meant little more than a right to hear that one's representative had "voted" for whomever the Party Organization Department had nominated, but since the late 1970s, the process for picking high-ranking members of the executive and judiciary has been revamped. Although the NPC has yet to remove an official on its own accord or reject a nominee placed before it (Yang, 1998: 5), competition has been introduced for many positions, and the number of dissenting votes has grown. At the 1995

plenary session, for instance, nearly 37% of the NPC's deputies abstained or voted against a Party-nominated candidate for vice premier (Tanner and Chen, 1998: 41).<sup>3</sup> Local congresses have shown even more mettle when challenging name lists put forward by the Party's Organization Department. Among notable instances of assertiveness, provincial assemblies have impeached a vice governor in Hunan, rejected Party-sponsored nominees for governor in Guizhou and Zhejiang, and elected a deputy-nominated chief judge over a Party-designated candidate in Jiangsu (Xia, 1997: 15; 2000: 168-72; Shi, 1997: 36).<sup>4</sup>

It is wrong, however, to interpret this newfound feistiness as a sign of significant growth in citizenship rights. People's congresses have long been negligent in exercising their powers of appointment and recall, and a smattering of newsworthy examples to the contrary does not mean that business as usual has changed. The Party still manipulates nominations, and procedures surrounding senior appointments remain "extremely vague and ill-formed" (Dowdle, 1997: 104). Legislators, as in the past, are provided scant information about candidates, and campaigning is frowned upon. Competition typically entails having one more nominee than the number of positions (e.g., six candidates for five spots), and for top posts (e.g., president, vice president, governor), deputies are usually presented with a single nominee, whom they then vote up or down (Bao Yu'e, Pang Shaotang, and Sun Yezhong, 1990: 104; Jacobs, 1991: 188, 190-91; Dowdle, 1997: 37-41).

Competition at the chief executive rank remains limited even in the lowest reaches of the state hierarchy. In a 1999 election observed by a delegation from the Carter Center, town deputies were presented with five candidates for four deputy magistrate positions but only the incumbents for people's congress chair and magistrate. To delegation members, it was "very obvious" that once the nominee for a top position was put forward, "all deputies understood the message and refrained from nominating any new candidates" (Carter Center of Emory University, 1999: 12). To this day, the selection of nominees mainly reflects the outcome of administrative evaluation, recommendations from the organization department, and the normal workings of the *nomenklatura* system. As a "remedy for occasional defects" (Manion, 2000: 775), deputies may veto leaders selected by the Party

committee one level up, but this power is less an opportunity for choice than an incentive for the Party committee to vet its candidates with care.

Ordinary Chinese, of course, have even less say over high-level Party positions. Members of the Politburo and its Standing Committee, as well as provincial first secretaries, are all selected at Party conclaves with no pretense of mass participation. At the very top, the situation is much as it has been since 1949: there are few constraints on the ruling elite, and formal means of accountability have little weight in a system that is innately elitist and (at times) intentionally unresponsive. Opportunities to participate in the exercise of political power remain closely held. China's top leaders respond to popular opinion as a matter of choice or tactics, not out of obligation or because they fear removal in a democratic election.

#### *ELECTING PEOPLE'S CONGRESSES*

The structure of people's congresses also impedes popular participation. Of special importance to villagers, Chinese electoral laws favor urban over rural districts. Each deputy from the countryside must represent four times as many constituents in county people's congresses, five times as many in provincial congresses, and eight times as many in the NPC. This discrimination is said to be called for because cities are the nation's political, economic, and cultural centers and because urban leadership is desirable as industrialization proceeds. Equal weighting of urban and rural residents, it is claimed, would produce large majorities of low-quality (*suzhi*) rural deputies, which might diminish the vitality of representative assemblies (Jacobs, 1991: 177; Xu Chongde and Pi Chunxie, 1982: 64-65). In recent years, some Chinese scholars and deputies have suggested righting this imbalance somewhat (see Bernstein, 1995: 14-15), perhaps reducing the disparity to two-to-one (see Nathan, 1997: 236), but calls to end malapportionment have seldom been heard.

Even many advocates of stronger legislatures have doubts about institutionalizing political equality. Despite constitutional provisions guaranteeing equal protection to all Chinese, they feel that undereducated peasants cannot take part in politics and that congresses should

be “galaxies of talent” (Tan, 1987: 49) stocked with the nation’s best and brightest. Such self-proclaimed reformers are hesitant to grant too much power to “backward” country people. Instead, they would replace deputies who cannot read complex legal documents or understand budget proposals with highly qualified officials and professionals. To this end, they would gerrymander election precincts so that cadres and intellectuals would stop “bumping cars” and would be elected in disproportionate numbers (Xu Datong and Li Zhao, 1986). These supporters of tinkering with legislative composition argue that the interests of the least educated can be upheld by others, and they have little sympathy for farmer (or worker) deputies who weigh down congresses and dilute the influence of people (like themselves!) deemed more able (Chen Yanqing and Xu Anbiao, 1990: 11-12; interviewees 1, 2, 3). Although this view is usually expressed in hushed tones and elliptical language, recent election results suggest it has made considerable headway. Should education and professional abilities continue to be valued highly, the underrepresentation of rural people in people’s congresses will only increase (O’Brien and Li, 1993-1994).

How legislators are chosen also affects the extent to which villagers are included in the polity. People’s congresses may be symbols of popular sovereignty, but deputies are elected in a popular vote only up to the county level. Above that, members are “produced” (*chansheng*) by deputies who serve in the congress immediately below. Regulations call for a measure of competition, with 20% to 50% more candidates than positions, but by all accounts these “indirect” (*jianjie*) elections are strongly influenced by quotas and Party-provided name lists. The selection process is generally secretive, and nominations from the floor are unusual and fare poorly. A lack of campaigning leads to much “blind” voting, and Party luminaries are often assigned to represent a region in which they grew up or worked but no longer live (O’Brien, 1990: 129, 168; Jacobs, 1991: 188-90, 199; Dowdle, 1997: 37-39; Tanner, 1999a: 119-21).

Proposals to begin direct voting for provincial congresses and the NPC spring up every few years, and since the mid-1990s, NPC research staff have been exploring what would be needed to expand popular elections. But, as one Western researcher observes, “given the undermining of other Leninist states by even modestly competitive

legislative electoral reforms, such reforms are unlikely in the immediate future" (Tanner, 1999a: 121). To this point, there has been little reason to think that deputies produced via indirect elections would be chosen in a popular vote.

Direct elections to county and township congresses offer greater opportunities for political participation. In the 1980s, the first several rounds of contested county elections took place with much fanfare. Early reports suggested that new provisions requiring more candidates than positions were generally observed and that some nominees put forth by voters had reached the final ballot. At the same time, it was also clear that manipulation of the nomination process was rife, and unapproved nominees were frequently crossed out or replaced. Election officials sometimes offered flattering introductions and a preferred place on the ballot for candidates they favored, and voters had few chances to meet their representatives or find out what they thought (Womack, 1982; Nathan, 1985: 193-223; McCormick, 1990: 130-56; Jacobs, 1991: 188, 178-88). Groups of constituents "very rarely" proposed their own nominees, and secret balloting was the exception, especially in rural districts. According to Chinese commentators, many voters simply "went through the motions"; villagers, in particular, often felt elections were "meaningless" (Nie Yulin, 1988: 250-51; Jiang Fukun, 1989: 10-11; Ji Yu, 1990: 254; Kang Fangming, 1990: 274, 277-79).

More recently, a team of foreign observers that witnessed a town election expressed concern with ballot secrecy and distribution, voter identification, and limited candidate responsiveness to voters' concerns but was impressed by the large turnout and the eagerness of deputies to criticize the performance of town officials (Carter Center of Emory University, 1999: 4). Tianjian Shi's surveys (Shi, 1997: 38-39, 110, 177, 179; 1999b) have also shown increased interest in choosing local congress deputies. Although the authorities still work hard to handpick nominees, many voters have apparently decided to take part in imperfect, semicompetitive elections to punish corrupt leaders or promote political change. Private, informal campaigning is on the rise, and better educated, more informed voters are less inclined to boycott elections as a means of showing displeasure with the candidates they are presented (but also see Chen, 2000). Instead, they sometimes use elections to get rid of or humiliate leaders they dislike. Insofar as

defeat at the polls always causes a loss of face, usually leads to a transfer, and often triggers an investigation, casting a ballot has become a way to exercise a dollop of influence. Small procedural reforms, in sum, have changed voting behavior, and some Chinese have become adept at working a reforming authoritarian system to their advantage. In the cities, this means making the most of limited-choice people's congress elections. In the countryside, these contests draw less interest, and the most promising avenue of inclusion lies with village-level voting (Choate, 1997: 7; Shi, 1999b: 1134).

#### *ELECTING VILLAGERS' COMMITTEES*

That villagers' committee elections have attracted much notice in China and abroad is not surprising. As a breeding ground for citizenship rights, VCs have two decisive advantages over people's congresses: they are more autonomous, and they control things people care about. Legislators may remonstrate for groups or individuals to whom they feel an attachment (O'Brien, 1994a). But congress deputies have few resources and less power, and they must rely on others to carry out their decisions.

Members of villagers' committees work with fewer constraints. Under the Organic Law of Villagers' Committees (1987, revised 1998), VCs are not part of the state apparatus; rather, they are "autonomous mass organizations" through which villagers manage their own affairs, educate themselves, and meet their own needs (art. 2). VCs are composed of three to seven members, each of whom is elected for a term of three years. Committees have broad powers and limited but real autonomy from the township governments that sit above them. While committees, for instance, must "help" townships in their work, they are not subject to top-down "leadership relations" (*lingdao guanxi*), and townships are prohibited from meddling in affairs that fall within a VC's purview (art. 4).

Villagers' committees also control resources. In eight villages that I visited in Fujian in 1992, VCs managed on average 15% of the yearly income earned by villagers. Although Party secretaries usually dominate enterprise management in richer areas, even weak VCs own a village's land and usually have "veto power to decide the general use of

village resources—what might be called macro-economic control” (Oi, 1996: 137; see also Oi and Rozelle, 2000).

Whether villagers are currently political citizens in more than a formal sense rests in large part on the quality of VC elections. What rights does the Organic Law guarantee? Have rural people been enfranchised, and are village elections free and fair?

The Organic Law details an impressive array of citizenship rights. Notably, all registered adult villagers are entitled to vote and to stand for office (art. 12). With the exception of “those deprived of political rights by law,” it contains no notion of being “among the people” or of the class-based identities of the Maoist era. These provisions repeat standard Chinese eligibility rules, except that in some places, restrictions have been added that exclude the mentally ill (Elklit, 1997: 6).

Special efforts have also been made to protect the rights of women. In the years after the Organic Law was first passed, balloting on a family basis was common. This practice often placed a household’s vote in the hands of a family patriarch. More recently, reportedly as a result of foreign prodding, household voting was banned in Fujian and a number of other provinces (Wang Zhenyao, 1998: 246; Shi, 1999a: 408). Both the original Organic Law and its 1998 revision also accord women “appropriate” (*shidang*) representation on VCs (art. 9).

Recent amendments also strengthen voter privacy and freedom of choice. For the first time, secret voting, semicompetitive elections (i.e., more candidates than the number of positions), and open counts are required (art. 14). Some provinces have also taken the lead in prohibiting proxy voting, experimenting with absentee ballots, and making primaries mandatory. Since the mid-1990s, the Ministry of Civil Affairs has promoted “sea elections” (open nominations) (Epstein, 1996: 409; Shi, 1999a: 405-6), and Fujian, a pacesetter in carrying out villagers’ autonomy, now requires more than one candidate for each VC post.

Perhaps most important, villagers have been empowered to fight misimplementation of the Organic Law. For many years, civil affairs officials have been receptive to complaints about election irregularities (O’Brien, 1996: 44; Li and O’Brien, 1999: 139; O’Brien and Li, 2000: 482-83), but now voters are expressly authorized to combat dishonest elections (“threats, bribes, forged ballots and other improper methods”) by lodging “reports” (*jubao*) with local governments,

people's congresses, and other concerned departments (e.g., civil affairs offices; art. 15). At the same time, the Organic Law clearly states that no organization or individual is allowed to "appoint, designate, remove, or replace" members of a VC (art. 11).

By all accounts, the quality of village elections has improved since the early 1990s, and voter interest is on the rise. In the words of two observers, "local elections appear to be acquiring high salience in the political life of the countryside" (Jennings, 1997: 366), and "peasants have shown great enthusiasm for this grassroots political reform" (Wang, 1997: 1437). Early on, many villagers had scoffed at their voting rights, and in some places they shunned VC elections (O'Brien, 1994b: 51-53; Shi, 1999a: 394). But this seems to be changing. According to an official in the Ministry of Civil Affairs, "most villagers did not pay attention to the first round of elections, but some became interested the second time, and by the third time many actively participated" (quoted in Shi, 1999a: 402). After seeing that elections could dislodge incompetent, corrupt, and high-handed cadres, some villagers now take them so seriously that a nationwide survey showed that 17% of villagers have nominated a VC candidate.<sup>5</sup> There is good reason for them to pay attention—elections have given rural people a way to unseat some horribly unpopular cadres. In balloting between 1995 and 1997, VC turnover in seven provinces ranged from 2% to 31%, averaging just under 19% (Pastor and Tan, 2000: 504).<sup>6</sup> In some villages, particularly where economic growth has been disappointing, elections have sidelined a team of village cadres en masse. Freshly installed leaders are said to be younger and more entrepreneurial than the people they replaced (Epstein, 1996: 415; Wang, 1997: 1437; Howell, 1998: 99; interviewees 4, 5, 6). In some locations, write-in campaigns waged by maverick businessmen succeed ("Villagers Spurn Communist," 1999), and as Bruce Dickson (1999: 16) recently found, 15.5% of 524 private entrepreneurs surveyed in eight rural counties had been candidates for village chief.

Cadres chosen in popular elections may also be more responsive to their constituents—at least in some regions. Oi and Rozelle (2000: 537) found that "in some villages where there have been elections, there is more open accounting of village spending." Amy Epstein (1996: 413) has argued that elections give villagers more control over how taxes are spent (but also see Bernstein and Lü, 2000: 762). A

four-county survey designed by political scientists at the University of Michigan and Beijing University showed that cadres in villages with competitive elections were closer to their constituents' positions on the state's role in the economy than cadres in villages that had not held competitive elections (Manion, 1996: 741-45). Interviews in the countryside also suggest that where free and fair voting is the norm, village leaders live in a different world than the officials above them. As one VC director explained to Lianjiang Li,

We village cadres depend on the "ground line" (*dixian*) (that is, villagers' votes); those at higher levels depend on the antenna (*tianxian*) (that is, appointment by higher levels). If we wish to be cadres, we must win the masses' support. [Quoted in Li and O'Brien, 1999: 140]

#### LIMITS ON PARTICIPATION

Although VC elections offer villagers entry into the local polity, the inclusion they confer is incomplete. The state has yet to recognize certain citizenship rights, and it has not taken the steps needed to ensure that all the rights it recognizes are honored.

Under the Organic Law, nonresidents cannot take part in village elections (art. 20). This would be of small concern if rural-to-rural migration were not accelerating. In a sprawling, industrial complex in the Tianjin suburbs, I was surprised to hear the Party secretary say that the population topped out at 1,100 villagers (interviewee 7). Only later did he mention that the village was also home to more than 2,000 guest workers and their families. The secretary acknowledged that in many places, outsiders were treated like "slaves" (*nuli*) and that it was a struggle to guarantee their labor and welfare rights, let alone to imagine enfranchising them. In a Shandong village that relies on nonresidents to work its gold mine and to perform other backbreaking labor, the exclusion and condescension trained on guest workers were hardly less (interviewee 5).<sup>7</sup>

Women are also underrepresented on VCs. Quotas may exist, but even in provinces that have embraced grassroots elections, few women are nominated to committees, and even fewer serve as VC directors (International Republican Institute, 1997: 20). In the twenty-

odd villages in which I have done interviews, the VC usually includes one woman, and it is easy to guess her portfolio—the thankless job of enforcing family planning. Male domination may grow further if plans to streamline the government and lighten “peasant burdens” come to fruition. Since the mid-1990s, female representation has begun to drop in some villages as the size of VCs is pared to cut costs (Howell, 1998: 99-100).

There are also a number of areas in which election practices and rules are wanting. Practices and institutions that impede political participation include the following:

*Election committees.* Election steering groups, often led by the village Party secretary or a representative of the township, play a murky role in selecting nominees and final candidates (Elklit, 1997: 5; Carter Center of Emory University, 1997: 10; Howell, 1998: 97-98, 101). Sometimes, VC candidates even serve on these committees, despite regulations to the contrary (Carter Center of Emory University, 1998: 7; Pastor and Tan, 2000: 494). Although the revised Organic Law (art. 13) empowers villagers’ assemblies or small groups to “select” (*tuixuan chansheng*) the village steering group, it is unclear how this provision will be implemented and how much control it will provide.

*Nomination procedures.* VC candidates are chosen in a bewildering number of ways. While formal and informal primaries are becoming more common, procedures for whittling down the number of nominees are far from transparent and leave considerable room for manipulation. Much still goes on behind closed doors, and townships and village Party branches have numerous opportunities to prevent unapproved candidates from reaching the final ballot (O’Brien, 1994b: 55; Elklit, 1997: 8-9; Kelliher, 1997: 82; Howell, 1998: 97).

*Competition.* Village elections are short of being fully competitive; in many provinces, only one more candidate than the number of seats is required. This rule makes curbing voter choice a cinch and encourages ruses such as placing an obviously unqualified candidate on the ballot alongside the incumbents or putting up a husband and wife (when only one woman is running and couples are not permitted to serve) (O’Brien and Li, 2000: 485; interviewee 7). In some villages, as

recently as 1998, no VC races were contested (on limited competition, see Elklit, 1997: 6; Howell, 1998: 98-99; Chan, 1998: 513).<sup>8</sup>

*Campaigning.* Candidates ordinarily make a brief statement on election day. Spirited speeches brimming with promises appear here and there (Friedman, 1998; Pastor and Tan, 2000: 496), as does door-to-door campaigning (Elklit, 1997: 9; Wang Zhenyao, 1998: 248-50; Thurston, 1999: 28), but lobbying for votes is not encouraged. Many VC members liken campaigning to self-promotion and regard "pulling votes" (*lapiao*) to be unfair, even corrupt (interviewee 8; Epstein, 1996: 410; Chan, 1998: 512-13; Thurston, 1999: 28). Running against the Communist Party or organizing a new party is, of course, forbidden.

*Secret balloting.* Before the Organic Law was revised in 1998, comparatively little attention was paid to secret balloting. In some locations, polling booths were provided but not used; in others, voters filled out their ballots in public while milling about and chatting with neighbors (Elklit, 1997: 10-11; Chan, 1998: 513; Howell, 1998: 96; Thurston, 1999: 3). Attention to vote privacy may be growing, however. A survey conducted in the provinces of Fujian and Jilin (largely in demonstration areas) showed that nearly 100% of the villages had employed a secret ballot (Pastor and Tan, 2000: 509). Still, outside democratically advanced locales, it is unclear if the importance of casting a vote privately is fully appreciated by election officials or most voters (Howell, 1998: 96; Pastor and Tan, 2000: 498, 508).

*Proxy voting.* Proxy voting is used to boost turnout and protect the rights of the aged, the sick, and those away from home. But as the Carter Center (1998: 5-6, 11-12) and the International Republican Institute (1998: 11) have pointed out, allowing one person to vote for up to three others can compromise voter privacy and freedom of choice. Ann Thurston (1999: 30) discovered that the dominance of a family's senior male was so ingrained in Lishu county, the nationwide model for village elections (!), "that few women or younger men would even think of casting an independent vote." So far, only Fujian has banned proxy voting, and in some villages, one-fifth or more of the ballots are cast by proxy (Pastor and Tan, 2000: 498).

*Roving ballot boxes.* Roving ballot boxes are used in remote areas and to help the sick and elderly vote. Like proxy voting, this practice attests to a desire to be inclusive but also poses a threat to ballot secrecy and is open to abuse. In some places, mobile boxes are used mainly for the convenience of busy villagers. In one Liaoning village, for example, more than 90% of the votes were cast in mobile boxes rather than at polling stations (Pastor and Tan, 2000: 497-98). Many election observers advise that proxy voting and roving ballot boxes be replaced by absentee voting to protect the integrity of voting, promote the civic awareness that comes with going to a polling station, and reinforce the principle of voting by and for oneself (International Republican Institute, 1997: 26-27, 1998: 11; Carter Center of Emory University, 1997: 15).

*Certification.* Township governments have also been known to annul elections if the “wrong” candidate wins or to dispense with voting and appoint “acting” VC members (Kelliher, 1997: 82; Li and O’Brien, 1999: 136-39). Sometimes, sitting cadres go so far as to bribe township officials to subvert the Organic Law. They may, for instance, coax township officials to cancel or rig an election by offering expensive gifts, hosting lavish banquets, or purposely losing at mah-jongg (interviewees 9, 10). In some counties, semicompetitive village elections have never been held.

*VC-Party relations.* VCs seldom have final say over village political life (Kelliher, 1997: 81-85; Howell, 1998: 101). In many areas, the influence of the village Party branch exceeds that of the VC, and “real power remains in the hands of the Party secretary who makes the key economic decisions regarding industry” (Oi, 1996: 136). Concurrent membership on villagers’ committees and Party branches is common, as is the convening of joint or consecutive meetings (O’Brien, 1994b: 54). The revised Organic Law (art. 3) has further muddied relations between VCs and Party branches and increased the temptation to meddle by stipulating that the Party branch is a village’s “leadership core” (*lingdao hexin*).

Chinese villagers have certain rights, but theirs is a partial, local citizenship. Rural dwellers have few opportunities to participate outside

the village, and their inclusion in the wider polity is not well established. While villagers have a foothold in grassroots politics and some resources, their ability to rein in state sovereignty is slight. The inclusion that rural people have been offered is piecemeal and incomplete.

#### *CITIZENSHIP FROM BELOW*

If citizenship were solely a status awarded by the state, our story would end here. But citizenship is more than a collection of rights bestowed on passive recipients (Turner, 1992: 2). It is also an outcome of historical processes that emerges as members of the popular classes seek to improve their lot by confronting the powers that be. Citizenship, in other words, arises out of negotiation between representatives of the state and social groups, and all initiative does not lie with the state. In fact, in many places, enlarging the scope of citizenship requires prolonged struggle (Giddens, 1982: 165, 171-72), and new rights are acquired only through bottom-up pressure and the painstaking extraction of concessions. Citizenship, in this sense, is less granted than won, less accorded than made.

Understood this way, citizenship is a “way of life growing within” (Marshall, 1976: 70) that reflects new aspirations and demands. Its spread depends on changes in people’s hearts and minds, and it leads to changes in behavior. As seen in the farmer from Wangjiacun who denounced corruption using the soothing language of community membership, the rise of citizenship signals new identities and a growing fluency in “rights talk.” To understand how citizenship develops, it is important to tally up what the central state recognizes and the local state enforces, but tracing changes in claims making and popular consciousness is just as key. In this regard, political citizenship involves adjustments in psychological orientation: in particular, it involves changes in one’s awareness of politics, sense of efficacy, and feelings toward government. It implies a willingness to question authority and suggests that people view their relationship with the state as reciprocal. It entails a readiness to enter into conflicts with the powerful and a certain assertiveness in articulating one’s interests (Shi, 2000).

When the spotlight shifts to how citizenship rights emerge, popular dissatisfaction with incomplete inclusion takes on a new meaning. It

becomes a sign that ordinary people are learning to speak the language of power with skill: to make officials prisoners of their own rhetoric by advancing claims in a particularly effective way. Consider the following incidents:

- Two men in Hunan, when facing an illegal snap election, organized their neighbors to plaster 74 posters around their village, recommending rejection of handpicked candidates and opposition to “dictatorial elections” (Zhongguo jiceng zhengquan jianshe yanjiuhui, 1994: 80).<sup>9</sup>
- Hundreds of Shanxi farmers besieged a county government building, demanding that a VC election be nullified after a cadre seeking reelection escorted a mobile ballot box on its rounds (interviewees 10, 11).
- Residents of two Shanxi villages occupied a township office and refused to end their sit-in unless officials agreed to make their villages “special zones” where free and fair elections would be conducted (Shao Xingliang et al., 1994).
- Nearly a hundred Hebei villagers lodged complaints with the Central Discipline Inspection Commission concerning a township Party committee that insisted a village Party branch had the right to nominate VC candidates (interviewee 10).
- More than twenty Liaoning complainants, indignant over “minor” technical infractions, traveled to the county seat, the provincial capital, and finally Beijing, at each stop reciting chapters of the Organic Law while appealing for new elections (Tian Yuan, 1993: 3-4).

In each of these cases, villagers cited specific clauses or the spirit of the Organic Law to back up their charges. By pointing to procedural irregularities that peasants are usually thought to ignore, these strict constructionists turned the gap between rights promised and rights delivered into a political resource. They challenged official misconduct using state-sanctioned symbols and deployed rights claims to protest illegal or undemocratic practices. To protect themselves and increase the likelihood of success, they shrewdly couched their demands in the language of loyal intentions while professing little more than a desire to make the system live up to what it was supposed to be. The regime had promised them a place in the polity, and they expected the system to live up to its billing.

And these are not isolated incidents. Villagers in many locations shower officials with complaints when their electoral rights are abridged. One study reported that two-fifths of the occasions on which

rural residents contacted officials concerned elections (Jennings, 1997: 366); another survey showed that as many as 5% of villagers nationwide have lodged complaints about election fraud (Shi, 1999a: 403-4).<sup>10</sup>

Chinese villagers are increasingly identifying, interpreting, and challenging undemocratic elections using the vocabulary of rights (O'Brien, 1996; Chan, 1998: 519-20; on rights claims outside electoral contexts, see Zweig, 2000; McCarthy, 2000: 109; Goldman and Perry, forthcoming). Aware that the Organic Law and local regulations have granted them certain protections, they appropriate rights discourses and press to unclog channels of participation. These well-informed, exacting critics exploit the "discursive trappings of democracy" (Howell, 1998: 104) to trip up local officials who refuse to acknowledge rights that the central authorities have ostensibly recognized. They often invoke a contractual logic borrowed from their economic life to demand that protections they have been guaranteed are respected. When local cadres dare to manipulate elections, they are quick to step in and charge them with prohibited behavior. Venturing forth in the name of unimpeachable ideals, they say they are simply seeking faithful implementation of the Organic Law.

When villagers come to view state promises as a source of entitlement and inclusion, they are acting like citizens before they are citizens. Certain citizenship practices, in other words, are preceding the appearance of citizenship as a secure, universally recognized status. In fact, practice may be creating status, as local struggles begin in enclaves of tolerance, spread when conditions are auspicious, and evolve into inclusion in the broader polity.

For now, however, the claims villagers put forward mainly demand entry into local politics. Villagers seldom press for wider civil and political rights to association, expression, and unlicensed participation; nor do they often question the legitimacy of existing laws and policies, not to mention the right of unaccountable leaders at higher levels to promulgate laws and policies. Although it is possible that rights-oriented contention may find elite patrons (or generate political entrepreneurs) who organize regionally or even nationally significant pressure groups, no such trend is now apparent. The intervillage organization and national aspirations of most villagers appear to be rather limited. Even the most assertive among them rarely demand

provincial or national elections, wisely avoiding an issue that might alienate the allies they need to enforce their claims against local officials (Li and O'Brien, 1996: 54-55).

Rural complainants know that they exist at the sufferance of higher levels and that the "rights" they act on are conditional. Unlike some Chinese intellectuals, who employ a different kind of rights discourse, there is little evidence that villagers consider rights to be inherent, natural, or inalienable; nor do most claimants break with the common Chinese practice of viewing rights as granted by the state mainly for societal purposes rather than to protect an individual's autonomous being (Edwards, Henkin, and Nathan, 1986). Demanding citizenship is therefore making a claim more to community membership than to negative freedoms vis-à-vis the state. Villagers seldom argue that rights flow from human personhood but rather that the government's right to loyalty depends on ensuring that its officials fulfill their obligations. The duties of those below must be reciprocated by the duties of those above (Wang Gungwu, 1991).

Chinese villagers, accordingly, are best thought of as occupying an intermediate position between subjects and citizens. When they use unenforced citizenship rights as a weapon, they are demanding that the representatives of state power treat them equitably, respect their claims, and deliver on promises made by officials at higher levels (O'Brien, 1996; Bernstein and Lü, 2000: 756-59; Zweig, 2000). They are exploiting the spread of participatory ideologies and patterns of rule rooted in notions of equality, rights, and rule of law. By tendering impeccably respectable demands, they have found a persuasive way to agitate for the accountability that the Organic Law calls for and to challenge those who would usurp their electoral rights. Ultimately, their efforts may help make various still-contested rights real. Although villagers are only partial citizens in the local polity, we may be witnessing the beginnings of a more complete citizenship coming about.

#### *SOME HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE*

Although this article has highlighted the upsurge in rights-based contention in recent years, rules consciousness and a sensitivity to the

power of government discourse are not new in China, or indeed elsewhere. Members of the popular classes have always been adept at taking advantage of government commitments, professed ideals, and legitimating myths (Field, 1976; Scott, 1990: 101-6). Chinese villagers, in particular, have long seized on official rhetoric—whether framed in terms of Confucianism, class struggle, or citizenship rights—to press claims against malfeasant power holders.

In late imperial China, the Qing government tried “to establish a direct rapport with tenants” (Wiens, 1980: 33), and tenants sometimes used official rulings as a pretext to delay or refuse payment of rent. Rural people also objected to taxes when they felt local authorities had ignored proper collection procedures and would back off when faced with popular complaints. Such challenges typically rested on appeals to equity and fairness, focusing on how the tax burden was apportioned, on adjustments for harvest conditions, and on the use of biased measures and conversion ratios. Local officials understood the protesters’ logic and, provided that fiscal concerns were not overly pressing, sometimes gave in (Wong, 1997: 235-37). Villagers, for their part, often submitted to all sanctioned impositions and used their fidelity to established values to launch attacks in a rhetoric that even unresponsive elites had to acknowledge. In the Laiyang tax revolt of 1910, for example, peasants considered the regular rates to be fair enough and employed them to fend off irregular levies. Like the rural complainants of a later era, their resistance was not only a reactive effort to restore what they had. Beyond demanding the removal of exploitative tax farmers, the Laiyang protesters “also proposed a system to help ensure that corrupt power was not regenerated—namely, the public election of new functionaries to administer reform programs” (Prazniak, 1980: 59). This defiance thus transcended run-of-the-mill rules consciousness. As with contemporary villagers who press for free and fair elections, the Laiyang resistance was both loyal and proactive: it was simultaneously a means to advance group interests within existing limits and a way to assert new rights and pry open new channels of participation.

Other elements of today’s “rightful resistance” (O’Brien, 1996) were also apparent in Republican China, particularly in clashes surrounding taxation. Studies of the Nanjing Decade depict a state that was already too fragmented to treat as a unified actor and villagers

who did not experience the state as a single entity with a single face. In Patricia Thornton's (1999) telling, provincial leaders, circuit court judges, and the Administrative Yuan regularly received letters of complaint from peasants and "citizen representatives" (*gongmin daibiao*) criticizing official misconduct. But as incidents of tax and rent resistance rose, it was local administrators who bore the brunt of popular ire. "Rural residents seeking redress from fiscal predation of county officials and their minions tended to see central authorities not as culprits or co-conspirators in the fiscal battle being waged against them, but as potential protectors" against their real antagonists—local bureaucratic capitalists (Thornton, 1999: 13). Thornton goes so far as to argue that portrayals of the central state in popular sources were more positive and optimistic in the Republican era than they are now. Still, she acknowledges that while Republican taxpayers generally did not perceive the central government to be accountable to the citizenry, "rural residents in the reform era expect more from central authorities in Beijing" (Thornton, 1999: 30).<sup>11</sup> Contemporary protesters, one might add, sometimes find the intercessors they need. State power is divided against itself, and pressure points exist where elite unity crumbles. Resourceful villagers nowadays can often ferret out supporters in various bureaucracies (such as the Ministry of Civil Affairs) who have a stake in seeing their appeals addressed and in upholding the policies they invoke. Villagers may be pessimistic, but they are also sometimes successful in locating advocates to champion their claims.

The Maoist era offers an ambiguous legacy to villagers pursuing citizenship from below. On one hand, rights discourses were not in vogue; late Cultural Revolution-era protests, for instance, were "almost exclusively of a defensive and reactive character. The protesters defied political despotism, but only a few went so far as to demand an expansion of participatory rights" (Heilmann, 1996: 34). On the other hand, using the regime's own words as a weapon clearly did not begin in the 1990s. Borrowing slogans from the government arsenal to express heterodox views was a common tactic throughout the Cultural Revolution and the Hundred Flowers Movement (Perry, 1995; Heilmann, 1996). By instilling in the popular consciousness the idea that there is a right to rebel in the name of symbols embraced by those in power, Maoist practices set the stage for the partly institutionalized, partly legitimate resistance we see today. A generation of mass

mobilization reinforced existing resistance routines and inspired innovation at the edge of the repertoire of contention. It altered popular expectations and very likely made people more willing to act up when faced with official misconduct (Perry, 1995: 34; O'Brien and Li, 1999: 377, 384, 391).

It is hardly novel to say that new identities are built on the shoulders of old ones. Contemporary Chinese villagers are the inheritors of a repertoire of contention that has been honed over decades, even centuries. In one sense, our Wangjiacun graffiti artist was using a familiar tactic (writing a wall poster) and seeking a "return" (*huan*) of his rights. In another sense, he was cloaking a daring proactive claim in reactive terms, demanding citizenship rights he had never enjoyed while making it appear he had just been deprived of them.<sup>12</sup>

#### APPENDIX

##### Interviewee List

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1. City and district people's congress deputy—May 1990.
  2. Provincial people's congress deputy—May 1990.
  3. Constitutional scholar—May 1990.
  4. Villagers' committee director—August 1992.
  5. Villagers' committee director—August 1994.
  6. Party secretary and villagers' committee director—July 1998.
  7. Villagers' committee director—September 1993.
  8. Villagers' committee members—July 1998.
  9. Villager—December 1995.
  10. Ministry of Civil Affairs official—June 1994, January 1997.
  11. Ministry of Civil Affairs official—June 1994.
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#### NOTES

1. For more on the village of Wangjiacun and the unfolding of a bitter collective complaint there, see O'Brien and Li (1995).

2. Riesenberg (1992: 176) writes, "Citizenship is today so freighted with notions of individual participation and self-government that we automatically think of it as an intrinsic part of democratic society. In fact, over most of history, considering it as a mechanism of discrimination and reward, it has been compatible with all forms of government." In the Chinese context,

Goldman and Perry (forthcoming: 3) have noted that citizenship “is not just another term for democratization.”

3. According to one analyst (Dowdle, 1997: 105), Vice Premier Jiang Chunyun met opposition because National People’s Congress deputies were disappointed with the amount of background information provided. Others have attributed the opposition to Jiang’s age, his education level, and his association with corruption scandals (Pei, 1995: 71).

4. In 2001, the Shenyang Municipal People’s Congress took the uncommon step of rejecting the Intermediate Court’s work report, but it stopped short of demanding that court officials, some of whom were under investigation for graft and ties to organized crime, resign (Chao, 2001).

5. The survey data appear in Shi (1999a: 403-4). Other surveys put the number at a still healthy 5% (Lianjiang Li, personal communication, September 1999).

6. Shi (1999a: 386) reports that voters ousted 30% of incumbent villagers’ committee (VC) members in the 1995 balloting in Shandong. A Ministry of Civil Affairs official has written that approximately 20% of VC chairs are not reelected “in most places” (Wang Zhenyao, 1998: 251). These sources do not make it clear if those leaving through ordinary retirement or choosing not to run are included.

7. Whether long-term migrants retain their voting rights varies by location. On the second-class citizenship of urban migrants, see Solinger (1999).

8. In a Moslem village I visited in the Tianjin suburbs in July 1998, primaries were hotly contested, but the final election was uncontested.

9. These posters were written on white paper (a color associated with death and ill fortune). This gesture attracted the attention of county officials, who investigated the charges and ruled that the balloting should be rescheduled and nominations reopened.

10. The figure of 5% seems remarkably high. In 1994, the Fujian Bureau of Civil Affairs received 562 election-related complaints and deemed 24 elections invalid (International Republican Institute, 1997: 27).

11. Kathryn Bernhardt has noted a similarly complex view of the Republican state in relation to rents: “In its role as rent dunnor, the state was seen as an oppressor, but in its role as the monitor of rents, it was seen as a potential ally” (Bernhardt, 1992: 229).

12. Some county officials use the phrase “return (*huan*) power to the people” analogously when promoting village elections, even though the people have never had the power that is being “returned” to them.

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# *Unearthing Popular Attitudes toward the Opium Trade and Opium Suppression in Late Qing and Early Republican Fujian*

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It has long been axiomatic among historians of late imperial and early Republican China that opium was a plague on the Chinese people—sapping their willpower and stamina, weakening the military, draining the Qing treasury while padding the coffers of the colonial Indian government, and reinforcing China's international image as an empire in decline. The settlements with Great Britain following the Opium War of 1839-1842 and the *Arrow* War of 1858-1860 ultimately compelled China to drop its own long-standing legal restrictions against the importation of foreign opium and sparked the growth of a lucrative domestic opium economy that eventually extended throughout the Qing empire.<sup>1</sup> By the turn of the twentieth century, opium was perceived as having caused widespread social dysfunction, and the drug served as a powerful metaphor for China's political somnambulism in the age of Western imperialism. In short, China had developed a serious opium problem—and along with it, a public

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rhetoric of condemnation that eclipsed the ambiguities of China's relationship with the drug.

The foundation of that rhetoric was the assumption that the Chinese people harbored an intense antipathy toward opium despite their inability to turn back imperialist aggression or combat the drug's addictive power. This article seeks to explore the validity of that assumption within the southeastern province of Fujian from just prior to the outbreak of the Opium War until the establishment of Guomindang authority in the 1920s. The analysis focuses on determining how residents of Fujian felt about the opium trade and the attempts to eliminate opium, how they expressed those sentiments (especially when their attitudes contradicted official policy), and how politics then and now have obscured the complexity of this story. I begin by briefly outlining the history of opium and opium suppression in China and Fujian, then analyze the historiographical obstacles encountered in the course of this study. The bulk of the article explores expressions of hostility to the opium trade as well as resistance to opium suppression in Fujian during three distinct periods. The first begins in the 1820s, when opium smuggling began in earnest, and lasts until the launching of the official anti-opium campaign in 1906. The second period constitutes the campaign itself (1906-1914), and the final period encompasses the warlord years and the rise of the Nanjing regime.

Fujian makes an important case study for a number of reasons, including its pattern of poppy cultivation and opium importation, the province's peculiar place in the history of China's troubled relationship with the drug, and the rich documentation left behind by officials and reformist elites involved in the late Qing/early Republican crusade against opium. Unlike the provinces of Sichuan and Yunnan, Fujian was never a major contributor to domestic poppy production, but because its small but important poppy crop coexisted with a thriving trade in imported opium, an analysis of Fujian's relationship with opium can touch on virtually all dimensions of China's opium problem. In addition, Fujian claims the dubious distinction of serving as the gateway through which opium smoking first entered the Qing empire (Waung, 1979: 209). As the illicit opium trade expanded beyond the confines of Canton (Guangzhou), Fujian's proximity and jagged coastline attracted smugglers and their customers.

But Fujian was also the birthplace of Lin Zexu, China's most famous anti-opium crusader, and the imperialist origins of the opium trade (as well as the destructive nature of the drug itself) generated considerable ill will. When the battle against opium was joined in the early twentieth century, elites from Fujian plunged into the crusade with exemplary vigor. Working together, officials manned the formal anti-opium bureaucracy while elites founded unofficial anti-opium associations, and both groups documented the progress of the suppression campaign by tracking government legislation, issuing public proclamations, and distributing periodicals. Many of those materials survive and yield considerable insight into not only the structure of state efforts to control opium but also the reactions of the local populace. Although the authors of these documents most likely saw themselves as crusaders for public health and order, the difficulties they encountered reveal that their mission was not always as welcome as they had hoped.

*OPIUM AND THE STATE IN LATE QING/  
EARLY REPUBLICAN FUJIAN*

As with the trade of any other commodity, the opium economy constructed in China and Fujian was at its heart a matter of supply and demand. Some poppies had been grown in China for medicinal or decorative purposes since antiquity, but the supply side of the Chinese opium equation really began in India, where merchants from Great Britain, the United States, and elsewhere saw an ideal opportunity to recoup the silver they spent so freely on Chinese goods such as tea and silk. These Western traders competed to feed a growing Chinese demand that seemed to be contained only by Qing proscriptions.

When the drug was first landed at various ports along the Fujianese coast, probably in the 1820s, smuggling networks dominated by local clan organizations quickly materialized to convey the opium to markets beyond the coast (Qi Sihe, 1959: *juan* 13; Lin Renchuan, 1985: 63-65; Xu Liangxiao, 1993: 137). By the time the importation of foreign opium was legalized in 1858, the smuggling trade was flourishing, and demand was already well established (USDS, 1849-1906: reel 1, no. 30, Jones to Secy. of State, 1 January 1857). That demand

and the price of the foreign drug soared when opium was freed from the stigma and judicial constraints of illegality. From the 1860s until 1887, the high taxes levied on the foreign drug in the treaty ports of Fuzhou and Xiamen (Amoy) meant that much of the Indian opium consumed in the province was actually landed in other ports and transported over the border by smugglers (Lin Manhoung, 1979: 15).<sup>2</sup> However, at the turn of the century, the import and transit (*lijin*) taxes on opium still provided substantial revenue for the coffers of the central and provincial governments (Mann, 1987: 111-16; Luo, 1936: 2/575-76). In short, Fujian's opium economy had generated ties to interests both underground and aboveboard, meaning that suppression would prove doubly difficult.

The lucrative trade in Indian opium also tempted some of Fujian's farmers in the arable coastal regions to enter the market with a home-grown variety that was of lower quality but far cheaper than the imported narcotic.<sup>3</sup> Fujian's poppy crop was concentrated in the prefecture of Xinghua and the rural areas surrounding the ports of Zhangzhou and Quanzhou (ZZGB, 1909: 20/104-6). Although the total production of opium in Fujian was quite small,<sup>4</sup> it was well entrenched and proved especially difficult to eradicate when the Chinese government reimposed its ban on the drug. Most of the opium grown in Fujian tended to be consumed within the province. Customs officials observed that during this period, consumption appeared to increase among the lower classes that could only afford the cheaper domestic opium or an adulterated compound (IMC, Santuaio, 1892-1901: 85; IMC, Foochow, 1892-1901: 109).

The increase in Chinese poppy cultivation after 1887 resulted in the steady reduction of British opium imports, as the latter lost a good portion of the Chinese market to the cheaper domestic drug. Legalization enabled the Qing state to tax opium in a number of different ways, including the transit tax mentioned above. Despite the enormous monetary benefits of legalization, the Qing government maintained its moral opposition to the opium trade, claiming that legalization and taxation of the drug helped it contain and monitor the flow. Cynics suspected that Qing morality had actually been overcome by financial exigencies, but when a reasonable opportunity for reform surfaced in 1906, the Chinese state moved quickly.<sup>5</sup> By that time, however, the opium trade had ceased to be a simple matter of foreign exchange and

had spawned an immense economy that absorbed Chinese land, labor, and lucre along with the narcotic itself.

By the early twentieth century, the decline of Indian opium revenues, combined with a growing international outcry against the opium trade, convinced the British government to cooperate with the Chinese (*Friend of China*, April 1909, 26: 38-39; Reins, 1991: 108-24). The Qing government announced the launch of a comprehensive ten-year campaign to eliminate the sale, consumption, distribution, and cultivation of opium in September 1906; by 1908, the Chinese and British had signed an agreement whereby the latter agreed to reduce the amount of Indian opium exported to China by one-tenth over a period of ten years (China No. 1, 1908). One of the most controversial clauses in that agreement was the three-year trial period mandated by the British. From the outset, skeptical British negotiators and anxious Indian opium traders suspected that Chinese anti-opium initiatives were nothing more than an attempt to substitute Chinese opium (and the tax revenue it generated) for the foreign drug. The trial period gave Britain an opportunity to invalidate the agreement if the Chinese government could not demonstrate significant progress within those three years. But when the agreement came up for renegotiation in 1911, China's unanticipated success gained Chinese negotiators enough moral leverage to wrest important concessions from the foreigners.

The campaign in Fujian mobilized an impressive network of officials and unofficial elite-led reform groups and attained considerable progress before the 1911 Revolution. Opium dens were shut down, and opium consumption in brothels and other public places became illegal. Farmers were instructed to replace their poppies with edible grains or other useful crops. Opium smokers in urban areas were tallied and registered, and inveterate addicts were permitted to purchase a license to buy a carefully measured ration of the drug from licensed opium shops. The ration was gradually eliminated, along with the opium shops. Officials, military men, and other social exemplars were inspected, and those who were declared addicted to opium were expected to enter treatment centers run by the government, foreign missionaries, or unofficial reform groups. Illegal opium and opium-smoking equipment seized by the authorities were publicly

burned in dramatic spectacles in the streets of Fuzhou and elsewhere (FQZJ, 1907: *baogao* section, 1; ZZGB, 1909, 20: 104-6).

The signing of a revised agreement with Britain on 8 May 1911, just months before the 1911 Revolution, marked an important new stage in China's attempts to eliminate its opium problem. The new agreement retained the original ten-year schedule, but with several important provisions that gave the Chinese government the chance to end the importation of Indian opium well before 1917. Article III stated that "Indian opium shall not be conveyed into any province in China which can establish by clear evidence that it has effectively suppressed the cultivation and import of native opium." That "clear evidence" was to be obtained by joint Sino-British investigation teams, which would tour each province that claimed to be free of the domestic drug. More important, Article II pledged to support Qing efforts by offering to end the Sino-Indian opium trade before the deadline when and if China could prove that it had eliminated all Chinese poppy cultivation (PRO/FO 233/134, Opium Agreement, 1911).<sup>6</sup> The eruption of the 1911 Revolution meant, however, that implementation of changes in campaign strategy in the provinces would have to wait until the chaos subsided.

In Fujian, the political upheaval created a temporary vacuum of power that was taken by many opium farmers and smokers as an opportunity to openly resume their formerly illicit activities. When the new regime had established itself, however, the opium restrictions were revived. The campaign against poppy cultivation intensified and became increasingly coercive as opium farmers resisted efforts to uproot their crops. Because of that resistance, Fujian lagged behind many other provinces—including Sichuan—in its attempt to eliminate domestic poppy cultivation, and it was not placed on the list of those provinces authorized to exclude the importation of Indian opium until 1914. The absence of British oversight after the conclusion of the Sino-Indian opium trade, together with the pressures on the new Republic, meant decreased vigilance even before the death of Republican President Yuan Shikai marked China's descent into warlordism. After 1916, opium became a favorite source of revenue for embattled warlords, and colorful fields of poppies blazed in Fujian once again.

*RHETORIC AND REALITY:  
THE PROBLEM OF OPIUM IN HISTORY*

To construct an analysis of attitudes toward the opium trade and opium suppression in Fujian, one must navigate around some fairly substantive historiographical obstacles. Compounding the more obvious difficulty of uncovering and interpreting evidence on a subject as controversial (and often illegal) as narcotics use and trafficking are the political implications of those sentiments today and during the late Qing/early Republic. When I began researching the official opium suppression campaign, I expected to find a wealth of Chinese documentation and secondary analyses. After all, this was a policy initiated by the Chinese themselves and designed to free China from the yoke of narco-imperialism, rescue the nation's reputation, and kindle a sense of patriotic pride. Yet until fairly recently, scholars in the People's Republic of China (PRC) showed a marked reluctance to deal with the issue of opium outside of the confines of the Opium Wars.<sup>7</sup> Materials on the Opium Wars are voluminous, as article after article and book after book rail against the immorality of capitalist greed and the calculated aggression generated by the imperialistic/colonial mentality. But not until the 1980s did the topic of opium suppression in the late Qing and early twentieth century become an acceptable avenue for historical exploration. Even then, many of the available works were situated squarely within a rhetorical framework (and political context) that left little room for impartial analysis.<sup>8</sup>

That framework, constructed from an amalgam of Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong's thought, and Chinese nationalism supported a myth of peasant/mass nobility within which the reality of China's ambiguous relationship with opium did not fit comfortably. The story of opium suppression in the late Qing and early Republic not only illustrated the ability of the central state to play a leading role in condemning and combating the opium trade but also revealed the need for it to do so. If the masses, portrayed almost universally by PRC historians as the motive force of progressive revolution in China, had wholeheartedly opposed the importation of foreign opium and had felt the sting of imperialist oppression each time they lit an opium pipe, the market for British opium would not have expanded so rapidly, and the

social dysfunction associated with widespread smoking would not have assumed the proportions of a national crisis. In fact, foreign involvement in the opium trade essentially ended at the treaty ports, where the drug was purchased, conveyed, taxed, distributed, prepared, sold, and consumed by Chinese. And what about the massive production of domestic opium in the latter half of the nineteenth century? Even a cursory examination of Chinese poppy production reveals a farming population that embraced opium as a cash crop and was sometimes willing to use violence to resist attempts to halt that profitable sideline. Thus, complicity in the opium trade on the part of the Chinese masses often has to be read between the lines of the dominant political discourse.<sup>9</sup>

In addition, a balanced view of opium reform also requires a more positive spin on regimes vilified by historians in China until quite recently. To describe and analyze the evolution of opium suppression policy, we must take a new slant on the Qing dynasty, often reviled as “degenerate, backward, and feudal” (Zhou Ruiguang, 1984: 161), as well as the Republic of the much-maligned Yuan Shikai, which guided this far-reaching social reform. Materials on the resurgence of opium addiction and the domestic opium trade in Fujian under warlord rule and Chiang Kaishek’s Nanjing regime are understandably more plentiful. Finally, even those Chinese historians who laud the suppression campaign almost uniformly portray the policy as an initiative reluctantly adopted by an otherwise apathetic or coercive Chinese state in response to powerful mass sentiment against the drug. From this perspective, it was the Qing and Republican states—specifically their weakness in the face of imperialist pressures, financial mismanagement, favoritism toward the wealthy and landholding classes, and so on—that provoked grassroots resistance to the suppression policy the masses were said to have supported in principle.

To be fair, there is ample evidence of popular hostility to opium in Fujian before, during, and after the suppression campaign. Prior to 1906, some Fujianese expressed their aversion to the drug in folk songs and poems and fought opium abuse by joining groups that condemned opium smoking. During the official anti-opium movement, large numbers of ordinary Chinese sought treatment for opium addiction in official refuges, listened to anti-opium propaganda, and

participated in events that celebrated the successes of the campaign. Even after the anti-climactic conclusion of the crusade, lyrical and other expressions of hostility toward opium persisted.

But not all Fujianese lamented the damage caused by opium abuse, and many stood to lose financial and physiological sustenance under the suppression policy. After all, while the British were at fault for supplying opium in ever-increasing quantities in defiance of Chinese law, many Chinese contributed to the problem by flouting the law in a variety of ways. Fujian could neither have developed nor sustained its thriving opium economy without a vast network of officials, merchants, transporters, distributors, and poppy farmers and opium smokers. Those individuals and any larger interests that they may have represented were the target of various stages of the late Qing/early Republican opium suppression campaign, and they did offer some resistance to the restrictions on their livelihood.

The remarkable progress of China's ambitious anti-opium campaign did not come smoothly or without objection from the Chinese people. Admittedly, violent resistance to suppression measures even at their most coercive was minimal in Fujian, given the scope of the opium restrictions. When the government restricted the amount of opium that could be sold or consumed, opposition tended to occur on an individual level and did not present serious problems for the state. Only when the focus of the campaign shifted to the elimination of the domestic poppy crop did relatively large-scale, organized resistance first appear, most sparked by popular resentment toward the coercive and sometimes capricious methods of enforcement adopted by the Chinese state. But the flourishing of the opium trade before and almost immediately after the campaign, as well as the problems that stymied official and unofficial opium reform mechanisms during the campaign, reveals that popular antipathy toward opium and the opium trade was by no means universal.

In their attempts to document grassroots hostility to the drug, recent Chinese chroniclers of Fujian's history have used the pages of county- and provincial-level *wenshi ziliao*<sup>10</sup> to introduce modern Chinese to the anger and sorrow of their ancestors as they shouldered the twin yokes of addiction and foreign oppression. The anti-opium songs and poetry featured in these publications testify to the existence of vocal opposition to the opium trade and to popular recognition of the

damage wrought by the drug on Chinese bodies, families, and society, although there is no way to determine how representative they were of contemporary popular opinion. The folk songs in particular appear to validate the belief of the Chinese Communist Party in the power of popular culture to reflect and shape public opinion. Many folk songs lamented the horrific consequences of poverty, the oppression of women, and the tyranny of the landholding classes, while others addressed themselves to more specific social ills—among them, the deplorable consequences of opium smoking and addiction (Hung, 1994: 221-69). If similar odes devoted to the more pleasing effects of the drug existed, they may not have been recorded and probably would not be reproduced for public consumption.<sup>11</sup>

The work of Western scholars on opium also has been constrained by politics since many researchers rely primarily on the descriptions of opium-related social, physical, and economic damage offered by foreign missionaries who lived and worked among the Chinese. Such assessments of opium's impact often became mired in the missionaries' own moralistic and political agendas. Those agendas may have obscured the possibility that opium prohibition failed to generate violent resistance because abstinence and withdrawal simply were not that difficult, either because the drug was not as addictive as supposed or because most Chinese were moderate users.

Historian Richard Newman believes that graphic descriptions of the physical decline and suffering endured by opium addicts may reflect the honest mistake of missionary observers who confused the symptoms of disease, injury, or chronic poverty with the most common local Chinese remedy for those conditions (Newman, 1995). This thesis provides a useful caveat to scholarly dependence on missionary reports. Western missionaries often were presumed to operate within a relatively altruistic and impartial framework, but their desire to distinguish themselves from their less noble compatriots and to promote their own good works encouraged them to identify and document serious consequences from opium abuse. However, Newman's provocative research is limited to English-language sources, and his conclusions do not address the persistence of genuine Chinese hostility to the drug. After all, Chinese crowds regularly heckled missionaries whom they perceived as linked with the opium trade, and many Chinese opium addicts freely sought out missionary opium refuges for

treatment. Other Western sources, such as the dispatches filed by representatives of the British, American, and French governments in China, corroborated many missionary observations while also taking great pains to report instances of Chinese resistance to the official suppression campaign.

Newman is part of a group of Western and Chinese scholars who recently have begun to recast the scholarly dialogue on opium, lifting it out of its long-standing home in the annals of diplomatic history and placing it firmly in the center of sociopolitical and literary analyses of Chinese history from the Opium War to the founding of the People's Republic.<sup>12</sup> As the editors of a recent collection of essays note, "In the last few years, the scholarly community has started to see opium as a more complex phenomenon with a multi-stranded history" (Brook and Wakabayashi, 2000a: 19). Opium has now become a lens through which we can examine state building, perceptions of social deviance and mechanisms for its control, and East-West interaction through medicine and religion, among other themes. Such an examination requires that we reread and rework classic sources on the Opium War to circumvent the historiographical obstacles noted above, incorporate recently discovered materials, and use historical and literary theory to address "a topic that, until recently, most historians assumed was adequately understood and therefore of little interest" (Brook and Wakabayashi, 2000a: 19).

What emerges from my study is the fundamental ambivalence of the Fujianese people toward opium, the opium trade, and the suppression campaign. Available sources indicate that popular outrage toward the flouting of Chinese laws and social conventions by opium importers and smokers, as well as a grassroots revulsion at the physical, moral, and socioeconomic consequences of opium abuse, existed side by side with considerable resistance to state suppression efforts. Even anti-opium propaganda can be productively mined for evidence of popular resistance. The *Fujian Anti-Opium Society Quarterly* (hereafter referred to as the *Quarterly*), in trumpeting the Society's impressive accomplishments, inadvertently sketched out the contours of the resistance that confronted reformers. The explanation for such complex popular attitudes toward the drug lies in a number of factors, including the time frame of these events, socioeconomic conditions, local power structures, geography, ideology, and the evolution of

Chinese legal responses to opium. Careful navigation of this volatile historical terrain reveals that the simplistic narrative of China's troubled relationship with opium has long overshadowed a colorful spectrum of popular sentiment toward a habit simultaneously conceived of as social vice and economic windfall. What becomes abundantly clear below is the degree to which that sentiment was embedded in a larger social, political, and economic context.

#### *POPULAR HOSTILITY TOWARD OPIUM IN FUJIAN*

Popular hostility toward opium abuse and the opium trade in Fujian province was expressed in a number of ways, including the composition of anti-opium songs and poetry, participation in heterodox religious sects that incorporated opposition to opium addiction into their ideological agendas, active support for the late Qing/early Republican opium suppression campaign, and opposition to the forcible cultivation of poppies under regional warlords in the early twentieth century. Fear and anger fueled many of these reactions, and the animosity toward opium was inseparable from the social and political turmoil that eventually toppled the Qing state and increased popular outrage at the depredations of Republican-era warlords. Opium was feared for the appalling toll it took on the bodies and families of addicts, as well as the way it empowered the foreigners who peddled the drug. But anger at this growing social problem also derived from a broader sense of dissatisfaction with the declining quality of life, the resentment of inadequate or extractive methods of reform, and the growth of a nationalism that condemned opium as the most blatant manifestation of Chinese weakness and Western imperialist greed. For most Chinese, opium addiction probably was symptomatic of China's more systemic sociopolitical illness, and hostility toward the drug was only one item on a larger list of grievances against the Chinese state and Western imperialists.

Despite their differences in form, geographical origin, and sophistication, the poems and songs woven into the following discussion share several of the themes mentioned above. Although generalized laments about the physical and moral perils of addiction can be found throughout this period, other themes appear to have evolved over time.

Early slaps at Western imperialism and Qing corruption tended to give way to appeals to nationalistic pride in self, province, and country in the early 1900s; eventually, a tone of bitter resignation became dominant after the death of Yuan Shikai. Some of the works are eloquent and obviously were penned by witty and educated individuals; others are preserved through the recollections of ordinary Chinese. The latter tend to be more crude, and some were clearly intended to shock listeners with their graphic depictions of the toll of addiction. Whether any of the authors were outside the literati may be impossible to determine, but the popularity of these songs and poems among ordinary villagers implies a shared hostility toward opium and its impact on life in Fujian that appears to have transcended class differences.

*ANTI-OPIMUM SENTIMENT PRIOR  
TO THE SUPPRESSION CAMPAIGN*

Hostility toward the opium trade from the 1830s to 1906 in many cases reflected a revolutionary, overtly political anger directed either at foreign imperialists or at the ruling dynasty. The Opium Wars may have demonstrated the sincerity of Chinese government opposition to opium imports, but the drug's subsequent legalization through a series of aptly named "unequal treaties" engendered a reservoir of ill will toward a Qing state too weak to enforce its will on foreign purveyors of the drug (despite the growing Chinese demand for opium). The problem with opium was but one symptom (or cause) of the internal strife that characterized the second half of the nineteenth century in China.

The events surrounding the first Opium War generated angry responses from educated Chinese, such as the anonymous priest who called himself "the Chrysanthemum Daoist." He composed an intriguing lyrical expression of hostility to opium in Fujian in the early 1840s. The twenty-stanza poem was elegantly carved into a rectangular tray made of the wood of the flowering pear tree. Firmly embedded in its specific historical context, the poem is punctuated by literary allusions and tied together by an undercurrent of sarcasm condemning all strata of Chinese society for their complicity in the flourishing opium trade. Within the small sample of anti-opium songs and poems discovered in the course of researching this article, this poem stands

out as unusual for its author's explicit condemnation of Chinese complicity in the trade and his frank acknowledgment of the drug's powerful allure.<sup>13</sup>

In a tone that is often savage and mocking, the poet works his way through each layer of Chinese society, from the imperial court down to the common farmer. He skewers Chinese peasants for planting poppies and then claiming to the government that the land lay fallow. He indicts officials for their hypocritical condemnation of the trade while they themselves smoked the drug and their corruption allowed it to bypass legal restrictions. Chinese soldiers come in for particularly intense criticism because they allowed addiction to destroy their capacity to fight. One compelling stanza asks the military how it expects to defeat the enemy while using only opium pipes as weapons. Smokers among the literati are said to have diluted their intellect, and addiction is blamed for destroying the livelihoods of artists and craftspeople by making them listless and dispirited. Toward the end of the poem, the author rises to a more global condemnation of the drug, decrying the sins of smokers against their ancestors and illustrating the pitiful consequences for families of these unfilial men. Then his readers are provided with a jarringly crude description of the appalling physical damage suffered by individual addicts. The conclusion warns readers to avoid "sinking in the opium sea," which can cause more damage than excessive drinking and gambling—a sea whose seductive powers the author compared to the charms of a beautiful woman.

Another poet writing around the time of the Opium War, this time from Zhenghe county in the northwestern prefecture of Jianning, included the following poem, titled simply "Opium," in his book *Songs from Central Fujian*:

*Materia Medica* records the *yangfu* plant,  
*Afuyong* is another name, they say;  
 Sown beneath the springtime moon,  
 Harvested till the first winter's day;  
 Foreigners gather the flower's sap,  
 Mix the poison and boil away;  
 Smoking the drug brings suffering,  
 But fragrance like an orchid, so they say;  
 The ignorant folk develop a need,  
 Like worms in smartweed, for more and more each day;

For years the sickness was concealed,  
 So it isn't easy to push away;  
 Foreigners each day grow more and more rich,  
 While Chinese grow poorer by the day. [Song Kuaian, as quoted in Qi Sihe, Lin Shuhui, and Shou Jiyu, 1957: 1/335]

This author acknowledges the lengthy history of the poppy in China, but opium is clearly presented as a commodity prepared and imported by foreigners to seduce Chinese into giving up their wealth.

Quanzhou scholar Wu Zeng, writing at around the same time, included another poem in his book *A Stimulating Piece about Quanzhou Customs*. The lyrics bemoan the dehumanizing consequences of opium smoking:

People consume opium,  
 The drug consumes them whole,  
 Melts away one's fat and blood,  
 Devours the very soul.  
 To the marrow of the bone the craving goes,  
 Smokers are living devils, everybody knows.  
 New devils crave a little,  
 Old ones need much more,  
 Scorched black is the color of a new devil's face,  
 Of human color, an old devil has no trace. [Wu, quoted in Lin Renchuan, 1985: 68]

Eschewing the need to assign blame for China's opium problem, Wu's piece focuses on human suffering and the social stigma attached to longtime addicts, who were commonly referred to as opium devils (*yapian gui*) because of their inhuman appearance and behavior.

Another compelling testament to popular recognition and disapproval of the social ravages of opium addiction in Fujian was passed down orally from sometime during the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century in the following "Anti-Opium Song." The villagers of Xiamao, located in Yanping prefecture, are said to have composed the lyrics:

The opium pipe is made of *sihua* bamboo;  
 I lie on the mat in a shrimp-like curlicue.  
 Smoking a pipe, I see a light;

the fire on the stove burns red and bright.  
 I gulp hot tea, purse my lips and start;  
 in a hundred ways the taste invades my liver and heart.  
 Yama himself runs the opium den;<sup>14</sup>  
 good men and women need not go in.  
 When first you smoke, the blood runs hot;  
 but smoke more, need more, and soon you are a sot.  
 Skin and bones, the fat became lean;  
 everyone calls me an opium fiend.  
 An opium addict cannot sit still;  
 sells his wife, his kids, and the land they till.  
 Wife and daughter, the fields he tends;  
 all go up in smoke in the opium den.  
 Evil merchants sell the drug to make money for the West;  
 disaster for the nation—it can't be for the best. [Xiao Qinglun, Zheng  
 Xuezhang, and Shu Yin, 1987: 142-43]

The song vividly described the power of addiction, the terrible toll the drug exacted on both the body and family of the smoker, and the amoral greed exhibited by opium merchants. The anti-foreign sentiment with which the undated song concludes leads me to believe that it was composed before the Opium Wars and the boom in domestic cultivation, although the lyrics could also reflect the absence of a domestic poppy crop in this inland prefecture after the boom had begun. Folk songs such as this were and are viewed by the current Chinese government as expressions of long-standing class-based antagonisms that could be used to foster class consciousness and embroider the historical tapestry of peasant revolution with rich, emotional hues.

Anti-opium sentiment was not confined to poetry and song in the second half of the nineteenth century. Discontented individuals in Fujian increasingly turned to heterodox religious groups as they sought spiritual renewal in those troubled times, and many such groups required that members abstain from opium smoking. Spirit-writing societies and the “Emptiness sect” (*zhenkong jiao*) were examples of organized expressions of popular opposition to opium in Fujian before the suppression campaign was inaugurated. Known by a variety of names, the spirit-writing societies originated in coastal Fujian (in the Quanzhou region) and Guangdong provinces in the mid-Qing, and their influence spread to the island of Taiwan in the 1850s. Members believed that the spirits would communicate with

them through mediums, who waited with planchettes ready to transcribe messages from the supernatural world onto sand tables. The messages usually related to specific prayers offered by the society, and in the mid- to late nineteenth century, those prayers often requested cures for opium smoking. In Taiwan, one such cure involved consuming a concoction containing the ashes of incense burned to summon the spirits mixed with the water used to clear the sand table. This allegedly efficacious combination often led to abdominal pain and vomiting. Smokers were also asked to burn their smoking equipment in front of the sand table to demonstrate their sincerity.<sup>15</sup>

The Emptiness sect apparently was a similar type of spiritual brotherhood. One of the primary requirements for membership was abstention from opium smoking, and a Chinese account credited the widespread appeal of the group to its position on the drug. This well-organized sect was headquartered in Youqi county, Yanping prefecture, an important commercial center that served as a hub for opium importers from the coastal areas who wished to transport their goods into Jiangxi province. The sect attracted followers primarily from lower-class workers such as “boatmen, shoemakers, prison guards, chairbearers, vagrants, small shopkeepers, and doctors” (Pan Youlian, 1989: 51-53). The popularity of these groups indicated a strong tendency among some nonelites to support anti-opium initiatives, but their role in the official anti-opium movement is unknown and likely problematic, given the anti-state bias implicit in such heterodox organizations.

Knowledgeable readers will wonder at the omission of any discussion of the Taiping Rebellion from this section since abstention from opium was a key pillar in Hong Xiuquan’s social agenda. There is very little documentation regarding the impact of Taiping ideology on the masses of Fujian. The province generally fell outside the area of Taiping occupation, becoming a battlefield primarily during the frantic, bloody Taiping retreat from Nanjing. Ironically, the most significant impact of the Taiping Rebellion on Fujianese attitudes regarding opium may have been not a broadening of potential support for suppression but rather resentment toward the Qing state for violently suppressing the rebellion and for imposing the despised *lijin* tax, partly intended to cover the astronomical cost of battling the Taipings.<sup>16</sup>

Anti-opium sentiment in Fujian also surfaced, on occasion, as part of a more generalized mistrust of Western missionaries. Vocal skepticism and pointed heckling greeted many British and American missionaries, as some members of the Chinese audience questioned their motives in the face of the prominent role played by their home nations in the Sino-Indian opium trade (MacGowan, 1907: 200, 340-41). Such reactions were particularly common during the mid-nineteenth century and remained prevalent in areas free of poppy cultivation. In Fujian, however, there was virtually no violence directed at missionaries solely as representatives of Western opium-importing nations, despite the predominance of imported opium in the province. The one notable exception may have been the so-called Kucheng (Gucheng) massacre of 1895, when a local vegetarian sect (*caihui*) killed eleven foreigners. The murders were rumored to have been committed in retaliation for alleged Western support of Japan during the recent Sino-Japanese War. However, widespread opium addiction in the Gutian area may have been partly responsible for the popularity of the society since some of its members joined the sect because it offered a supposed cure for opium smoking. Hostilities between the vegetarians and foreign missionaries may have arisen over competition for recruits from a similar social pool (Rankin, 1961: 30-32, 36-38; USDS, 1849-1906: reel 8, Hixon to Secy. of State, 2 May 1896).

Anti-opium sentiment was not necessarily accompanied by blanket hostility to foreigners. Many Chinese joined Christian churches in Fujian precisely because of the anti-opium stance of the missionaries and the opium treatment facilities built by Western physicians. Some of the most devoted Chinese converts were former opium smokers rehabilitated in missionary hospitals and clinics.<sup>17</sup> For others, a healthy dose of anti-opium propaganda was part of the broader moral curriculum advanced in missionary schools and churches.

Additional evidence of popular opposition to opium that clearly eschewed any anti-foreign component surfaced on the eve of the suppression campaign in the villages outside Fuzhou, where the anti-opium work of mission hospitals in the city inspired villagers to seek help from Westerners for their own opium problems. One meticulously documented example concerned the small village of A-iong (Chinese characters unknown), a few miles outside Fuzhou. In late

February 1906, with the agreement of their neighbors, two men who had been cured of their habit in a Church Missionary Society hospital in Fuzhou summoned the Anglican missionaries to the village. The evangelist-physicians spent two weeks attempting to cure all of the village's opium smokers, and when word of their success spread to other nearby villages, they took their treatment regimen to grateful villages in the rural areas around Fuzhou (Mercy and Truth, May 1907: 147-53).

Clearly, the opium problem generated a significant degree of popular antipathy in late Qing Fujian well before the announcement of the official suppression campaign in late 1906. Without further documentation, it is impossible to link that sentiment directly to grassroots support for that campaign, but the evidence available does indicate that expressions of hostility toward opium could be found in all strata of society, outside as well as within the major urban centers, and was as multifaceted as the problem itself.

*POPULAR HOSTILITY TO OPIUM, 1906-1915*

During the suppression campaign, popular hostility to opium generally was expressed through and interpreted as support for state policy. Many officials and unofficial elite-led reform groups became deeply involved in implementing and enforcing the campaign, and in many cases, they set the tone for reform. For this reason, the anti-opium songs and poetry cited in this section represent less the spontaneous expression of popular sentiment than the appropriation of the rhetoric of hostility by activists who supported suppression even while many of them came to reject the Qing state. But many others not directly involved in the mechanisms of reform also appeared to support the initiative, although to discern cooperation that is purely voluntary is admittedly difficult. Some smokers and their families took advantage of increased opportunities for treatment; in addition, eager audiences flocked to mass meetings and celebrations organized by opium reformers and officials. Some undoubtedly were drawn by the spectacle, but many must have come away influenced by the fiery speeches and the dramatic, public incineration of opium and smoking equipment. Such gatherings resulted from a conscious effort by Fujian's elite to draw ordinary Chinese into an emergent public space

for political activism, a space created in part by opium reform. That elites felt the need for these efforts indicated a fundamental change in the nature of Chinese politics, and that so many responded revealed either a reservoir of popular support for suppression or a sense of obligation stimulated by a fear of the state's coercive powers.

Fuzhou was the site of several dramatic anti-opium demonstrations that attracted thousands of townspeople. Carefully organized and choreographed by local reformers, these meetings featured emotional speeches, bands, and colorful parades, and they culminated in bonfires fueled by confiscated contraband. The *Quarterly* claimed that the crowd was noisy and enthusiastic as it followed the procession and cheered the bonfires (FQZJ, 1908, 3: *zazhi* section, 20). By 1911, local elites in cities all across the province had set up a network of 112 branches (*zhishe*) of the Anti-Opium Society (IMC, Foochow, 1902-1911: 91), most of which also staged mass meetings, treated addiction, and distributed anti-opium propaganda. Mass rallies against opium also erupted outside Fuzhou, some without the guiding hand of the Anti-Opium Society. For example, one source claimed that in 1912, the people of Pucheng county (Jianning prefecture) rose up spontaneously and burned a large amount of opium seized locally (Zhang Xingzheng, 1987: 31).

Other local reform groups also participated in the official policy against opium. In the city of Fuzhou, members of the *qiaonan gongyishe* (literally, the South-of-the-Bridge Public Welfare Society) showed their support by sponsoring a branch of the Anti-Opium Society (QGZ, 1908-1909). Outside the capital, in Jianning prefecture, a branch society of the Fujian Anti-Opium Society was founded, followed by the establishment of an organization called the Brother-in-Law Society (*dabai hui* or *baida hui*). The grueling initiation ritual for the latter group, which required among other things continuous kowtowing from sunrise to sunset and the recitation of poetry with a mouth full of water, was said to cure opium addiction (Chen Guansan and Zou Xiutong, 1986: 43-44). All of these activities indicate that a significant degree of popular interest in and support for suppression accompanied the official campaign.

Modern education, presumably laced with a strong dose of nationalistic rhetoric, nourished popular hostility to opium, and students in missionary and government schools were among the most enthusias-

tic promoters of the opium suppression campaign.<sup>18</sup> They turned out in large numbers for any public meeting or celebration, participated in anti-opium essay contests, and joined anti-opium organizations. According to the missionary George Newell, one very well-attended meeting was organized in 1907 by students of government schools in Fuzhou to discuss and celebrate Beijing's order to close down opium shops all over China. Missionaries, mission students, and Chinese officials were all invited to speak, and the gathering featured a boisterous procession of students in Western dress waving anti-opium banners (Newell, folder 2, letter dated 15 May 1907). Moreover, Newell also reported that in some locales, students seemed to view themselves as partly responsible for enforcing the campaign:

A few months ago some students were returning from a government school for the holiday season, and in one of the villages through which they passed, they saw some poppies growing. They went over in a body and pulled up every plant and tramped them to pulp. No resistance was offered and nothing done about it, the conscience of the owners evidently not being quite clear about the matter. [Newell, folder 2, letter dated 7 April 1908]

The lack of opposition also may have reflected a healthy fear on the part of the farmers of individuals connected to the state-led campaign in any way. In addition, an American diplomat claimed that students of a Fuzhou military school took it on themselves to comb the city streets for violators of the opium restrictions and in one instance beat up a prominent scholar for smoking in public (USDS, 1906-1910: reel 104, 774/110-11, enclosure in Gracey to Secy. of State, 28 May 1907).

The Fujian Anti-Opium Society spread its message in a variety of ways, most of which are recorded in the pages of the Society's quarterly publication. For example, the *Quarterly* often included political cartoons that graphically depicted the toll of opium addiction on the physical and social body. One issue featured a number of anti-opium songs penned by supporters and promoters of opium suppression; these tunes were intended not only to *reflect* popular exultation but also to *produce* it. Translated below are the lyrics of several songs, reprinted in the *Quarterly*, that were sung in Fuzhou by local school-

children when foreign opium imports into Fujian were halted in 1914. Presented as they were on an occasion of triumph, the songs signal a clear shift from fear and anti-foreignism to pride in nation and province. While all of the songs contain references to the Western origins of the commerce in opium, they also stress the current confluence of Chinese and Western sentiment against that trade.<sup>19</sup>

This first song was sung by students from a YMCA school and was representative of others at the same celebration (FQZJ, 1914, 12: *zazhi* section, 6-7):

This terrible thing—who can trace?  
Disaster it brought to our native place.  
The once-closed ocean was opened wide,  
And allowed the poison to come inside.  
A thousand ships, ten thousand again,  
Continued to arrive without an end.  
So many years, no one can say,  
Our country weakened by the day.  
The people drank that poisoned wine,  
Drank till they lost their presence of mind.  
Now East and West, hearts beat as one,  
From today begins the prohibition!  
By sealing off the river's source,  
We can stop the poison's course.  
From Fujian's rivers and mountains high,  
Our country's flag waves in the sky.  
And so, then, from this day on,  
The people's illness is all gone!

A brief poem written by Society member Wang Junwen expressed his enthusiasm for the same event:

How can poppies blight our blessed land?  
We wailed for help for many a year.  
Now the filthy flow has finally ceased,  
Today the Min River flows clean and clear.

And finally, a single verse from a longer song presented by the Xiehe School “joyfully celebrated the prohibition of opium imports” and reiterated the same themes:

Taut in the wind our national flag flaps,  
 As the pipes are destroyed, the crowd all claps,  
 Flap, clap, flap, clap.  
 There are ten thousand ways to right this wrong,  
 And change our country from weak to strong,  
 The masses celebrate them in a song.

How accurately these children represented the sentiment of those “masses” is not easily determined. During the anti-opium campaign, it became difficult to distinguish genuine popular antipathy toward opium from a general tolerance of official policy or fear of state repression. The restrictions that closed down numerous opium shops and dens in Fujian’s cities apparently met with relatively little resistance, while throngs of townspeople attended mass meetings, thousands enrolled in the state-controlled opium rationing scheme, and others sought treatment for addiction. The relative ease with which these anti-consumption measures were implemented may have reflected progressive urban reformism present long before 1906. But once the state had mandated opium reform, hostility to opium was no longer a matter of choice.

#### *POPULAR HOSTILITY TO OPIUM AFTER 1916*

After the death of Yuan Shikai, public feeling about opium changed once again, as the campaign sputtered to an inconclusive end. From the beginning of the warlord era into the 1920s and 1930s, the joy and pride that characterized the anti-opium celebrations of the early Republic gave way to despair. The Fujianese countryside was ravaged by competing warlord regimes and by the demands of the Nationalist regime in Nanjing, which all relied significantly on revenues derived from taxes on domestic opium (Zhou, 1999: 40, 61). Foreign diplomats, missionaries, and congregations of Chinese Christians petitioned the Chinese government and the international community to highlight the plight of many Chinese farmers and to beg for help; although significant efforts were made to organize a global response to the narcotics issue, China was left to deal with its own opium problem.<sup>20</sup>

Most of Fujian's poppy crop after 1916 was grown in the traditional trouble spots of Xinghua, Quanzhou, and Funing prefectures along the coast. According to many Chinese historians, because of the ever-present need for revenues to pay for military expenses, farmers in those regions were encouraged and even compelled to cultivate opium poppies despite Nationalist attempts to revive the suppression campaign. For example, in 1922 in Fuan county (Funing prefecture), warlords apparently forced farmers to plant poppies instead of rice and wheat even after a devastating flood had decimated local food stores (Miao Xiaoning, 1988: 55).<sup>21</sup> Farmers in Zhangpu county (Zhangzhou prefecture) were said to have planted poppies to satisfy high land taxes imposed by warlords (Ya Ji, 1986: 29). Local authorities allegedly forced farmers in Shunchang county (Yanping prefecture) to meet a poppy quota set by those officials (Xia Weijian and Ye Xiangrong, 1987: 203). The need for military revenue was undoubtedly the primary impetus behind the resurgence of poppy cultivation in Fujian, but whether local farmers planted poppies because they were compelled to do so against their will—either by exorbitant taxation or by military force—remains uncertain. Most Chinese sources insist that heavy taxes made lucrative cash crops such as opium a regrettable necessity for otherwise unwilling Fujianese peasants.

Oppressive taxes were also levied on the consumption and sale of opium, measures that in effect legalized the vice and apparently increased the financial oppression of the poor. In Jianyang county, bans on gambling, prostitution, and opium were replaced in 1931 by heavy taxes. Local rumor had it that one impoverished addict even sold his wife's pants to buy more of the drug (Wei Hongyuan, 1985). Warlords in Shunchang county established "opium paste administration offices" (*tugao guanlisuo*) to collect from opium dens a tax of four jiao per opium lamp (Xia Weijian and Ye Xiangrong, 1987: 203). The tone of these accounts implies popular support for suppression, or at least objections to taxes on opium, but there is no evidence of active sabotage of or rebellion against the revived opium economy.

Accordingly, literary expressions of hostility to opium lost their patriotic fervor and became gloomy; most focused on the decay of body and family that accompanied addiction. For example, this brief ditty was popular in the 1930s in the northwestern county of Jianyang:

The sons of opium smokers are very few,  
Smokers don't understand what to do.  
Before they smoked, their families were fine,  
Afterward, most of their wives left, too. [Wei Hongyuan, 1985: 54]

Around the same time, a Guomindang government propaganda team penned the following song, explicitly spelling out how opium smoking eroded traditional Confucian values:

When addiction kicks in, pity the family's plight,<sup>22</sup>  
Even with good medicine, it's hard to set the spirit right.  
The homes of hard-core addicts fall into decay, while moderate users keep  
debtors at bay,  
All their friends and relatives arrive to cart it all away.  
All it takes is one small pipe to rob a hero of his life,  
His home and land are gone as well, he's left with naught but strife.  
The friends about whom he used to care, come into the smoker's lair,  
And take away everything that's there.  
No matter how much cash is spent, to buy some land or pay the rent,  
All that results is debt and hardship, that is the lament.  
Workers, farmers, scholars, merchants—all kinds of men, you can find  
them hidden in an opium den,  
No matter if they're good or bad, they share the mats again and again.  
The children hate this terrible life, and complain to the ancestors about the  
strife,  
But they pretend not to hear what goes on in this life. [Huang Yunqing,  
1990: 28-29]

Yet another song—this one perhaps more “authentic” in its representation of grassroots sentiment—was recalled and sung to modern oral historians by an elderly man from Shanghang county in remote Dingzhou prefecture:

. . . [P]eople with no money,  
Can only knit their brows.  
First exchange your furniture,  
Then sell your pants and blouse.  
Continue by selling off your land,  
And then selling your house.  
It's just like moxibustion,  
Burns your flesh until you shout.  
Wives married off to a distant place,

Children sold cheap to another house.  
The family fortune squandered,  
You become a solitary louse.  
Beg for food and skip some meals,  
Sleep in temples for lack of a house.  
Plagued by sickness and poverty,  
The situation worsens as each day goes by.<sup>23</sup>  
Until finally, you just drop dead,  
And not a soul blinks an eye.  
No more relatives or friends,  
And no family standing by.  
The flyswatter hanging useless now,  
It is the mosquitoes who come to cry.  
Ground beetles also swarm around,  
Toward the corpse rats and fleas turn their eye.  
The four pieces of wood used as a bed,  
Now serve as a coffin to lay in when you die.  
It's carried out beyond the city walls,  
Very little dirt is moved to make a place for it to lie.  
The lament is that you were an opium fiend,  
This is the end result—so long, goodbye. [Lan Hanmin, 1984: 20-21]

The song clearly reflected the peasant nightmare of a lonely pauper's burial and the collapse of a social support network among friends and relatives.

In sum, popular hostility to opium in Fujian existed before, during, and after the formal prohibition campaign. That hostility not only was based on the devastating social and physical damage attributed to the drug but also was directed at those responsible for its presence in Fujian, Chinese or foreign. Not everyone supported the crackdown, though, and attempts to eradicate opium smoking and eliminate Fujian's small but tenacious poppy crop were met with various forms of resistance.

#### *RESISTANCE TO OPIUM RESTRICTIONS AND PROHIBITIONS IN FUJIAN*

Much of this discussion focuses on the first half of the nineteenth century prior to the legalization of opium imports, as well as on the period of the suppression campaign itself. It would be misleading to

speak of resistance during most of the latter half of the nineteenth century, when imported and domestic opium was legal (though some smuggling persisted). In addition, the rapid expansion of Fujian's legitimate opium economy when legal restrictions were lifted could be viewed as illustrating the enduring financial and psychological appeal of opium. Before the treaties that legalized the importation of opium from abroad and the later measures that lifted the ban on cultivating poppies within Chinese borders, however, those who purchased, transported, prepared, marketed, grew, or smoked opium operated in open defiance of Chinese law. The same conditions held again in the early twentieth century, when the Qing government initiated the ten-year suppression campaign. After the cessation of British opium imports, particularly after the death of Yuan Shikai, opium suppression became a farce until the late 1920s, when the Nationalist regime ascended and the GMD sporadically attempted to restrict opium use.

*RESISTANCE TO SUPPRESSION PRIOR TO 1906*

Before foreign opium imports were legalized following the *Arrow* War, Fujian hosted a small but growing black-market trade in opium that took advantage of the province's coastal location, its navigable river systems, and its domination by strong local lineages. Driven north from Guangzhou by sporadic Chinese crackdowns on opium smuggling and a desire to attain easier access to tea-growing regions, Western merchants bearing opium made contact in the 1820s with Chinese traders in Fujian eager to transport the drug inland (Wong, 1998: 359).

The first center of opium smuggling in Fujian was Zhaoan county, located along the border with Guangdong near the city of Shantou (Swatow), but the trade soon shifted north to the jagged coastal regions around the trading ports of Quanzhou and Zhangzhou (Qi Sihe, 1959: 103-4). The small, isolated fishing villages in the latter areas, with their easy access to inland waterways, were particularly attractive. According to one account, the scene along the coastline was often chaotic, with "thousands upon thousands whistling to sailors on the [foreign opium] boats to make deals" (Lin Renchuan, 1985: 63-65).

After the foreign opium was purchased, powerful local clans controlled the protection, transportation, and sale of the drug. For example, in Pujiang county, the Shi, Chen, and Ding clans were among those who cooperated willingly with British traders and set up extensive trafficking networks that moved opium throughout Fujian and into markets in the cities of Ningbo and Shanghai and as far north as Shandong province. One source described how the village of Yakou was transformed into a storehouse for the imported drug, with a neat row of warehouses set up along the docks, presumably in full view of local residents and officials (Xu Liangxiao, 1993: 137-38; Lin Renchuan, 1985: 63-65).<sup>24</sup>

The ingenious means used to conceal the drug from local authorities indicate that Chinese involved in the trade were aware of its illicit nature. Opium was discovered hidden among containers of goods such as betel nuts, fish, and cloth. On one occasion, the drug was molded to resemble swallows' nests, which presumably were then passed off to customs officials as culinary delicacies (Lin Renchuan, 1985: 63-65; Collis, 1946: 77-79). Often, however, official complicity made concealment unnecessary; in 1857, the American consul in Fuzhou charged that a number of firms openly conducted their unlawful trade in opium (USDS, 1849-1906: reel 1, no. 30, Jones to Secy. of State, 1 January 1857).

Even after opium was legalized, smugglers devised numerous schemes to transport the drug to eager consumers without having to pay the heavy taxes that served as the justification for lifting the prohibitions on its importation and transportation. The tax rate was extremely high at the treaty ports of Fuzhou and Xiamen, so many Chinese traders bought their opium at ports with lower taxes and smuggled it into Fujian (USDS, 1844-1906: reel 4, no. 42, LeGendre to Dept. of State, 30 September 1867; no. 45, LeGendre to Dept. of State, 28 May 1868). During the 1860s and 1870s, however, a legitimate system of opium importation and distribution grew up alongside this black market, and the state was able to establish control over much of the opium trade in Fujian by 1906.

The opium economy of Fujian was a complex framework of supply and demand that rapidly became an integral part of the society, economy, and politics of the province. By 1906, that framework included farmers, merchants, laborers, boatmen, boilers, bureaucrats,

strongmen, and manufacturers of opium-smoking paraphernalia, not to mention the owners and patrons of pawnshops, brothels, wine shops, and opium dens, all of whom depended on either the financial or physiological returns of the opium trade in late Qing Fujian. One account estimates that at least 100,000 people were involved just on the supply side of that province's opium economy in the mid-nineteenth century, and that number undoubtedly increased substantially with the expansion of domestic poppy cultivation (Lin Renchuan, 1985: 68). Presumably, many of these individuals did not wish to see their livelihoods eliminated.

*RESISTANCE TO THE OPIUM SUPPRESSION  
CAMPAIGN IN THE CITIES OF FUJIAN*

To determine how and to what extent Fujianese resisted the official anti-opium campaign, we must first recognize that the restrictions elicited different popular reactions in the urban centers, where opium distribution and consumption were the primary targets of the campaign, than in the rural poppy-growing regions. The available evidence indicates that although steps taken to reduce consumption generally met with compliance, a sizable minority of Fujian's poppy farmers offered both passive and violent resistance to efforts to eliminate this profitable crop. Local socioeconomic conditions, as well as state enforcement strategies, largely determined the nature and extent of that resistance.

Urban dwellers might be expected to object to restrictions on the demand and supply of opium because the policy not only entailed substantial monetary sacrifices but also often meant physical suffering and limits on their personal freedoms. First and foremost, the suppression policy obviously meant the severing of a lucrative line of income for those involved in transporting, preparing, and selling the drug, as well as those who specialized in manufacturing opium-smoking implements. In addition, to force consumers to give up their habit, a census of smokers was ordered in most areas, and a rationing scheme was implemented.<sup>25</sup> Vigilance by officials, the new police forces (in some areas), and unofficial reform groups translated into constant pressure to comply with the opium restrictions. Yet sources indicate that although strong and frequent objections to these measures did

occur throughout the province, resistance was scattered and uncoordinated, usually occurring spontaneously and on an extremely small scale.

Beginning in 1907 and continuing into the early Republic, opium shops, opium dens, brothels that also sold opium, and all other retail distributors were ordered to be shut down by provincial authorities. The lack of widespread resistance to this very visible measure was largely a function of the nature of the establishments and their clientele. These were marginal establishments that operated in the best of times at the outermost boundaries of acceptable society. Respectable, upper-class users generally prepared and smoked their drug at home, and resistance by customers who frequented opium dens probably would not elicit much public sympathy or support. This particular measure was a visible success in most urban areas, but sporadic resistance continued into the early Republic, as determined merchants secretly opened small dens.

The official and unofficial reform groups that worked to implement and enforce these restrictions were granted extensive and intrusive police powers that potentially could terrify or anger those whom the measures affected. For example, the Fuzhou Anti-Opium Society conducted nightly raids of businesses, private homes, and religious and administrative establishments, and the *Quarterly* printed the names of violators. Branches of the Society carried out similar efforts throughout the province. The elimination of demand also threatened individual smokers with personal suffering. In the county seat of Xianyou (Xinghua prefecture), a British missionary noted that several of her chairbearers in that town complained, "If we do not eat opium, we could not carry the chairs" (IWCD, August 1899: 177-78). As evidence that they anticipated or had already experienced popular objections to their mission, the Society's regulations clearly stated that those who resisted arrest or caused the injury of an inspector or police officer would be punished severely (FQZJ, 1907, 1: *zancheng* section).

Another form of resistance that plagued provincial authorities in Fujian and that deserves far more attention than it can be given in this article was the smuggling of opium by Chinese from Taiwan who claimed extraterritorial privileges by virtue of their Japanese passports. Whether this constituted a deliberate policy by the Japanese

colonial government or simply entrepreneurial ingenuity on the part of the Chinese traders was not clear. However, it drove home to opium reformers, and undoubtedly to the general populace as well, the point that the ultimate success of opium suppression had as much to do with the ability of the central Chinese state to remove the challenges to its sovereignty contained in the so-called unequal treaties as with the diligence of provincial authorities (USDS, 1910-1929: reel 113, 893.114/104, enclosures in Maynard to Secy. of State, 15 December 1913).

For the most part, open resistance to anti-consumption measures was confined to the owners of opium shops and dens and generally did not involve rank-and-file opium smokers. Passive resistance by smokers and local officials in the form of ignoring the regulations was far more common, especially in the countryside. The following patchwork of anecdotes indicates the type and degree of resistance most often encountered throughout the province during this part of the campaign. Beginning in the populous northeast, some owners of opium dens in Fuzhou attempted to get around the prohibition by conducting their business in boats floating along the rivers and canals of the city or by turning the homes of smokers into impromptu dens (USDS, 1906-1910: reel 104, 774/113-14, enclosure in Paddock to Rockhill, 24 July 1907). Others met with and begged the provincial judge to extend the deadline for the closure of opium shops (Newell, folder 2, letter dated 15 May 1907). Although availability of opium in the capital had been effectively curtailed, missionaries cautioned that "in the mountain villages twelve miles from Foochow the opium dens are still doing business in some places openly" (Foochow Messenger, April 1909: 1). In Gutian county (Fuzhou prefecture), a degree holder who managed the area's largest opium warehouse refused to comply with the prohibitions until arrested (IWCD, April 1910: 60, 106-7). Several years earlier, a prominent reformer leader in Gutian was ambushed on a back street by several dozen people—including seven women—and badly beaten. The attack apparently was in retaliation for a raid that publicly exposed opium dealers and some of their literati customers (CMS, Fuhkien Mission, Incoming Originals, 1900-1934, no. 228, letter from Woods dated 5 August 1907). In the prefecture of Funing, the intricacy of the retail trade complicated regulation, and on the eve

of the 1911 Revolution, a few dens were still in operation (Miao Xiaoning, 1988: 54-55).

No poppies were cultivated in the western half of the province, and local suppression efforts there focused solely on eliminating demand for the drug. Enforcement of the restrictions was slower and more haphazard than in the northeast. And here, too, the fist of the suppression campaign came down far more forcefully in the big cities, making resistance outside those urban centers not only less likely but less necessary. In the prefecture of Jianning, for example, the very public closure of all opium dens in Jianning City in mid-1907 was not replicated in the surrounding countryside until more than a year later (CMS, Fuhkien Mission, Original Incoming, 1900-1934, no. 148, letter from H. S. Phillips, 29 March 1908). In addition, missionaries claimed that even in that city, many of the opium dens that were closed with great fanfare in 1907 continued to do business through less conspicuous side doors (Mercy and Truth, August 1908: 245-49).

The anti-opium campaign lost ground during the political chaos that accompanied the 1911 Revolution, but the new regime quickly asserted its support for suppression. As the campaign revived, resistance to opium reform of the same scope and nature continued in the cities of Fujian until the official conclusion of the campaign in 1917.

*RESISTANCE TO REFORM IN THE  
POPPY-GROWING REGIONS OF FUJIAN*

Before the 1911 Revolution, authorities were able to make some progress in reducing the amount of land planted in poppies, but the job was far from complete; in many areas, the campaign was quietly ignored. Provincial officials recognized the importance of eliminating the provincial poppy crop but feared the wrath of local poppy growers, who were renowned for their general truculence. In a memorial to Beijing in 1910, Songshou, governor-general of Fujian and Zhejiang, warned, "As for investigating and prohibiting the planting of opium, those specially assigned officials personally walk among the fields. [They] suffer [and the situation is] dangerous" (ZZGB, 1910, 32: 159-60). In some ways, however, the few cases of violence were far easier to deal with than passive resistance. In the latter, more complex

situation, the complicity, negligence, or intimidation of local officials and elites made the truth difficult to ascertain and the proper state response equally difficult to impose.

In the southeast—the center of provincial poppy growing—enforcement of restrictions on selling and consuming opium was less stringent, so there was less need for resistance. For example, in Yongchun subprefecture, where opium consumption apparently had reached epidemic proportions by 1906, officials who were themselves longtime smokers posted but did not enforce anti-opium restrictions (PCE/FMC, box 10, file 1, Thompson to Dale, 22 December 1910). In the township of Shima, located southeast of Zhangzhou City, opium smoking was said to have been endemic among officials and the general populace. One author claimed that “local ruffians and hooligans not only smoked or ate opium, but also bought and sold it, eventually seizing a monopoly [on the trade in Shima]” (Lin Wenji, 1988: 60-62).

Before the 1911 Revolution, resistance to the anti-opium campaign did break out in Tongan county, the epicenter of Fujian’s poppy cultivation since the mid- to late nineteenth century. During the late Qing suppression campaign, the strength and violence of clans in the Tongan area sometimes made enforcement quite dangerous. In one case reported by the U.S. consul at Xiamen, the Kang clan dominated the district just west of Tongan City and had made their living from opium cultivation for many years. The magistrate himself led an expedition in late 1908 or early 1909 to investigate the more intransigent clan members. When confronted, the violators pulled out the offending plants peacefully. However, when the magistrate ordered three clan leaders to accompany him to his offices to sign a pledge never to grow the poppy again, hundreds of villagers gathered to protest. Violence erupted when the crowd misinterpreted a warning shot fired by an overanxious yamen clerk. Troops were sent from Xiamen to help quell the violence, but most of the clan fled (USDS, 1906-1910: reel 107, 775/585, Arnold to Secy. of State, 28 January 1909). After that, the magistrate enforced the new restrictions with an iron hand, personally inspecting his jurisdiction for violations. He ordered the arrest of the elders of any village in which poppy plants were found and torched entire villages when faced with intransigence (USDS, 1906-1910: reel 108, 774/690, excerpt from China No. 3, 1909).

The prefecture of Xinghua proved especially intractable, and resistance broke out in cities and rural areas. A British diplomat wrote that a half-dozen proprietors of opium dens in Xinghua City were publicly cangued for refusing to shut down their establishments, and a Western missionary physician claimed that although the city's opium shops briefly closed their doors, the owners talked the magistrate into a three-month reprieve (China No. 1, 1908, no. 28, report by Leech in Jordan to Grey, 27 November 1907; B. Van S. Taylor in Mercy and Truth, September 1907: 262-63). The campaign in Xinghua picked up momentum in its second year, but apparently progress was largely confined to the county and prefectural seats, with no interference at all with dens in the outlying villages. This situation persisted until the outbreak of the 1911 Revolution (Mercy and Truth, November 1911: 377-79).

In 1910, violence directed in part at opium reform broke out in the county seat of Putian. Evidently, new graduates of the local police school had banned roadside stalls and impromptu markets, charging vendors ten coppers to sleep unmolested by the side of the road (where presumably they awaited the next morning's business). An irate mob, indignant at these heavy-handed and seemingly arbitrary actions, burned down first the police sentry boxes and the police school and then the residences of Chen Qiao and Wu Hongbin, the two men responsible for local enforcement of opium prohibition. The incident reflected a link seen by the public between these two costly and intrusive reforms (Chen Zhangcheng, 1981: 113-16). Popular resentment reappeared along with opium reform after the Revolution, and it was no coincidence that Xinghua gave rise to the only large-scale violence directed at the anti-opium policy in Fujian.

Before 1911, Xinghua poppy farmers defied the restrictions, apparently with impunity, angering provincial officials and obstructing national goals for eliminating the plant. In May 1910, Governor-General Songshou submitted a memorial stating that the cultivation of domestic opium had been completely halted in Fujian. The central authorities were not that easily convinced, and on 19 April 1910, the Grand Council (*junji chu*) called on the Board of Finance (*duzhi bu*) to investigate the claims of provincial officials. Inspectors clandestinely traveled to Fujian and discovered that Songshou's assertion was false.

In its subsequent report on the progress of the campaign, dated 27 September 1910, the board singled out Xinghua as Fujian's most conspicuous violator (ZZGB, 1910, 32: 159-60; 1910, 37: 339-41).

The Revolution brought political turmoil, and the transitional period was marked by a virtual vacuum of authority that caused the temporary breakdown of local mechanisms for reform. Once again, opium poppies blazed in the fields of eastern Fujian. The new Republic quickly regained control and reinstated the suppression campaign, but the tenor of the new regime was decidedly more militaristic than its predecessor, and the impact of that change on the conduct of the anti-opium campaign was rapid and profound. Furthermore, as a result of the renegotiation of the agreement with the British in May 1911, early conclusion of the Sino-British opium trade now hinged entirely on the eradication of Chinese poppies.

When the first reports of a so-called opium revolt in the Xinghua region reached the American consulate in Xiamen in June 1912, the situation was not viewed as serious by foreign diplomats.<sup>26</sup> By the time the conflict sputtered to its conclusion in the spring of 1914, however, the uprising had cost hundreds of lives, resulted in the burning and looting of numerous properties (many of them owned by Christians and Christian churches), and contributed to the sacking of Fujian's governor, a host of lesser Chinese officials, and the American consul in Fuzhou. A man named Huang Lian, who was also known as the Sixteenth Emperor or Number Sixteen, initially led the insurgents. Huang's protection of local opium fields, his anti-Christian bent, and his alleged imperial pretensions alarmed foreign observers and Chinese authorities, prompting attention and intervention on the national level.

Opium was not the sole cause of the uprising, but it became the focal point of most histories of these events because of its powerful symbolic and diplomatic significance. In fact, the revival of opium suppression was only one of many policies with which the farmers of Fujian were dissatisfied in the early Republic. In general, anti-government sentiment in Fujian and elsewhere had its origins in the frustration of peasant expectations.<sup>27</sup> Huang Lian's revolt represented the popular rejection of a revolution that many peasants had hoped would free them from the yoke of costly and invasive New Policy reforms, including opium suppression. It was the largest instance of resistance

to the anti-opium campaign to confront Republican officials as they struggled to regain the ground they had lost during the revolutionary transition.

The recent work of Roxann Prazniak (1999) highlights the ways in which new taxes, census taking, and other modern bureaucratic methods instituted before the 1911 Revolution alienated many Chinese farmers by extending the reach of the state and further empowering local elites. The variety of restrictions imposed on opium smokers, sellers, and growers; the registration and rationing schemes; and the coercive powers allotted to unofficial reform groups certainly seem to confirm her contention that members of the rural public were far less receptive to the call for reform than their urban counterparts. However, because opium suppression persisted across the revolutionary divide, the chronological boundaries of Prazniak's study leave certain trends obscured. The basic patterns and motivations for resistance accompanied opium reform into the Republican era, but the endurance of these attitudes speaks to the failure of the 1911 Revolution for much of the Chinese population and explains the rapidity with which anti-government sentiment reemerged.

The prohibition of opium probably sparked Huang Lian's revolt by stoking the long-standing anti-tax sentiment of the rebels. One of the primary concerns of Chinese authorities at all levels of government as they implemented opium restrictions was the need to replace the revenue previously supplied by the various taxes on the sale, cultivation, and distribution of the drug. Fujian was one of many provinces to address this problem by increasing the salt tax during the first years of the Qing anti-opium campaign, and Xinghua was known for its large salt deposits. The salt tax was raised again in the summer of 1912, just before the outbreak of the revolt, and one Chinese account points out that as Huang Lian and his troops marched to attack Xianyou later that year, the masses spontaneously rose up and destroyed the salt storehouses, among other properties (ZZGB, 1908, 20: 104-8; "Kaoding yu buchong," 1983: 68-69).<sup>28</sup> Huang Lian himself first gained local fame when he was arrested for leading a local tax revolt in the late Qing and managed a daring escape from prison in a casket after feigning his own death ("Kaoding yu buchong," 1983: 63).

The first major outbreak of violence occurred in August 1912, when peasants from a particularly impoverished region known as the

Thirty-Six Villages (*sanshiliu xiang*) staged an uprising to demand that the land tax be abolished and that they be granted the right to plant opium poppies ("Kaoding yu buchong," 1983: 68). Huang Lian, who led the uprising, was reportedly protecting poppy fields for a fee. The rebels waged several inconclusive battles in the fall of 1912, but government soldiers soundly defeated them during an unsuccessful rebel assault on Xinghua City on 25 September 1912. Sporadic violence continued, as the authorities in Fuzhou and Beijing attempted to negotiate an end to the uprising (USDS, 1910-1929: reel 113, 893.114/57, Shanghai to Secy. of State, 15 January 1913; PRO/FO 228/2454, Jordan to Grey, 26 May 1913).

In early May 1913, the rebels again attacked, this time capturing the walled city of Xianyou; accounts of the conduct of Huang Lian and his troops during their two-week occupation of the city vary wildly. Chinese historians insist that with the exception of one death during the burning of the magistrate's yamen, the rebels behaved impeccably, and business inside Xianyou was conducted as usual throughout the occupation (Yu Qiqiang, 1983: 47). One anecdote did, however, recount that Huang summoned a local scholar and opium addict and had him publicly consume large amounts of the drug to assure residents that opium was no longer illegal. Huang then apparently issued a proclamation declaring that opium fields would not be taxed ("Kaoding yu buchong," 1983: 67). In contrast, the British consul attributed numerous instances of malfeasance and atrocities to the rebels, although his accusations were not confirmed by American or Chinese reports (PRO/FO 228/1872, no. 21, Werner to Jordan, 18 May 1913; PRO/FO 228/1869, Little to Jordan, 19 June 1913).

One thing on which all accounts agree is the abominable behavior of government troops on recapturing Xianyou. In late May, after most of the rebels had escaped from the city, the soldiers indulged in large-scale looting and killing, apparently targeting men with queues (Mercy and Truth, January 1915: 24-26; USDS, 1910-1929: reel 12, 893.00/1754, enclosure no. 26 in no. 46, Fowler to Secy. of State, 23 May 1913; PRO/FO 228/1869, Little to Jordan, 19 June 1913). The cutting of queues was not yet common in the countryside surrounding Xianyou, so soldiers had many potential targets. The incendiary effects of the soldiers' rampage on the populace were profound, and many now turned their anger on the Christians whom they held

responsible for summoning the troops. Indeed, the Methodist Bishop Bashford, ostensibly to enhance the status and influence of local Methodists, had apparently told a large public meeting in Xinghua City in February that troops were coming from Fuzhou at his request. The soldiers had in fact been dispatched on the orders of President Yuan Shikai, but locally the damage was done (PRO/FO 228/1872, no. 8, Werner to Jordan, 28 February 1913).

By June 1913, the poppy season was over, and the revolt appeared to become decidedly anti-Christian, with the property and followers of the Methodist Episcopal Church (MEC) as its primary targets. At this point, the Chinese government and the local military appeared to prefer attempts at negotiation to a continuation of military efforts to squelch the revolt, and foreign authorities were outraged. The whole affair sputtered to a halt in June 1914, when the MEC accepted a cash indemnity from the authorities in Xinghua and Yongchun, although sporadic fighting and executions continued for months (USDS, 1910-1929: reel 14, 893.00/2168, enclosure to no. 136, Fowler to Secy. of State, 3 July 1914). Huang Lian himself disappeared, and rumors of his subsequent death from illness were never confirmed (USDS, 1910-1929: reel 14, 893.00/2276, Pontius to Secy. of State, 3 May 1915; Yu Qiqiang, 1983: 47-48; “Kaoding yu buchong,” 1983: 64).

To label Huang Lian’s uprising an “opium rebellion” (USDS, 1910-1929: reel 113, 893.114, enclosure to no. 57, Shanghai to Secy. of State, 15 January 1912)—in other words, a protest directed at the Republic’s continuation of the anti-opium campaign—denies the complexity of the incident and obscures the many ways in which opium policy had become entangled with local social tensions and the twists and turns of national politics. Opium suppression was, however, one of the key arenas in which government policy—with its righteous tone of nationalism and its paradoxical ties to imperialist demands—clashed with peasant survival strategies. Huang Lian’s protection of poppy cultivation had great appeal to the rebels of Xinghua, as did his promise that no taxes would be collected on the illicit crop. Even otherwise supportive Chinese sources do not defend Huang’s promotion of opium cultivation, but most accounts note that state policy on opium and salt imposed great financial hardship on Xinghua. Much of the rebels’ anti-Christian sentiment also stemmed from anger at the

Methodist church's open support for the extractive policies of the late Qing and early Republican regimes.

Huang Lian's revolt raises important questions about the depth of popular support for China's opium reforms and suggests that resistance to the suppression campaign reflected a long-standing and deep-seated resentment directed at the authorities on both sides of the revolutionary divide. The proliferation of anti-opium societies and of mass meetings in Fujian seems to demonstrate strong popular support for the campaign in the cities, but most of the activists were the urban reformist elites so predominant in Joseph Esherick's classic analysis of the 1911 Revolution (Esherick, 1976: 130-33).<sup>29</sup> The Xinghua uprising indicates that in some rural locales, compliance with the opium restrictions may have signified not so much support as coerced obedience to a higher, more powerful authority. That authority often manifested itself by imposing taxes intended to extract the revenue for so-called progressive reforms from the pockets of those least able to afford the outlay or to enjoy the benefits.

*RESISTANCE AFTER THE DEATH OF YUAN SHIKAI*

Fujian was declared free of poppy cultivation by a joint team of British and Chinese inspectors in 1914, yet only a few years later, the Fujianese countryside saw a resurgence of opium growing and consumption. The collapse of central authority that accompanied the death of Yuan Shikai was both cause and effect of the warlordism that revived Fujian's opium economy. Systematic government attempts to enforce opium suppression did not resurface until the ascendance of the Nationalist regime in the late 1920s; in the interim, farmers in Fujian grew poppies to satisfy the financial demands of competing military authorities. Whether this constituted popular support for the provincial opium economy or simply a rational response to the coercive demands of those in charge is uncertain, although Western and Chinese histories insist that farmers sowed poppy seeds unwillingly. In any case, the question of resistance to suppression soon became moot.

*BEYOND THE RHETORIC*

By the nineteenth century, the nature of the opium trade had become as problematic as opium smoking itself in China because the rapid spread of addiction was intimately tied to imperialist aggression and the decline of Qing authority. Accordingly, the Chinese government and nationalistic Chinese elites supported the elimination of opium imports from abroad and the eradication of domestic poppy cultivation and opium smoking at home. The early anti-opium crusaders, including the famous Commissioner Lin, recognized and deplored the corruption of the Chinese bureaucracy and the greed of Chinese merchants that enabled the illegal opium trade to flourish (Polachek, 1992: 142-44).

After the Opium Wars, however, this stream of Chinese rhetoric fed into and was overwhelmed by a swelling chorus of international condemnation of the Sino-Indian opium trade and its socioeconomic consequences. The loudest voices now belonged to outraged Chinese elite activists and Western missionaries (mostly from the United States and Great Britain). These groups sought to end the opium trade by calling attention to British greed and to the physical and moral decay that accompanied opium addiction. Acknowledgment of widespread Chinese complicity in the opium trade or of popular objections to opium reform would have seriously undermined the righteous fervor of those involved in the suppression movement, as it would have shifted the blame away from Great Britain. Until recently, similar concerns about undermining the fundamental dichotomy between the righteous masses and the exploitative elite/official alliance that justified the Communist revolution generated similar biases in sources available from the Chinese mainland.

In reality, anti-opium sentiment was common among the urban elite population before, during, and after the official anti-opium campaign. However, it remains difficult to say to what degree that outlook extended to the lower classes. It is true that throughout the century, stretching from the beginning of the illicit opium trade in Fujian in the 1820s to the coming to power of the Nationalist Party in 1927, some ordinary Chinese had expressed their hostility to opium and the opium trade in a variety of ways. Evidence of anti-opium sentiment among the masses of Fujian was manifested in occasional efforts to rid their

villages of opium addiction, in the recollection of anti-opium folk songs decades after their composition, in the impressive size of audiences for urban anti-opium rallies, and in the popularity of heterodox sects that prohibited opium smoking. However, this cannot be taken as a groundswell of popular support for opium reform, given the depth and resilience of the provincial opium economy and documented incidents of resistance to the suppression campaign.

Thus, while many Fujianese were decrying the damage wrought by opium, many of their compatriots were deeply involved in sustaining the opium trade. The opium suppression campaign did make considerable progress in a remarkably brief time, but the crusade was never completely successful, and the rapid resurgence of the opium economy in the warlord years could only have been possible in the absence of broad-based or well-organized popular support for opium reform. Although violent resistance to even the most coercive suppression measures was minimal in Fujian, it did occur—and small-scale or passive resistance was endemic in the poppy-growing regions of the province. In fact, the difficulties of enforcing opium restrictions, as well as the ease with which Fujian's opium economy reappeared during the revolutionary transition and after the death of Yuan Shikai, point to the likelihood that the lower classes for the most part complied with the restrictions when enforcement was strict and resumed cultivating, selling, and smoking opium when it was not.

In other words, the thoroughness of enforcement was directly tied to the popularity of state-mandated reforms and the strength of the Chinese state at the national, provincial, and local levels. Although the crucial and very visible role of the state in establishing and sanctioning Fujian's opium suppression campaign inspired nationalistic feelings among some Chinese, it also generated considerable ill will among those targeted by government taxes and regulatory mechanisms. Just as popular hostility to opium and the opium trade was part of a larger anti-state, anti-imperialist sentiment that fueled Chinese nationalism in the early twentieth century, resistance to opium suppression was encompassed within a broader opposition (especially in China's rural areas) to the intrusive, extractive nature of the New Policy reforms.

Understanding the nature of China's relationship with opium is not an easy task, given the historiographical impediments to research, as

well as the changing perceptions of addiction. The often passionate anti-opium rhetoric that has dominated much of the history of the drug in China obscures a Chinese population torn between lofty nationalism and financial gain. Although the opium trade undeniably began in earnest with British smuggling of the drug, the trade could not have grown without Chinese distributors and consumers. Likewise, the anti-opium campaign could not have achieved what most observers felt was considerable success without the support of much of the elite population. To reexamine China's well-documented relationship with opium, we must remove it from the moralistic and political rhetoric that has overly simplified the complex socioeconomic dynamics of its trade and use and obscured the fundamental ambivalence of the Chinese people toward this much-maligned drug. At the same time, the very act of exploring the links between opium and state building, nationalism, and modernization requires the construction of an interpretive framework that can contain the many facets of China's opium economy.

#### NOTES

1. The term *opium economy* should not be understood to imply that opium was the dominant commodity in the late Qing economy. It instead signifies the extent to which this single good generated an extensive and entrenched network of individuals who imported, conveyed, distributed, prepared, sold, taxed, or used it.

2. The implementation of the Additional Article of the Chefoo Convention, signed on 18 July 1885, caused a decisive shift in the pattern of foreign opium importation into Fujian and effectively channeled more opium-related revenue into central government coffers. The article established a fixed, onetime charge of 110 taels per picul of imported opium—80 taels for transit tax and 30 to cover the export duty—both of which were to be collected by the Imperial Maritime Customs. This measure was designed to eliminate excessive or arbitrary taxes, thereby enabling the foreign drug to remain competitive with the cheaper domestic opium (Morse and MacNair, 1931: 366-67).

3. The Fujian farmers' embrace of opium production can be interpreted in several ways. As the text implies, the removal of laws against cultivation probably inspired previously law-abiding or timid farmers to invest in this cash crop. At the same time, it is also possible that the quantity of domestic poppy cultivation convinced the Chinese state that only legalizing the trade offered the hope of controlling it. And finally, as many cynics in Britain speculated, the profits being generated by the opium trade may ultimately have proved too tempting to a financially strapped Qing treasury.

4. In 1904, for example, estimates of Fujian's total production of opium ranged from 4,000 to just over 9,000 piculs, while the province of Sichuan was said to have produced 200,000 piculs (Adsheed, 1984: 51; Li Wenzhi, 1957: 461-62).

5. If the imposition of official taxes was truly intended to discourage domestic cultivation in Fujian, then the measure must be considered a dismal failure. On the other hand, if those policies are interpreted as an attempt to undermine the smuggling trade by establishing government control or to raise revenue while maintaining the appearance of propriety, then the assessment must be quite different. Rivalries for opium revenues among Chinese authorities at the local, provincial, and central government levels began when the transit tax was instituted in the mid-nineteenth century, but by 1906, the central state had taken important steps to assert its control. Aside from the obvious financial benefits for Beijing of opium taxation, it can also be argued that the move toward centralization was indeed a logical step toward state control and eventual suppression of the domestic trade. In addition, the channeling of opium revenues away from provincial coffers may have inclined provincial officials to accept a nationwide scheme to do away with the trade altogether.

6. The agreement with Britain did exempt the major opium transit center of Shanghai from the ban against importation until all other provinces had been declared free of domestic poppy cultivation, a decision that ultimately saddled the Chinese government with enormous stocks of the foreign drug in 1918.

7. Historians on Taiwan appear far more willing to delve into the opium trade with impartiality. Important works have been contributed by Chen Yongfa, Lin Manhoung, and Zhang Yufa, among others. Chen Yongfa (1990) asserts that the Communist Party raised much-needed revenue through clandestine involvement in opium trafficking, despite Chinese Communist Party rhetoric to the contrary. Lin Manhoung (1979, 1985) looks at the Chinese production and distribution of opium, as well as the lucrative taxation of the drug. Zhang (1987) states quite strongly that opium suppression was a top-down initiative that was not prompted by grassroots activism.

8. To be fair, not until the 1990s did Western academics take a closer look at opium outside the standard framework of diplomatic relations. A recent conference, titled "Opium in Chinese History" (held in Toronto, May 1997), attracted dozens of scholars, several of whom explored the suppression campaign; others highlighted the complicity of Chinese merchants and officials in establishing, expanding, and sustaining the global narcotics network. Many of those essays appear in Brook and Wakabayashi (2000b). The work of Frederic Wakeman, Jr. also is an exception to this rule, and his now-classic work *Strangers at the Gate* (1966) explores the social consequences of the Opium War on the people of Guangdong.

9. This generalization excludes the work of historian Lin Renchuan of Xiamen University, who does not hesitate to condemn corrupt Chinese officials, opium dealers, and smugglers who facilitated the trade, along with the despotic clans that strong-armed and cowed the local populations. However, Professor Lin's well-researched and evenhanded article on opium in Fujian did not appear in print until 1985.

10. These collections of historical and literary materials, published periodically from the 1960s on, are the responsibility of *wenshi ziliao* committees in each county in China. They are designed to educate modern Chinese about the past by using oral histories and otherwise obscure materials housed in local historical archives (some of which are closed to foreign researchers). Using a number of indexes, I have located the vast majority of *wenshi ziliao* articles on opium in Fujian: although they constitute an invaluable means of accessing popular sentiment, they also present problems for researchers today. Many do not contain footnotes, and most are careful to include some kind of moralistic condemnation of the drug and the pre-1949 regimes under which China suffered from its most serious opium problems. For more on this valuable but problematic source, see Cochran (1996).

11. I did locate several opium pipes and other smoking paraphernalia dating from the late Qing that were inscribed with poems rhapsodizing on the unearthly delights of opium smoking. The geographical origins of the equipment are unknown. Many thanks to Deborah Hull-Wolski,

collections manager for the Department of Anthropology Collections at the Museum Support Center of the Smithsonian Institution in Suitland, Maryland, for permitting me to examine these and other artifacts and to R. LaVerne Madancy for arranging my visit there on 21 August 2000.

12. See Brook and Wakabayashi (2000b) for essays by more than a dozen of these individuals, many of whom have since published books on their opium-related research. The bibliography of the Brook and Wakabayashi volume contains most of the new research in this exciting subfield.

13. My discussion of this poem by the Chrysanthemum Daoist derives from Zhou Ruiguang (1984). Because the numerous allusions and slang make an elegant translation extremely difficult to produce, I do not include the verses themselves in my discussion.

14. Yama was the king of hell in Chinese cosmology.

15. See Wang Shiqing (n.d.). Evidently, the Taiwanese incarnation of this society launched a well-organized and very popular anti-opium movement at the turn of the twentieth century, but the anti-Japanese undercurrent drew a crackdown by the Japanese occupation authorities. Many thanks to Professor Philip Clart of the University of Missouri–Columbia for making Wang’s article available to me.

16. For more on the Taipings in Fujian, see Ma Guanwu (1981), Cai Rujin (1983), and the standard references by Franz Michael (1966-1971) and Vincent Y. C. Shih (1972). Some discussion of the Taipings also appears in various mission sources.

17. Missionary publications are full of anecdotes to support this statement about Chinese converts. See also Latourette (1929: 480-85) and Gewurtz (1985: 21-24).

18. For an excellent discussion of Christian involvement in the opium campaign and many other nationalistic movements in the early twentieth century, see Dunch (2001).

19. The songs (and the *Quarterly* contained many more than are quoted here) have a decidedly formulaic quality; their marked similarity in meter and phrasing implies commonalities in the background of the composers. Many were probably Chinese Christians educated by missionaries or were Chinese reformers who worked closely with missionaries in the opium suppression campaign.

20. For example, as early as February 1915, a group of Chinese Christians in Ningde county, Funing prefecture, submitted a petition complaining that a new district magistrate by the name of Zhu Ding had presided over a loosening of opium restrictions. They enclosed a poppy leaf to add emotional weight to their complaint. Chinese and English versions of the petition are included in PRO/FO 228/2461.

21. Many thanks to Steve Averill for bringing this source to my attention.

22. In the poem, the author actually refers not to family but to the six relations (*liuqin*)—mother, father, elder brothers, younger brothers, wife, and children.

23. Here I must ask for the reader’s indulgence. In the original song, the last line of each couplet maintains the same rhyme throughout the song, but since English has far fewer rhymes than Chinese and I have a far more limited an imagination than the poem’s author, I was forced to shift halfway through.

24. Both authors cite the same source, *Rongma fengtao ji* (“The Stormy Life of a Warhorse” collection), but a search for that volume in libraries and archives in Fuzhou proved fruitless.

25. Many of the New Policy reforms required some form of census taking, a process that engendered tremendous anxiety among the local population, who feared that this information would be used against them by foreigners or the Chinese state. For a number of examples of this anxiety, see Prazniak (1999).

26. For a more in-depth discussion of this compelling incident, see Madancy (1995).

27. Lucien Bianco (1991: 21-38) has shown that protests against levies on land, salt, and opium were among the most common forms of peasant resistance during the early Republic.

Esherick (1976: esp. 250-52) also discusses briefly anti-Republican sentiment in the countryside of Hunan and Hubei. Ted Gurr (1970) discusses the revolutionary ramifications of relative deprivation.

28. For a similar occurrence in nearby Guangdong province, see Hsieh (1972).

29. As noted earlier, Esherick (1976: 250-52) explicitly acknowledges the rapidity of popular disillusionment with the Revolution in the countryside.

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## “Jumping the Dragon Gate”

### Storytellers and the Creation of the Shanghai Identity

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In 1875, a local Shanghai pictorial newspaper ran an article about the prevalence of storytelling beggars in the Chinese part of the city. Its author described these beggars as follows: “These pitiful creatures are usually driven to this lowly profession by disability, but this is not their only problem. They are hungry and diseased, and most of them are so filthy and covered with scabs that you can’t bear to look at them.” Morbid curiosity lured crowds of gawkers to these beggars, and once a sizable number of people had gathered, the beggar would pull out a small stringed instrument and sing a portion of a well-known epic tale. When he had finished his tale, the beggar would walk around to each of his listeners, holding out his cupped hands to solicit donations (“Yingye xiezhen,” 1875: 8).

This article and countless others like it give us an indication of the abjectness of storytellers (*shuo shu*) in late imperial China. More often than not, these performers were relegated to an unstable existence, traveling among rural communities and soliciting donations from passersby at the end of every chapter or song in their tale. Little better than beggars by trade, often driven to their profession by disabilities, criminal records, or homelessness, they faced perpetual poverty and discrimination. In the official hierarchy of professions, storytellers ranked even below prostitutes in social and political status. Their itinerancy made it difficult for them to marry, settle down, or even find a steady source of income; as a result, they were considered threatening to the social order and they had little, if any, access to traditional

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Chinese networks of support and control. They were scorned by the state and by society as a whole, and they had few sources of help when faced with hardship.

Sixty years later, in 1936, the storyteller Xue Xiaoqing found himself racing along Shanghai's Bubbling Well Road in his shiny new Austin motorcar and pulling to a stop outside the glamorous Ciro's Dance Hall, where upward of 500 fans awaited his performance of the now-famous story "Fate in Tears and Laughter" (*Ti xiao yinyuan*). The son and grandson of storytellers who had traveled an itinerant circuit and begged for their living, Xue could certainly say that his profession had undergone an enormous transformation in the 40 years since his father had taken up storytelling.

The astonishing leap in social status among Shanghai-era storytellers exemplified by Xue Xiaoqing and many others is inextricably linked with immigration to Shanghai, with the development of the city of Shanghai itself and with the emergence and conscious creation of a modern urban identity specifically associated with Shanghai. In her thorough and engrossing book on native-place identities in late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century Shanghai, Bryna Goodman (1995) classified all urban immigration as "sojourning" because it did not, in the period she studied, involve a fundamental change in identity. However, my research on *pingtan*<sup>1</sup> storytellers in a slightly later period—the first half of the twentieth century—indicates not only that urban identities did exist but that they were an essential feature of the social mobility I have just described.

#### THE PRIVILEGING OF URBAN SPACE IN SHANGHAI

Until the late nineteenth century, Shanghai and its surrounding hinterlands formed something of a continuum. To storytellers, Shanghai was just another market town on the circuit traveled by itinerant performers in Zhejiang and Jiangsu. Whether they were in Shanghai or in a small village in rural Jiangsu, storytellers tended during this period to give ad hoc performances in abandoned temples, in dilapidated teahouses, at temple fairs and in marketplaces, or simply on street corners. By the 1930s, however, Shanghai had undergone a remarkable economic, architectural, cultural, and technological transformation: it

now dwarfed the other cities and towns in the region, and it provided storytellers with new physical and cultural spaces in which to establish more respectable reputations.

Shanghai's earliest storytelling venues were actually teahouses (*chaguan*), whose furnishings and amenities were minimal; in this regard, there was nothing unusual about performing at a teahouse in Shanghai in the late nineteenth century. Only at the turn of the century did the storytelling venues of Shanghai begin to distinguish themselves from the others in the region. First, their numbers exploded: in the last 30 years of the nineteenth century, more than 70 new storytelling houses opened in greater Shanghai (Cao Hanchang, 1993: 124), and by the 1940s, Shanghai boasted more than 500 storytelling venues. Thus, Shanghai quickly outstripped the other cities and towns in Zhejiang and Jiangsu in providing storytellers with opportunities to perform. But these new storytelling theaters were important to the social mobility of storytellers in ways beyond their mere numbers. They enabled storytellers to work for fixed wages rather than for small donations from open-air audiences, and this larger, steady source of income helped improve the performers' lot and status.

The growth of the teahouse industry in Shanghai presented storytellers with new sources not just of financial capital but of cultural capital as well. The rather sudden rise in the popularity of teahouses at the end of the nineteenth century reflects broader trends associated with urbanization, such as the growing importance of leisure time activities, increases in expendable income, the desire of urban sojourners separated from their families and villages to have a place to socialize, and so forth. Shanghai-area storytellers were able to capitalize on and even appropriate these and other trends of urbanization.

Between 1885 and 1900, the introduction of electricity, running water, and multistory architecture set Shanghai's storytelling venues apart from their more primitive counterparts outside the city. Running water made possible better tea and more modern public hygiene. Electricity enabled the owners of storytelling houses to light their establishments well past sunset, thus introducing the possibility for additional storytelling performances every day<sup>2</sup>—as well as the whole concept of Shanghai as the “city that never sleeps” (*bu ye cheng*), with all of the powerful cultural resonances that that entailed. In some of the highest-level storytelling houses, electricity also brought such

amenities as electric fans and even primitive air conditioning, conveniences appreciated by performers and their increasingly wealthy clientele alike. These new technologies attracted higher-class patrons and justified a raise in admission fees; as a result, storytellers working in these establishments earned more money and enjoyed the increased prestige associated with catering to high-class audiences. Finally, advances in architecture made it possible to build immense storytelling theaters (*shuchang*) that accommodated up to 500 people, as well as imposing five- to ten-story entertainment houses (*yule changsuo*) where several famous storytellers might perform simultaneously in different rooms.<sup>3</sup>

In brief, performing in Shanghai's foreign concession areas was simply considered more comfortable, more profitable, and more prestigious than performing outside Shanghai or in Shanghai's rundown Chinese City. "Of *course* I preferred working in the foreign concessions," insisted one storyteller:

Storytelling houses in the foreign-concession areas were just *better* than the ones outside Shanghai or in the Chinese City. Everything about them just seemed cleaner, more elegant, more . . . *cultured*. My heavens, even the *tea* tasted better! The tea you got in the Chinese City in those days was cloudy, and it had a strange taste. [Cao Hanchang, interview with author, 14 November 1994]

By the 1930s, Shanghai had come to represent the pinnacle of the pingtan storytelling world, and only those storytellers who were consistently able to find work in the privileged urban spaces of Shanghai were considered truly successful. The storyteller Tang Gengliang put it like this:

In the old days [i.e., before 1949], when you learned the storytelling art, first you studied with your master, then you worked on your own, traveling the itinerant circuit, and finally you came to Shanghai—if you could do this, then it was a sign that you had really perfected your art and that you had become a star. [Suzhou pingtan yanjiuhui, 1986: 251-52]

By the 1930s, the expression "jumping the dragon gate" had entered the lexicon of pingtan storytellers and, indeed, the popular imagina-

tion. To “jump the dragon gate” (*tiao long men*) was, in the jargon of storytellers, to land a job in one of the storytelling venues of Shanghai’s foreign concessions (Yao Yinmei, interview with author, 14 July 1992). Storytellers were particularly fond of comparing themselves to scholars, making this expression’s origins—in popular lore about the imperial examination system—particularly interesting. An oft-cited Chinese proverb about commoners who succeed in the imperial examinations refers allegorically to the ability of a common carp to jump the dragon gate and transform itself into a dragon (*liyu tiao long men*). To jump the dragon gate was thus to catch the golden ring of success and fame. For storytellers in the Zhejiang-Jiangsu area, this success could be achieved only in Shanghai’s foreign concessions.

#### GUILDS AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF RURAL-URBAN BOUNDARIES

Those storytellers who did jump the dragon gate worked very hard to shore up their newfound status by affiliating with highly territorial storytellers guilds. These guilds emerged at the turn of the century as crucial to creating a class of “professional,” elite, well-paid storytellers with clear urban affiliations and to distinguishing this group from their untrained, poor, itinerant, rural counterparts. The distinction between guild “insiders” and guild “outsiders” was starkly apparent to performers and spectators alike.

Guild affiliation gave a select group of storytellers exclusive access to jobs in the highest paying, most prestigious storytelling houses. Guild leaders paid heavy dues to storytelling house owners to buy rights to these establishments, and their monopolies were reinforced with bribes, extortion, and physical violence. The simple truth is that no one who did not belong to one of two storytellers’ guilds in Republican-era Shanghai had a chance of finding employment in any of that city’s more than 500 storytelling houses.

One gained entrée into a reputable storytellers guild by completing a long apprenticeship with a senior member, and many storytelling masters, wishing to demonstrate that their professionalized, elite line of work was not open to riffraff, made a show of being exceedingly choosy about potential students. But in fact, every storyteller who

attained some degree of fame in late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century Shanghai seems to have been apprenticed because of his or her connections through friends or family. A 1943 article from a storytelling newspaper called *Robin Hood* demonstrates the extent to which “outsiders” were disadvantaged by this system. Its author complained that the storyteller Xu Hansheng randomly accepted untrained itinerant storytellers as his “apprentices” in exchange for payment, allowing them to advertise themselves as his students (and thus as guild members) without actually giving them any training. Most successful storytellers frowned on such practices, which deprived Shanghai’s storytelling guilds of both the financial rewards and the quality control that the apprenticeship system was intended to ensure. “If Xu is allowed to continue operating this way,” warned the author, “then any old country bumpkin can become a [guild] member, and the quality of the storytelling profession in this area will sink considerably. [Xu’s guild] should seriously consider throwing him out!” (Luobinhan, 1943: 4). Such worries about “country bumpkins” infiltrating the profession are amusing, given that most Shanghai-area storytellers were not themselves originally from Shanghai.<sup>4</sup> What saved bona-fide guild members from being labeled as country bumpkins was their submission to a training process meant to cleanse them of their peasant habits and to school them in the intricacies of the elegant comportment of the educated. The implied difference between city people and their country cousins is the former’s refinement, culture, education, and status.

*THE ARTICULATION OF “CULTURAL” DIFFERENCES  
BETWEEN RURAL AND URBAN STORYTELLERS*

Guild leadership made a concerted effort to establish and maintain the cultural boundaries between city people and rural people, forcing their members to adhere to strict standards of behavior. Ma Rufeï, who is credited with founding Shanghai’s largest and most influential storytellers guild, the Guangyushe, instituted its “professional code of conduct”: it forbade storytellers to shiver or sweat in public and required them to sit ramrod-straight and to minimize the movements of their bodies during performances to maintain what he called

a “cultured” appearance. The storyteller Cao Hanchang recalled being drilled endlessly by his teacher on the ways that “cultured people” walked, stood, seated themselves, adjusted their clothing, spoke, gestured with their hands, sipped tea, drank soup, laughed, and so on. His teacher used to urge him, “Present yourself in public as if you were a distinguished Confucian scholar on your way to an audience with the emperor” (Cao Hanchang, interview with author, 14 November 1994). Even today, pingtan storytellers and the scholars who write about them are careful to emphasize their cultured, educated image, as the following description of the storyteller Huang Zhaolin suggests: “Zhaolin was very tall, with clear fair skin and elegant manners; he looked not like an itinerant but rather like a Confucian scholar (*wu jianghu xiqi er you rufeng*)” (Ni Pingqian and Jiang Kaihua, 1985: 245). By the 1940s, Ma Rufei’s nineteenth-century entreaties that storytellers clean up their act and behave in a “cultured” manner had gone beyond codification into guild rules to become the justification for a new Guangyushe requirement that all prospective storytelling students complete at least a middle school education before being accepted as apprentices to guild members. It was hoped that this measure would help raise the level of education of guild members and thereby promote the perception that Shanghai’s guild-affiliated storytellers were cultured elites with no ties to their itinerant, illiterate predecessors (Zhou Sunguang, 1942: 41).

As part of maintaining this refined, cultured, “urban” image, guild members were expected to refrain from spitting and clearing their throats in public. While such habits were tolerated among itinerants and people who performed in the dingy teahouses outside Shanghai, they were frowned on in the elegant new storytelling venues of Shanghai’s foreign concessions. In 1933, a storytelling aficionado from Shanghai complained in a letter to a fan newspaper about the standards of comportment and performance among storytellers in Changshu, which he had just visited on a business trip. “Performers and audience members alike cleared their throats and spit incessantly,” he lamented. “Spitting whenever the mood hits you is a bad habit of the Chinese to begin with, but people should be even more careful to avoid [spitting] during radio broadcasts, to avoid provoking disgust among listeners.” Ultimately, the author declared that the best way to avoid exposure to distasteful practices like spitting was to stay

in Shanghai: “I was revolted and embarrassed to be in such an uncultured place, and I couldn’t wait to get back to the Eastern Storytelling House [Shanghai’s *Dongfang Shuchang*], where people are more refined” (Sun Kang, 1933: 2). That same year, another author argued against this habit not because it disgusted him personally but because it was “unsanitary and damaging to national prestige” (Pan Xinyi, 1933: 1).<sup>5</sup>

#### KEEPING THE RIFFRAFF OUT OF SHANGHAI

Shanghai’s guild-affiliated storytellers were so convinced of their cultural and behavioral superiority to their rural counterparts, and they were so jealous of the privileged territory to which they had laid claim in Shanghai, that they went to great lengths to keep untrained, itinerant storytellers out of the city. As I have already noted, guild connections were essential for finding work in the storytelling houses of Shanghai’s foreign concessions. But if an itinerant storyteller managed to get a job performing in one of the smaller teahouses in the Chinese city, or if he attempted even to gather an audience on a local street corner, an elaborate procedure, called “confiscating one’s tools” (*xie jiahuo*), had been designed to thwart him.

All storytellers, professional or untrained, relied on a few simple props to embellish their stories: a banjo-like stringed instrument (*sanxian*), a wooden clapper (*xingmu*), a handkerchief, and a fan. A professional, guild-affiliated storyteller who found an itinerant storyteller performing in guild territory could issue a formal challenge by walking up to the intruder’s performance area, using the itinerant’s own handkerchief to cover his wooden clapper, and then placing the fan on top of the handkerchief. This interruption, of course, brought the performance to an abrupt halt and was a clear sign to the itinerant that his right to perform was being called into question. If in fact the performer in question was *not* affiliated with a Shanghai storytellers guild, then he would usually just pack up and exit as swiftly as possible, leaving that day’s earnings to be pocketed by the professional whose challenge had succeeded. However, if the performer in question felt that his tools had been confiscated unfairly, then he would recite the following words:

My fan is an assassin's rifle with a bayonet on the end. King Zhou Zhuang gave advice to the righteous, and Confucius roamed across many different states, begging and teaching from door to door. Ten thousand blossoms can bloom under one tree, so what's the point in confiscating my tools recklessly?

He would then make a loud noise by hitting the table with his wooden clapper, signifying that the performance could begin again. A particularly self-confident street performer could at this point call the "professional" storyteller's bluff by once again covering his wood clapper with his handkerchief and placing the fan back on top of the pile. This was the conventional way, in the storytelling profession, of saying, "If you're such an expert storyteller, then why don't *you* finish up the story?" The guild-affiliated storyteller who had issued the challenge was expected to reply, "A wooden clapper is my profession, a fan is my livelihood; the rivers, streams, lakes, and seas are my home, ten thousand-foot waves don't scare me." Then he would pick up where the other storyteller left off, telling the rest of that day's story (a feat made possible by the limited repertoire of pingtan stories—creativity was usually demonstrated within the basic framework of a well-known story rather than by changing plot, song lyrics, or song order). Because it was exceedingly humiliating to be forced into such a performance, most storytellers dared to confiscate someone else's tools only if they were sure that immediate acquiescence would follow. But the storytelling world in this region was small enough that most guild-affiliated storytellers, in whatever guild, knew one another—so distinguishing between "insiders" and "outsiders" was relatively straightforward. And as guilds became more insular and more powerful over the course of the first half of the twentieth century, the task became even easier; rituals such as "confiscating one's tools" helped further delineate the distinction (Yun Youke, 1988: 46-47; Zhang Wenting, interview with author, 16 October 1994; Peng Benle, interview with author, 14 October 1994).

One of the most compelling facets of this ritual is that professional, guild-affiliated storytellers and itinerant storytellers alike actively participated, even though the latter had nothing to gain from it. In other words, both sides promoted the association of wealth, skills, education, and social status with the urban environment and poverty,

ignorance, and itinerancy with the rural environment. It is also fascinating that in legitimating their higher position, guild-affiliated, elite, urban storytellers referred to an itinerant existence (i.e., “the rivers, streams, lakes, and seas are my home”). Thus, while high rank and refinement became increasingly associated with geographic *immobility* (i.e., a permanent residence in Shanghai), storytellers nonetheless continued to draw on the nostalgic cultural repertoire of the roving bandit and the knight-errant to justify their status.

#### *STORYTELLING AND THE PRIVILEGING OF THE URBAN VERNACULAR*

As pingtan storytelling became increasingly associated with the cosmopolitanism and refinement of Republican-era Shanghai, the language used in common stories was sanitized and standardized. Eighteenth- and nineteenth-century pingtan storytelling was directed almost exclusively at lower-class male audiences, and it was thus often exceedingly bawdy. Storytellers pandered to lowbrow tastes by weaving tales of sexual exploits filled with obscenities. According to one early-twentieth-century writer,

If the language [of a storytelling performance] is the least bit refined, [the members of the audience] quickly shake their heads in disapproval and leave. Therefore when storytellers perform in the eastern part of the city, most use language that is rough, base, improper, and obscene. If they do not, listeners are uninterested. (Xu Ke, 1917: *xia* 31)

By the late nineteenth century, the cultural, economic, and class differences between Shanghai’s city dwellers and their rural counterparts began to find expression in their language. Pingtan artists quickly picked up on these changes, reforming their stories in ways meant to appeal to their more cosmopolitan audiences. For instance, one scholar of pingtan storytelling characterizes the “level of culture” of itinerant storytellers as “rather low: the lyrics they performed were coarse, shallow, and unrefined.” In contrast, Shanghai’s guild-affiliated storytellers all “possessed a certain level of culture,” and their song lyrics were “relatively refined. In all ways [they] strengthened the lit-

erary character of [pingtan], and thus raised the status of the art of [pingtan] within the context of all other types of popular performing arts" (Kuang Yunsheng, 1983: 72).

Aspirations to refinement also led Shanghai's guild-affiliated storytellers to sanitize the *content* of their stories. A sense of the vast changes necessary to make pingtan stories as they were originally conceived and performed on the itinerant circuit suitable for elite Shanghai audiences can be gained by comparing versions of *The Jade Dragonfly* (*Yu qingting*) that predate and postdate the social mobility of Shanghai-area pingtan storytellers. This popular narrative details the adventures of a wealthy young playboy who conceives a child with a Buddhist nun. The story began to circulate in various forms no later than the Ming dynasty, but it was adapted for pingtan storytelling performances around the turn of the nineteenth century by a storyteller named Chen Yuqian; the adaptation was then passed down orally to Chen's sons, grandsons, and disciples (Zheng Zhenduo, 1984: 366; Zhou Liang, 1985: 37). The very idea that a young playboy might conceive a child with a sweet young nun is in itself risqué, and early versions of this story are of course riddled with lewd humor. Zhou Yuquan (1897-1974), one of Shanghai's most famous storytellers during the 1930s and 1940s, was a fourth-generation disciple of Chen's, and *The Jade Dragonfly* was one of the most famous stories in his repertoire. It was under Zhou's curatorship that this titillating tale full of sexual innuendo was transformed into a more subdued story.

Consider the scene of *The Jade Dragonfly* in which the male hero, Guisheng, first encounters an older nun in the convent where Zhi Zhen, the nun who is the object of his affections, lives. In the earlier street version of this story, passed down through four generations by Chen Yuqian and his disciples, this encounter is filled with broad sexual humor. When Guisheng asks the older nun her name, she answers shyly, "This humble nun is called Pu Chan." Guisheng makes a joke at her expense by feigning misunderstanding: "Huh? Pu *Chuan*? Would that perhaps be '*chuan*' as in '*chuan zong jie dai*' [continuing the family line by producing a male heir]?" After thus explicitly referring to the mortified nun's fertility and childbearing capacities, he then proceeds to humiliate her further by expressing his own willingness to help her "continue the family line" (i.e., have a son) (Mei Xuechun, 1938: 18). But in the version of this story performed by Zhou Yuquan

in Shanghai, this scene—like many others—is utterly sanitized. No longer the sexual predator that so amused lower-class rural audiences, the Guisheng of the 1940s version, presented to more “respectable” elite audiences, is reduced to a bland tourist: in this first exchange with the older nun, he merely asks her name, her age, the name of the convent’s patron, and the number of rooms in the convent. Finally, rather than suggesting that he might father her child, he instead ends this encounter by requesting a tour of the convent (Zhou Yuquan, 1985: 15).

These distinctions between “refined” and “unrefined” language and content may seem superficial or even fabricated, but their artificiality is precisely what makes them interesting. Zhou’s deliberate efforts to clean up the content of his stories for elite audiences and his guild’s strict regulations prohibiting obscene or overly colloquial language both reveal a heightened consciousness of the links between language and social status. Numerous sociolinguists have demonstrated in contemporary studies of other populations that presenting oneself by consciously using prestige features and avoiding stigmatized features of language indicates deep-seated anxieties about social status. In particular, lower-class people have been shown to be “especially hostile to stigmatized features” of language, often “overcorrect[ing] in their pursuit of respectability” (Edwards, 1976: 19-21).<sup>6</sup> In short, Shanghai’s Republican-era storytellers viewed the linguistic sanitizing of their performances as a self-conscious form of empowerment, as a way simultaneously to identify with the elite Shanghai lifestyle to which they aspired and to distance themselves from their roots as poor, uneducated, and itinerant. And because the “elite” audiences these storytellers sought to impress were often engaged in the same processes of urbanization and social mobility, their listeners embraced this compelling fiction of urban refinement.

As pingtan storytelling spread into theaters in the foreign concession areas and attracted more elite listeners, storytellers, as well as their guilds and the patrons of the establishments where they performed, became increasingly concerned that the performances meet the standards of comportment expected by the upper classes. However, the most important impetus for sanitizing and *standardizing* the language of pingtan was the growth of radio as a venue for storytelling. Because radio reached an overwhelmingly elite audience across

Shanghai and even beyond the boundaries of the city proper, it helped foster a recognizable “urban vernacular” that delineated the boundaries of community in Shanghai.

The first radio station in Shanghai (indeed, in all of China) was XRO, established in 1923 by the American E. G. Osborn. Osborn’s main interest was not in broadcasting per se but in selling radios to the Chinese market.<sup>7</sup> Within eighteen months of XRO’s first broadcast, which consisted of a mix of entertainment and news items, 8 other radio stations had sprung up in Shanghai; by 1934, 51 local stations were registered with the Shanghai Bureau of Communications (Shanghai Archives, 1985: 111-12). More than 20 of these stations included pingtan in their daily broadcasts, and the most famous storytelling broadcast of the 1930s, the *Big Million*, attracted more than 100,000 listeners each day (Peng Benle, 1992: 2).

The people who listened to pingtan storytelling over the radio were markedly different from the lower-class rural migrants who had formed the backbone of the genre’s clientele until the late nineteenth century. These new listeners were overwhelmingly from Shanghai’s upper classes (only the wealthy could afford radios), and they tended to be educated.<sup>8</sup> Prominent authors frequently wrote to storytelling fan newspapers to proclaim their fondness for pingtan broadcasts (Gu Mingdao, 1934: 17), and many literati even created new material for their favorite storytellers.<sup>9</sup> In addition, this new storytelling audience was ethnically diverse. Shanghai in the 1930s and 1940s was home to migrants and sojourners from all over China, and radio broadcasts served to unify them all. One newspaper columnist from Ningbo, for instance, wrote in a popular newspaper for storytelling fans, “I may be a native of Ningbo, but I still love listening to pingtan—it’s far superior to the Ningbo [style of storytelling]” (Shen Yimei, 1933: 2).

This increasingly diverse, wealthy, educated audience for pingtan radio broadcasts brought the standardizing influence of the written word to bear on the language of pingtan. As just noted, educated listeners often wrote down new lyrics and stories for their favorite storytellers and mailed them either directly to the storyteller or to a fan newspaper. This reliance on writing was a new development in pingtan storytelling. To be sure, many of the oldest and most popular pingtan stories (*Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, for instance) either originated as novels or had long existed in standardized, written form.

Nonetheless, for centuries the transmission of the art of pingtan from teacher to student had been almost exclusively oral.<sup>10</sup> Suddenly in the 1930s and 1940s, however, pingtan songs and stories began to be transmitted through written transcriptions, and these written transcriptions were far less colloquial than the orally transmitted stories and songs had been (Yao Yinmei, interview with author, 14 July 1992).

The written transmission of pingtan stories and songs was greatly facilitated by a new genre of publications devoted to pingtan that first emerged in the 1920s and reached its peak in the 1930s and 1940s. These publications included “small newspapers” (*xiao bao*) that covered all the latest developments, personal as well as artistic, in Shanghai’s storytelling world,<sup>11</sup> as well as collections of pingtan song lyrics (*kaipian*). They played an important role in establishing among pingtan enthusiasts a sense of community, which they helped broaden and solidify by making pingtan linguistically accessible to Shanghai’s cosmopolitan inhabitants. If Shanghai’s community of storytelling aficionados had been limited to those who spoke a northern Jiangsu dialect (Liu Jingting, the purported founder of the pingtan tradition, was from Taizhou, in northern Jiangsu) (Chen Ruheng, 1979: 1-18; Zhou Liang, 1993: 129), then this group would have been quite small and drawn largely from the lower classes.<sup>12</sup> One affiliate of the radio industry summed up the problem: “If we rely on the local dialect, then people from other places cannot understand. But if we mix Mandarin and Shanghainese, then the language will be even harder to understand” (Shanghai Archives, 1985: 254).

For pingtan to appeal to Shanghai’s wealthier, more cosmopolitan, upwardly mobile population, its language had to be made accessible. This accessibility was achieved initially through published transcripts of popular stories. For example, one listener wrote to a fan newspaper in 1933 to declare his enthusiasm for the practice of publishing pingtan lyrics:

Although I am not from Suzhou [i.e., he does not understand the Suzhou dialect], I always turn on the radio when I have a free moment. Since pingtan storytelling is perhaps the most popular form of radio entertainment, I can enjoy these broadcasts by reading along. When I hear a pingtan song, I always . . . look at the lyrics. [Meng Hu, 1933: 2]

In fact, one editor of a storytelling fan newspaper acknowledged that his goal was precisely “to help storytelling aficionados understand [the words and content of the stories]” (“Weiwei ji,” 1933: 4).

Such publication helped standardize the language of pingtan storytelling in two different ways. First, many performers themselves turned to the printed versions of lyrics that were available in most stores, restaurants, and radio stations to learn and perform new material. Second, storytelling audiences grew so familiar with published pingtan lyrics that they became intolerant of any deviation by performers from the printed versions; in the face of this disapproval, inconsistencies usually were quickly corrected.<sup>13</sup> Thus, while the development of the oral language in which pingtan was performed in Shanghai during the first half of the twentieth century cannot be precisely re-created, it clearly was greatly influenced by the written word. The language in which pingtan is performed today is in fact a hybrid, a uniquely urban vernacular arrived at through a process of give-and-take between the dialects of northern Jiangsu, Shanghai’s Wu dialect, and standard written Chinese. Because this new urban vernacular was actually *negotiated* through radio broadcasts and published materials disseminated within the Shanghai metropolitan area, it also helped define a new community of urbanites.

#### THE INVENTION OF THE SHANGHAI REN IN PINGTAN STORIES

Shanghai’s successful pingtan storytellers helped further define the new community of urbanites by making increasingly sharp distinctions between “urban” and “rural.” In their stories and songs, most pingtan performers gave Shanghai an image of opulence and modernity, as Wang Gengxiang did in the following song:

The ten-*li* foreign enclave is extravagant,  
Featuring only the best in clothing, food, housing, and transportation.  
Families live in high-rise apartment buildings,  
And drive automobiles when they go out.  
Most comfortable of all are the rich young mistresses of these  
families:

[They are] modern girls who consider shark's fin and sea cucumber to be just ordinary dishes,  
And they do nothing all day but dress up in the latest fashions. [Wang Gengxiang, 1934: 36]

The stereotypical *Shanghai ren* (Shanghai person) who enlivened many pingtan stories of the 1930s and 1940s was wealthy, modern, fashionable, and heavily influenced by foreign trends. He usually owned an automobile, which could be used at a moment's notice for a quick shopping spree on Nanjing Road. He lived in an opulent foreign-style mansion and dined on delicacies every day, and his wives and daughters paraded up and down the wide avenues of Shanghai's foreign concessions dressed in the latest fashions, as their high heels made distinctive clicking sounds on the pavement and the smell of expensive perfume wafted through the air behind them (Wang Zhongnian, 1934: 6).

Of course, such images were far from accurate descriptions of everyday reality in Shanghai, but they were presented to listeners as a Chinese version of the "American dream"—part of a package to aim for or even acquire simply by association if they stayed in Shanghai long enough. The tourism industry was clearly key in promoting Shanghai as the "Pearl of the Orient," a city of luxury and excess to be coveted by outsiders, but these images quickly found their way into popular media and entertainment. Storytellers represented the Shanghai identity to their listeners as naturally envied by all those who lived outside of Shanghai but also as within the reach of newcomers to the city. One of the most amusing of the stories promoting Shanghai identity as glamorous but within the grasp of the "little people" was "The Little Nun Who Came Down the Mountain," by Zhu Yaoxiang and Zhao Jiaqiu. The story of the little Buddhist nun who abandoned life at her convent on the hill to indulge her desire for sex had been popular and well known for years. But Zhu and Zhao gave it a new twist: in their version, the little nun is overcome not by a sexual longing but by a yearning to shop and to be like Shanghai's "modern girls." "Where can I indulge my desire to wear powder and blusher?" the little nun wonders. "Where can I adorn myself in silk and satin? The more I think about it," she sighs, "the more my heart aches!" In the end, she leaves her convent and comes to Shanghai to seek makeup and expensive

clothes. Incidentally, she also finds herself a husband there (Zhu Yaoxiang and Zhao Jiaqiu, 1933: 18).

Another way in which pingtan stories helped create the Shanghai identity was by explicitly defining what it meant to be “*not-Shanghai*.” In the world of late Republican-period Shanghai, the polar opposite of the Shanghai ren was the country bumpkin from Jiangbei; this culturally constructed distinction has been examined carefully by Emily Honig (1992). If the Shanghai ren represented the quintessential modern success story for those from Jiangsu, then the Jiangbei ren was at the opposite end of the spectrum, the ultimate self-delusional loser. This caricature was, of course, just as much an invention as that of the Shanghai ren, but its existence helped reinforce popular faith in the Shanghai identity. As Honig observed in her study of the Jiangbei identity, the “Shanghai identity can be understood only in contradistinction to the other against which it defined itself, and [Jiangbei] people represented that other” (Honig, 1992: 14).

The Jiangbei ren who appeared in the songs and stories of Republican-era Shanghai’s pingtan performers was basically a buffoon. In contrast to the Shanghai ren, who was dressed to the nines in the latest fashions, the Jiangbei ren of popular songs and stories was inevitably shabbily dressed in plain clothing that identified him as a country bumpkin, and even these modest clothes were often disheveled or covered with dirt. While Shanghai ren usually appeared in these stories and songs as real estate tycoons and ladies of leisure, Jiangbei ren were most often incarnated as rickshaw pullers and coolies (i.e., in the lowest positions in Republican-era Shanghai). The typical Shanghai ren was savvy and sophisticated, but the Jiangbei ren was always a bungling fool, a characteristic often accentuated in popular stories by making the Jiangbei ren not just stupid but deluded about that stupidity. More often than not, characters from Jiangbei were used in stories and songs for their comic effect. The storyteller Yao Yinmei recalled, “All I had to do was say a few words in Jiangbei dialect [to indicate that a Jiangbei character had appeared in the story], and the audience would burst out laughing. It’s not that what I had said was particularly funny, but they were laughing in anticipation of the stupid things this Jiangbei character was bound to do” (Yao, interview with author, 14 July 1993).

*THE LANGUAGE QUESTION*

As Yao's anecdote suggests, in the minds of Shanghai's sophisticated urban audiences, the Jiangbei accent itself had become so identified with everything that was backward and unappealing about the Jiangbei identity that its sound alone conjured up images of buffoonery. The irony of Shanghai-area storytellers' conscious use of the Jiangbei dialect and identity to reinforce the positive connotations of being a Shanghai ren is that the pingtan style of storytelling itself originated in Jiangbei. The tradition's acknowledged founder was a mid-seventeenth-century itinerant named Liu Jingting. Born in Taizhou, in northern Jiangsu province, Liu was exiled as a teenager to Xuyi because he was involved in a murder case. Once in Xuyi, he had no choice but to beg for a living; however, he somehow had the good fortune to come into contact with a learned man named Mo Houguang, who was a talented amateur storyteller. By the time he was twenty, Liu himself had mastered the storytelling art and set out on his own to ply his trade in the marketplaces of Nanjing (Chen Ruheng, 1979: 129).

The "problem" with Liu Jingting is that he was from Jiangbei, the very region that was so stigmatized in the work of Shanghai's early twentieth-century pingtan storytellers. As a result, scholars in the past two decades have become almost obsessed with the question of pingtan's links to the dreaded Jiangbei region. Clearly, the tie cannot simply be genealogical: few (if any) pingtan storytellers are blood relatives of Liu Jingting. The critical focus of the debate about whether pingtan storytellers have Jiangbei origins to live down is instead on language. Specifically, the scholars ask, was the original language in which Liu Jingting created the pingtan storytelling tradition the Wu dialect, spoken in southern Jiangsu, or the Yangzhou dialect, spoken in the despised Jiangbei region?

Because storytelling was largely an oral tradition, with teachers passing their knowledge and their language on to their students much as parents pass their genes on to their children, a linguistic genealogy could take the place of blood lineage in settling the Jiangbei/Jiangnan question. By the early twentieth century, Shanghai-area storytellers definitely used the Wu dialect because it was easier for Shanghai-area audiences to understand. But current practice did not, by any stretch of

the imagination, prove whether the linguistic roots of this storytelling tradition were in Jiangnan or in Jiangbei—after all, any old country bumpkin could learn the Wu dialect and pass himself off as being from Jiangnan. So the argument went back to Liu Jingting, the ancestor whose linguistic seed had been passed on to so many Shanghai-area storytellers. Liu was born in Jiangbei, where he lived and worked for much of his life; it is logical, then, to identify Liu as a Jiangbei ren. But the saving grace for pingtan storytellers hoping to lay claim to a southern Jiangsu identity was that the man from whom Liu had first picked up the storytelling art, Mo Houguang, was from Songjiang, just outside of Shanghai and unquestionably in the region where the Wu dialect is spoken. In addition, Mo Houguang was a scholar, and thus he may even have told stories in Mandarin, the “official” language of the capital (Zhang Dihua, 1983: 257-62).

Though many pingtan storytellers were quite relieved at the “reprieve” that these historical links to the Wu dialect seemed to grant them, there is ultimately something absurd about this debate, for the dread attached to the Jiangbei dialect and the Jiangbei region did not exist in Liu Jingting’s day. As a metaphor for backwardness and poverty, Jiangbei is a cultural construction that can be dated very precisely to the mid- to late nineteenth century, and as such it has no relevance if we are trying to discern whether the linguistic roots of pingtan, like its early performers, were stigmatized. However, that Shanghai’s pingtan storytellers went to such lengths to distance themselves from the very language in which their art likely originated is itself significant.

Shanghai’s pingtan storytellers may very well have begun the process of sanitizing and standardizing their language in a self-conscious effort to mimic elite culture, but the standardized form of the Wu dialect in which pingtan has been performed for the past 60 years or so ultimately reflects a significant cultural, economic, political, and psychological shift. Incorporating sociolinguistic questions such as these into historical inquiry will give us insight into how identities are largely constituted through one group’s skillful manipulation of other people’s perceptions of them. The ways in which this manipulation takes place in turn tells us a great deal about deep-seated cultural meanings and perceptions. In the case of pingtan performers, the most important question to ask of the available historical records is, When did these storytellers shift from the northern Jiangsu dialect to the Wu

dialect, and when did they shift from self-conscious attitudes of exaggerated hostility toward stigmatized features of language to sincere and unself-conscious use of “upper-class” language? It is this cognitive shift that marks the true birth of an urban identity among Shanghai-area storytellers.

#### *ASSIMILATING A NEW IDENTITY*

The link between the social mobility of storytellers and their invention and embrace of the Shanghai identity is highly specific but also revealing. In the mid-nineteenth century, itinerant storytellers in Jiangsu and Zhejiang found themselves homeless and at the bottom of the social heap. It was precisely at this time that Shanghai began to expand and improve, and this growth in Shanghai created new possibilities for mobility among storytellers. Not only could these previously dispossessed people find steady and gainful employment in Shanghai; as Shanghai’s cityscape began increasingly to boast modern improvements unavailable elsewhere, such as plumbing, electricity, and opulent architecture, the city’s residents took pride in these developments—and the storytellers who were lucky enough to be working in the city’s new establishments found themselves perfectly positioned to lay claim to this new territory and this new, “modern,” “urban” identity.

These storytellers enhanced the glamour of this urban identity and changed the content of their stories to widen the imagined cultural barrier between urbanites and rural people. They shored up their own claim to an urban identity with the help of elaborate rules and institutional structures, fashioning an exclusive club to which rural outsiders simply were not admitted. Finally, they proclaimed their cosmopolitanism with the ultimate signifier of identity, language. At first, pingtan storytellers appear to have sanitized and standardized their language in a self-conscious effort to mimic what they perceived to be “elite” culture. Ultimately, however, the new urban vernacular became an integral part of their selfhood, reflecting their profound sense of belonging to this new community of “Shanghainese.” Shanghai storytellers had a strong urban identity because Shanghai literally made them who they were. Before they encountered the glitz and

wealth and expansion that characterized Shanghai in the 1930s and 1940s, storytellers were nobodies. Shanghai turned them into somebodies.

That observation brings us back to a point with which I began: Goodman's (1995) argument that native-place identities were so strong and well established among the turn-of-the-century sojourners she studied that they precluded the formation of a specifically Shanghai identity. I have here argued that a uniquely urban identity did exist among storytellers in the late Republican period, but the disagreement between us may be more apparent than real. Because they tended overwhelmingly to be uprooted and itinerant at the turn of the century, this group of storytellers did not have strong native-place ties to begin with. Perhaps, then, they espoused and defended their Shanghai identities with such vigor because Shanghai provided the first real identity and sense of belonging they had ever known.

#### NOTES

1. *Pingtán* is a genre of storytelling that originated in northern Jiangsu; it combines verse both spoken (*píng*) and sung to the accompaniment of a stringed instrument (*tán*). It was one of the most popular forms of entertainment (second only to movies) in Shanghai during the 1930s and 1940s.

2. Most storytelling houses outside Shanghai and in its Chinese City could accommodate only one or two performances per day, whereas the storytelling houses in Shanghai's foreign concessions, all of which boasted electricity by the early twentieth century, offered as many as five two-hour performances daily (beginning at 10 a.m. and 12:30, 3, 5:30, and 8 p.m.). See, for example, Feng Yu (1988: 211).

3. Some examples of multistory entertainment venues are the Wucenglou Shuchang (Five-Story Storytelling House), Da Shijie (Great World Amusement Center), and Lou Wai Lou (which, appropriately enough, means something like "the paragon of all such edifices") (Peng Benle, 1992: 4-5; Scott, 1982: 75).

4. Most pingtan storytellers came from smaller Jiangsu towns or from counties to the west and northwest of Shanghai (Suzhou, Yangzhou, Taizhou, Changshu, Dongting, Shengze, Wuxian, Wuxi, and so on).

5. The date of Pan's article indicates that it was written during the New Life Movement, a public morality campaign that condemned spitting and other unsanitary or unseemly behavior as "unpatriotic." While obviously inspired by New Life ideology, it specifically addresses the problem of maintaining a good image for Shanghai.

6. Citing in particular a series of studies by William Labov (1966), Edwards (1976) suggested that the use of speech patterns and vocabulary to locate a speaker socially is widely recognized and that because speakers are themselves aware of these social indicators, they often consciously correct their pronunciation and word choice to conform with elite patterns.

7. Osborn simultaneously established both XRO and the Radio Corporation of China, which manufactured and sold radio receivers (Osborn, 1923: 15; Shanghai Archives, 1985: 60).

8. Zheng Yimei (1934: 17) cited property and leisure time as the prerequisites for radio listening.

9. The storyteller Zhu Yaoxiang explained in the preface to a collection of his storytelling lyrics that many of the contributions to this volume were written by literati (Zhu Yaoxiang, 1934: 2).

10. The reliance on oral transmission can be attributed in part to the illiteracy of most pre-twentieth-century storytellers and in part to the desire to maintain secrecy and protect one's storytelling innovations from others. For a complete discussion of this matter, see McDaniel (1997: 58-63).

11. For examples of "small newspapers," see *Jin'gangzuan* (Diamond), *Luobinhan* (Robin Hood), *Shanhu* (Coral), *Shanghai shutan* (Shanghai storytelling stage), *Xin chunqiu bao* (The new spring and autumn journal), *Weiwei ji* (Persuasion), and *Shutan* (Storytelling stage).

12. For a complete discussion of the economic and cultural disadvantages of Shanghai's northern Jiangsu migrants ("Jiangbei" or "Subei" people), see Honig (1992).

13. As a young man in 1934, Yao Yinmei (who later became one of Shanghai's best-known pingtan performers) was nearly booed off the stage and fired from his job when he attempted to ad-lib while performing the story "Fate in Tears and Laughter" (Suzhou pingtan yanjiuhui, 1986: 248-49; Yao Yinmei, interview with author, 14 July 1992).

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