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Rural Transnationalism:

Food, Famine, and Agriculture in U.S. and Chinese Literature, 1898-1955

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in Comparative Literature

by

Alexei Robert Nowak

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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Alexei Robert Nowak

Doctor of Philosophy in Comparative Literature

University of California, Los Angeles, 2018

Professor Allison B Carruth, Co-Chair

Professor Eleanor K Kaufman, Co-Chair

This dissertation addresses an unexamined history of literary and academic exchange between the United States and China that shaped agricultural modernization in both countries, a project that speaks to the concerns of American Studies, Chinese Studies, ecocriticism, and critical food studies. The project is bilingual and cross-cultural, analyzing fiction and nonfiction writing together with agricultural surveys and policy documents, showing that writers in the U.S. and in China have articulated linked visions of problems in the countryside in elaborating a moral case for rural transformation. While transpacific studies have sometimes evoked circulation across the ocean and into the treaty ports, "rural transnationalism" brings into view the transformation of the inland continents themselves through agricultural development—and the multiple articulations of national identity in reference to the other.

Chapter one analyzes food politics at the turn of the twentieth century, reading Frank Norris's empire of food exports in *The Octopus* (1901) against literature popularizing the 1905 Chinese boycott of American goods. Many of these texts, receiving little scholarly attention, used agricultural and alimentary metaphors linking the racist treatment of Chinese immigrants in the U.S. with American food exports to China. Chapter two analyzes *The Good Earth* (1931) in the contexts of the transnational agricultural network that Pearl S. Buck participated in with her husband, and contemporaneous Chinese writing about the countryside. Following Arif Dirlik, I argue that the idea of "traditional" Chinese agricultural society was collaboratively produced by this Western Orientalist and Chinese self-Orientalist writing. Chapter three examines another joint U.S.-Chinese project, the Mass Education Movement led by James C. Yen, and fiction by his collaborator Lao Xiang, some widely read in English translation in the 1940's. Unlike the American technical experts, and the Chinese Communists, Yen and Lao Xiang provide an authentically-local vision extending from the village out into the world. Chapter four argues that competing visions of rural modernization the U.S. and China advanced during the early Cold War each drew on their collaborations before WWII. I show how Eileen Chang's English-language propaganda novel *The Rice-Sprout Song* (1955) illuminates and subverts the modernization discourse common to both sides.

The dissertation of Alexei Robert Nowak is approved.

Shu-mei Shih

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Introduction

On February 5th, 2014, over thirty U.S. food production organizations joined together to form the Coalition for Safe Affordable Food with the aim of lobbying Congress to affirm the safety of genetically modified foods. The organizations of the coalition—the Grocery Manufacturers Association, the National Council of Farm Cooperatives, the National Corn Growers Association, and the American Soybean Association, among others—were on the defensive first of all against ballot initiatives seeking compulsory labeling of genetically modified foods over the last two years in over half of the fifty states. Secondly, China's recent ban on certain genetically modified food imports had led to the return of 600,000 tons of American corn in 2013, and perhaps explaining why the front page of the Coalition's website features a photograph of a smiling East Asian child against a pastoral background, happily biting into a large corn cob ("Coalition"). In China, by comparison, the issue had become explicitly nationalist, with GM crops depicted as a threat not only to public health but to national food security and with struggling farmers protesting the "traitors" in the agricultural ministry who had continued some imports. In a video made for army officers but later leaked online, the voice-over makes this clear: "America is mobilizing its strategic resources to promote GM food vigorously. This is a means of controlling the world by controlling the world's food production" ("Food Fight").

This dissertation will show that these contemporary conflicts between and within the United States and China over food security have a long history that has defined uneven political and sociocultural relationships between these two countries, and moreover that literature has played an important role in imagining and defining those relationships. Frank Norris's 1901

novel *The Octopus* famously calls for a rapid increase in food exports to China to sustain the industrialization of agriculture in the American West. A character in the novel declares that for American farmers and industrialists to survive in the coming century, "we must march with the course of empire, I mean we must look to China," (Norris 1901, 305). Suggesting his own views hued closely to this fictional voice, Norris elsewhere linked the close of the frontier to American marines landing in Beijing to help put down the Boxer Rebellion (1903, 69). In addition to celebrating American power directly through the military, and indirectly through control of the food supply, Norris also contributed to so-called "yellow peril" discourse with stereotypical portrayals such as the Chinese kidnapper in *Moran of the Lady Letty* (1898). While scholars have explored the connections and tensions in American literature of this period between the fantasy of the China market as an engine for American prosperity and anti-immigrant racism, what remains unexplored is how Chinese writers understood and engaged with these same issues. In 1905, to protest the treatment of Chinese workers in the U.S., activists in southern China organized a boycott of American imports that lasted over a year (Wang). In the propaganda literature and other works of cultural production popularizing the boycott, the act of giving up American food products appears as particularly poignant. One popular song, for example, politicizes Norris's celebrated commodity: "American wheat flower is made with Chinese blood" (Wang 163). In the novella *Extraordinary Speeches of the Boycott* (1906), meanwhile, the protagonist decides that the only way for China to be truly independent of the U.S. is to develop its own food sovereignty, and at the close of the narrative he moves to the countryside to promote large-scale agriculture. In reading these American and Chinese texts comparatively for the first time, this project shows the multifaceted roles of both imaginative literature and other rhetorical forms, and especially literatures of food, on both sides of U.S.-China political

struggles. Furthermore the project demonstrates how these early conflicts informed the later Cold War competition between the two countries, when each attempted to export its own versions of rural modernization to the rest of Asia, from the Korean War era all the way up to the 2014 military video.

More broadly, by reading American and Chinese literature about agriculture together, we begin to appreciate how writers and their reading audiences of this period imagined the modernization of food production in their respective national contexts as entwined with transnational exchanges and tensions. In addition to the prominent conflicts over U.S. and Chinese food power during the past century, transnational collaborations between Americans and Chinese are perhaps less well known. Most importantly, from the 1890's to the 1937 Japanese invasion of China, a steady stream of American agriculturalists travelled to China to research Chinese agricultural practices and recommend improvements. While certain interests, such as International Harvester, hoped to promote U.S. farming technologies, this project will focus on the larger group of researchers with institutional funding—above all the Rockefeller Foundation—trying to solve what they saw as a global food shortage[1]. These visitors were graduates of the new U.S. agricultural colleges, and an increasing number of Chinese also travelled to the U.S. to become trained agronomists. The most influential of these consultants was Lossing Buck, husband of novelist Pearl S. Buck. Buck travelled with Lossing during his

[1] For the diversity of American interests in the Chinese countryside during the 1920's, see Stross (1986). See Cullather (2011) for how ideas of global scarcity changed from the early to mid-twentieth century, and how Americans worried about growing Asian peasant populations. I take up these latter developments in Chapter Four.

fieldwork, and edited his first book, *Chinese Farm Economy*, in the year before she wrote *The Good Earth*. I argue that this novel's extraordinary binational success—it was widely read and debated in China—can be best understood through the longer history of academic collaboration between Chinese and American agricultural experts attempting to define the nature of Chinese rural society through reference to the U.S. This is furthermore why there is actually significant overlap between her representations of the Chinese countryside and those of the Communist writers ostensibly at the other end of the political spectrum.

World War II largely put an end to U.S.-Chinese collaboration in the countryside, and when the Communists came to power in 1949 they renewed the terms of food conflict from the turn of the century. When the U.S. ambassador was recalled to Washington in August 1949, Mao Zedong characterized him as a fleeing colonial governor, and in a widely-read series of essays Mao criticized the American practice of distributing famine relief flour, saying that it was bait intended to catch the Chinese people and devour them. The image is reminiscent of the ending of *The Octopus*, where the figure of the American industrialist prepares a shipment of famine relief wheat as the first step to expand U.S. food export channels to China and India. With the opening of the Cold War in Asia during the 1950s, the U.S. and China each launched propaganda campaigns to promote how their competing visions of rural modernization could help the rest of Asia. The earlier work of the agronomists in China, such as Lossing Buck, served as the foundation for the Cold War U.S. program of non-redistibutive, technical improvements aimed at international development, a series of projects in India and other countries that were later collectively dubbed the green revolution. The Chinese Communist Party, meanwhile, went on to implement nearly all of the agronomists' earlier suggestions, but combined them with land redistribution. As evident in contemporaneous literature and film, both nations championed their

own programs as promising the utopian end to rural hunger, in contrast to the failure of the other. In this way the Cold War period shows a synthesis of the earlier two periods, as the old political rivalry renewed but this time through technical discourses of production and development.

Just as the two major national powers advancing the Cold War in Asia developed their agricultural and rural modernization programs out of their respective work in the Chinese countryside before the war, so did a third approach that we can now recognize as the prototype of the modern non-governmental organization (NGO). Another transnational project of the late 1920s and early 1930s was the Mass Education Movement (MEM), headed by James C. Yen, who was born and raised in Sichuan and who attended Yale and Princeton. Through his network of contacts with the YMCA, Yen secured Rockefeller funding for the MEM, giving talks throughout the U.S. and publishing multiple essays and pamphlets for an American audience. In contrast to the technical focus of the agronomists, Yen sought to reform village life as a whole, beginning with literacy and only then moving on to rural economy, health, and government. Literature again played a central but slightly different role in this project, which focused on literacy for the rural population rather than literary representations of those rural communities. American academics also participated in the MEM project, but here they were anthropologists seeking to understand and affirm local traditions, rather than scientists seeking to maximize crop yields. Most notably, Yen strove to remain independent of both the Nationalists and Communists, and after the Communists ultimately came to power, he neither stayed in China nor settled in Taiwan, but instead moved to the Philippines and founded the Institute for Rural Reconstruction. This non-governmental organization has continued to promote grass-roots, community-centered programs throughout rural Asia, later expanding to Latin America and Africa. When in the 1970's and 1980's a new generation of international development workers

began to question the top-down technical programs that the U.S. promoted throughout the Third World, James C. Yen's work fifty years earlier in China was rediscovered (Mayfield xv).

In short, this dissertation argues that American and Chinese writers imagined the other through tropes of agriculture, food, and hunger during the early- and mid-twentieth century. Writers producing fiction, poetry, and other forms of literature about agriculture and rural life mediated the material connections between the two countries, including their food trade and agricultural modernization projects. In pursuing these literary and cultural comparisons, the dissertation proposes dialectical relationships along two axes. It begins with the dialectic between imaginative literature and political-economy, specifically the political-economy of agricultural development. Literary and cultural studies as fields have shown that literature mediates readers' understanding of and engagements with historical processes, which cannot be apprehended in their totality. The relationship between literature and political-economy is dialectical because the former does not simply mirror the latter, but also provides ways of understanding that influence future actions. Many scholars have examined American literature's dialectical relationship with agricultural development and larger environmental transformations.[2] For example, William Conlogue (2001) has shown that during the twentieth century U.S. literary authors crystalized for their reading publics various competing directions for future agricultural development. In Chinese literature, understanding and reimagining the countryside and the rural people has been explicitly tied to national transformation since the early twentieth century, and

[2] For example: Conlogue (2001), Carruth (2013), Frietag (2013).

during the Maoist period aesthetic treatments of agricultural production were tightly regulated.[3] In particular, this dissertation builds on Allison Carruth's (2013) work showing that many twentieth-century U.S. literary writers responded to and mapped the growth of what she calls "American food power" abroad. I argue that how Americans and Chinese imagined their competing food interests had long-term consequences for the emergent global food system.

As my literary and cultural analyses will show, the most common trope through which the relationship between the U.S. and Chinese countryside—and in turn the shifting political-economic relationships between the two nations—was imagined was that of famine, for which I propose two main reasons. First, famine displays most completely the perceived failures of the current rural system, and so the need for modernization. As Marx noted, during the smooth functioning of the capitalist economy, people in daily life experience production, distribution, and consumption as only abstractly connected, but during periods of crisis their direct underlying unity becomes become painfully evident. In this way the representation of rural crisis as famine actually gives the most complete picture of the total food system as analyzed by food studies.[4] In the texts that I examine, the causes of famine are generally represented as at once "natural" and social—the typical example is a drought compounding the already unequal distribution of grain—and while one or the other may be portrayed as dominant for particular political goals, the text's reflection on the interconnections between them leads to a picture of rural life as an

[3] For a range of implications, see for example Wang (1992), Feuerwerker (1998), Yue (1999), Shapiro (2001), Han (2005).

[4] Lukacs argued that realism best conveys the unity of the social system below the everyday experience of fragmentation in modern capitalism ("Realism in the Balance").

ecosystem including both human and non-human forces. The second reason for the importance of famine as a trope is that the situation of starvation often serves in the texts as a great leveler, reflecting on the shared underlying biological basis of human life, and even a nature shared with other animals.

This project thus delineates two dialectical relationships, one the relationship between literature and food production, and the other the relationship between these discourses in the US and in China. This builds on the work of David Palumbo Liu (1999), John Eperjesi (2005), Colleen Lye (2005), and others who see a relationship between American literary representations of East Asia and East Asian Americans and those communities' self-understanding of their own economic power and development. By situating this American literary production in counterpoint with Chinese cultural production, a larger shared, asymmetrical context becomes more apparent. For example, Chapter Two is informed by Lye's comparisons between Pearl S. Buck and her contemporary American agricultural experts. In this way Lye reads Buck, as well as other writers such as Edgar Snow, as projecting American pastoral fantasies onto China. By examining Chinese literary writers such as Ding Ling or Mao Dun, however, we find continuities in their idealized visions of the countryside, and even literary formal elements. At the same time, while the dissertation is likewise inspired by Richard So's bilingual readings in English and Chinese, it does not follow his central concept of the transpacific as a unit and method of cultural analysis that contrasts with national and colonial histories. To take Buck again, whereas So celebrates her as escaping the tradition of Orientalism, I instead read *The Good Earth* within a longer history of overlapping American and Chinese ideas about the countryside and the concept of "Chinese agriculture." Following Arif Dirlik's argument that a new concept called "traditional Chinese culture" was the joint production of Western Orientalist writers and Chinese self-

Orientalist writers during the colonial period, I show that both Chinese and Americans sought to forge ideas of traditional Chinese agriculture as an ahistorical institution and cultural system in tension with the modernizing West. For tracing how these two national discourses overlapped and interacted, it is less helpful to posit a third space of the transpacific between the two nations, than it is to see the "contact zone" extending into the rural space that was the site of so much ideological investment during this period in both countries.

Moreover, then, to emphasize the Pacific Ocean through the use of "transpacific" would be evocative but potentially distracting for this study of ideas about agriculture and land use. Firstly, even as a geographical term the transpacific works less well than the transatlantic (and earlier Mediterranean) studies from which it derives by analogy. Like the transatlantic, the transpacific attends to the two edges of the ocean, with the water as a space of crossing and transformation, but it thus excludes the Pacific Islands and their very different colonial histories. Secondly, as this dissertation in particular analyzes literature about farming, transpacific imaginary is arguably not as apt to scholarship centered on rural land use and intra-national migrations. In an early critique of the concept of the Pacific Rim, Christopher Connery (1994) argued that "perhaps there is a danger in working within the dominant conceptual category of the ocean, given that it is capital's favored myth-element. We should likewise be wary of constructing an oppositional Pacific Rim, seeing in its 'dynamism' a new challenge to U.S. and European hegemony" (56). Emergent transpacific movement is, through such a lens, imagined to be dynamic in contrast with a presumed fixity of the continents and their nation states. Notably, the ocean only appears in one of the texts in this dissertation, *The Octopus*, which is also the most politically reactionary and racist, the boldest celebration of the circulation of capital through technological development. By contrast, my project's focus on agriculture brings into

view the transformation of the continents themselves through agricultural development—and the transformation of the multiple articulations of national identity in reference to the other. Rather than transpacific, then, this project could be identified as intercontinental.

Emphasizing the uneven power dynamic through which American and Chinese authors worked during this period, this study begins by recognizing the connection between China and the various encroaching powers during this period as semicolonial. Chinese Marxists of the 1920's invoked this term to indicate their complex political and cultural situation, according to which China was subjected to foreign power without the structures of formal colonialism. The "semi" in Chinese self-identification with semicolonialism should not be understood as a hesitant or partial colonialism, but rather as a variation on the more common conception of colonialism, characterized by several interrelated phenomena (Shih 30-40). First, no foreign power was hegemonic in the early twentieth century, but instead China became a site of economic competition between the imperialist powers of Britain, the U.S., Russia, France, Japan, and others, all secured by military force and unequal treaty agreements. Second, Chinese reformers overthrew the imperial state in 1911, but the new republican government likewise could not establish hegemony and competed with regional warlords. Thus the term was often used in a pair as "semicolonial, semifeudal," to stress that a national capitalist economy had not developed. Third, as a result, there was great regional variation in politics, economy, and culture. Hence a formulation such as "China today is colonial in the Japanese-occupied areas and basically semi-colonial in the Kuomintang [Nationalist] areas, and it is predominantly feudal or semi-feudal in both" (Mao Zedong 1940). Semicolonialism as a term thus does not define a strict, coherent concept such as a mode of production or a formal distribution of power, but rather indexes the

unevenness of political and economic development across China and the complex competition between several national and international power blocks.

What does this view of semicolonial China mean for the particular role of the U.S. in East Asia? In the first place, the U.S. should be recognized as one of multiple imperialist powers in China. To say that the two countries were linked through semicolonial domination directs researchers to investigate the cultural dimensions of this relationship—both how each represented the other and also how cultural forms circulated between them. For American studies, this perspective can enlarge an understanding of American imperialism as a whole. For example, a special issue of the *Journal of Transnational American Studies* edited by Hsuan Hsu, titled *Circa 1898: Overseas Empire and Transnational American Studies* provides compelling comparative readings of U.S. and East- and Southeast Asian writings on the military actions of that period. Although a central motivation for interventions in Southeast Asia was to gain better access to the China market, and American troops fought in China itself, the collection does not include writing about and from China, in the way that it pairs writing about and from the Philippines and other territories that the U.S. invaded. Because not much is known about Chinese writing in American Studies, scholars have not ventured comparative postcolonial studies of Chinese and American perspectives to complement cultural studies of other U.S. interventions. This dissertation fills that gap for the period around the turn-of-the-century, and builds from that to understand early twentieth-century cultural production within the two countries' semi-colonial relationship. Scholars of Chinese literature have long argued that modern Chinese cultural production cannot be understood on purely national terms, nor as the importation of foreign elements from the West, but as the invention of new terms and cultural practices in reference to

multiple international predecessors.[5] This project approaches American ideas about China as likewise part of this larger, shared whole.

For example, the first chapter analyzes the Social Darwinist arguments of anti-Chinese, anti-immigrant racism in late nineteenth and early twentieth century America, comparing them to Chinese discussions of Social Darwinism at the same time. In the pamphlet *Meat vs. Rice, American Manhood or Asiatic Coolieism*, AFL leader Samuel Gompers dwells on food practices to argue that "Anglo-Saxons" are biologically dependent on meat, which is comparatively expensive, arguing by extension that their labor power is more expensive than that of the Chinese, who, Gompers observes, subsist on less expensive rice. The conclusion is that white U.S. workers are less fit for modern urban labor and will lose in the direct competition of a free labor market, so the market must be manipulated through anti-immigrant legislation. At the same time, Chinese readers of Darwin worried that their political system was out of date, and ill-fitted to modern industrial economies. Reformers called for political action to create a nation-state that would be able to compete with countries like the United States, and also to guarantee China's food sovereignty. Both the Americans and the Chinese, then, worried that they were out-of-date, that they were fit for the past but not the present—and these fears in turn informed calls for nationalist political intervention. Both sides participate in a larger international discourse of Social Darwinism that naturalizes production, consumption, and imperial power, and in which food appears as a useful synecdoche.

Moreover, Shu-mei Shih, in analyzing intellectual life and cultural production during the era, argues that "the fragmentation and multiplicity of foreign powers implies that each power potentially occupied a different place within the Chinese cultural imaginary, as indeed was the

[5] See Liu (1995), Shih (2001).

case in the distinction most Chinese made between Japanese and Euro-American imperialisms." Specifically, then, this dissertation argues that one important association that the U.S. evoked for Chinese readers was agrarianism, taking the U.S. and China as two continent-sized agrarian nations. For Shih notes that because there was no formal colonial apparatus, and so no ideological indoctrination, little or no ideological anti-Westernism and anti-modernism of the kind seen in India and other colonial societies developed in China. Instead, while Chinese intellectuals were divided on a wide range of issues, none challenged basic enlightenment values of reason and progress. Even those who rejected Hegelian ideas of teleological progress and Western supremacy, did so informed by and with the support of Westerners critical of certain developments in the West—above all the destruction of World War I—such as Bertrand Russell and Henri Bergson. Thus in Chapter Two I will read Pearl S. Buck in the context of writers such as Liang Shuming who celebrated "traditional" Chinese rural society as not a rejection of modernity but rather an appropriate and valuable balancing force in the modern world. To say this is not so much to celebrate Buck as a cosmopolitan figure, as to explore how Chinese intellectuals themselves shared many assumptions with Buck and other Americans. Unable to locate a pure Chineseness in their urban environment, as Dirlik shows, they projected this idea onto the countryside. In Meleine Yueh Dong's words, many Shanghai Chinese "evinced the mentality of a semi-colonizer vis-à-vis the rest of China" (Dong 2006, quoted in Au 108). Despite these inventions of timeless tradition, this dissertation will reconstruct how Chinese developing ideas about their own agriculture were bound up with Americans, and how American ideas about their own agriculture were bound up with Chinese. The academic network of which Buck was a part is the clearest example, but is in fact one of several such connections in the early twentieth century.

In arguing that U.S-Chinese relations have long been imagined in terms of food and agriculture, the dissertation is organized around the shifts between three historical moments: U.S.-China trade competition at the turn of the century, transnational networks of agricultural and other experts in the 1920's and 1930's, and the competing Communist and Capitalist (Green Revolution) models for rural modernization in Asian nations outside China during the early Cold War. Chapter one begins at the turn of the century, when relations were understood strictly in terms of trade and immigration, that is circulation. This provides a prehistory to the coming decades of collaboration as well as international investment in agricultural production itself. Chapters two and three then address the transnational connections of the 1920's and 1930's, each taking up a different network, one working for technical improvement and one for rural education, and central literary-political figure, Pearl S. Buck and James C. Yen respectively. The dissertation's fourth and final chapter follows the legacy of the collaboration, as it transformed into the Cold War rivalry over how best to transform rural Asia.

Chapter one, "Food Empire, Trade Boycott: Literature and the Future of U.S.-China Relations in 1900," analyzes food politics at the turn of the twentieth century, when the U.S. began to intervene more heavily in China, via both military action and resulting investment in binational educational initiatives. This is the moment that the U.S. military actions in Asia and the Pacific that began in 1898 extended all the way to Beijing to help put down the Boxer Rebellion in 1900—the event that Frank Norris identified as the definitive end of the American frontier—and when organizers built the first explicitly nationalist social movement in China, a boycott against American goods in 1905. Due to a discrepancy in the indemnity fund that the foreign powers exacted from China following the Rebellion, moreover, the U.S. designated a

portion of this money to found three universities in China—including Nanjing University, where the Bucks would work from 1920 to 1933—and ongoing scholarships for Chinese students to study in the U.S. This chapter shows how writers and activists used food and agriculture to symbolize the growing political and economic connections between the two countries.

Common to both the American and Chinese fiction that chapter one considers is a shared sense of futurity-- a sense that a new age is dawning and that one's own country will only be saved through its control of the food system. Here, I analyze how Frank Norris, in his novel *The Octopus* (1901) and in his non-fiction writings, links the industrialization of agriculture to the U.S.-China trade, such that infinite American economic growth is secured by infinite Chinese hunger. The novel has received a great deal of critical attention for its representation of China,[6] but this chapter is the first analysis of *The Octopus* in the context of Chinese writing on the two nations' food trade. In fact, although the boycott is called the first Chinese social movement articulated in modern nationalist terms, very little has been written about the literary and cultural works produced to popularize it. I show that propaganda works popularizing the boycott used agricultural and alimentary metaphors to link the racist treatment of Chinese immigrants in America with American food exports to China. The anonymous novella *Extraordinary Speeches of the Boycott* goes as far as theorizing that China will only ever be free of the U.S. by developing its own agricultural production. The boycott discourse furthermore helps understand that the Chinese and the Americans both politicized the link between American exports to China and Chinese immigration to the U.S., and both shared a vocabulary of Social Darwinism. I argue that these discussions set the tone for the coming century.

[6] For example Eperjesi (2005), Lye (2005).

Chapter two, "A Transnational Agricultural Network: *The Good Earth* on Chinese and American Farms," argues that Americans have long seen parallels between China and their own country. These parallels are spectacularly dramatized in Pearl S. Buck's *The Good Earth*, the commercial success of which in English and Mandarin alike shows that both U.S. and Chinese reading publics were already prepared to see these connections. Rather than reading the novel alongside other American literary representations of China, I compare it to three other bodies of writing: Chinese as well as American technical writing about the countryside, and Chinese and American literary representations of the countryside. In particular I argue that *The Good Earth* uses tropes common to contemporary Chinese revaluations of the rural population, including a contrast between a traditional father and a modern son as well as dramatic irony that serves to distance a peasant's consciousness from the assumed urban reader. Buck participated in a larger trend among Chinese writers to revalue the rural population, but I argue that this facet of her literary work should not lead to the straightforward celebration of her cosmopolitanism. Instead, it helps us understand a longer history in which Western orientalist writers and Chinese self-orientalist writers produced the concept of traditional Chinese agriculture. Moreover, by recognizing *The Good Earth* as perhaps the most widely-read farm novel in American literary history that also had a lively critical and popular reception in China, we can better appreciate how the idea of Chinese agriculture informed other American writers' views of their own self-styled agrarian nation. Given Buck's literary and political influence during the 1930's, I propose that other American writers of the decade such as John Steinbeck and James Agee take up the dramatic irony that she borrows from Chinese literature, even as they use it to present a much bleaker view of rural life during the Depression.

Chapter three, "Rural Reconstruction through Literacy and Literature: James C. Yen and Lao Xiang," provides a contemporaneous contrast with Buck and the network of agricultural experts out of which her literary work developed. Scholars have traditionally contrasted Buck with leftist writers, but I argue in chapter two that she actually shares more with leftists in their views of the countryside than is generally thought. To further develop this point, chapter three presents another joint U.S.-Chinese rural project whose ideas of the countryside differ both from the agronomists and from the Communists, and that ultimately popularized its ideas through fiction that differs from that of both Buck and leftist writers. This project is that of the Mass Education Movement (MEM), founded and led by the Sichuan-born, Yale- and Princeton-educated James C. Yen. Rather than the agronomists' technical focus on agricultural yield, or the Communists' focus on class struggle, the MEM sought a comprehensive strengthening of rural society beginning with literacy education. Taking up this program, I examine the MEM teaching materials themselves and other documents of Yen's organization, together with fictional works by the most prominent writer working with the MEM, Lao Hsiang. Although his writings have been largely neglected by contemporary literary critics, many of Lao Hsiang's works were translated into English and published in the U.S. at the time, in particular his satire of national education methods, "A Country Boy Quits School" (1934). As I argue in chapter two, what Buck and the Chinese leftist writers share, among other things, is the goal of using literature to try to imagine or feel into the experience of the rural other, who is him- or herself illiterate by definition. James C. Yen challenged this fundamental view of the countryside with a revolutionary curriculum in which villagers were able to learn functional literacy in Chinese characters in as little as three months. Lao Hsiang, moreover, who had grown up in a small village near where he worked as an MEM lead teacher, elaborates in his fiction a view of the

world from the village outward. In my readings of "A Country Boy Quits School" and the novella *Quan Village* (1940), which was also translated into English (by Lin Yutang) and published in the U.S. in the 1950s by Buck and Richard Walsh, I show how Lao Hsiang develops a vision of rural society as intertwined with the regional, national, and even international world through networks of kinship relations. Lao Hsiang's work thus provides a striking contrast to the general urban/rural divide inscribed in most fiction from this period.

By bringing this fairly unknown project to light, this third chapter provides another dimension of support to one of the dissertation's central theses. Chapters two and four argue that both before and after the Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945), the hegemonic Chinese (or leftist) approach to the countryside and the hegemonic American (or liberal) approach share more in common than is typically acknowledged. By contrast with the MEM—a project that is significantly different from both of these in its democratic vision of literacy and community development and in its grassroots approaches—the similar technocratic structure of the two hegemonic forces becomes more apparent. The MEM project in Ding county in Hebei province provides a foil to the agronomists working in Nanjing as the MEM project was also a joint U.S.-Chinese venture, funded by the Rockefeller Foundation. In Ding county, however, the American academics who participated were anthropologists documenting variations in local folk cultures, rather than agronomists critiquing economic practices, or experts in classical literature such as Buck. As I take up in chapter four, the two sides in the Cold War in Asia both drew on their experiences in the Chinese countryside that we saw in chapter two: Communist land reform and American technological development, drawing on the work of Lossing Buck and others. At this time, James Yen maintained independence from both sides, just as he had during the civil war, by settling in the Philippines and forming a non-governmental organization that applied the same

bottom-up strategies in other parts of Asia (and eventually Latin America and Africa) that he had pioneered in the 1920's. Chapter three thus provides a bridge to the post-war period.

Turning to the early Cold War of the 1950's, chapter four, "Cold War Modernity and its Pessimists: Hunger in Eileen Chang's *The Rice-Sprout Song*," analyzes the American and Chinese competing visions for rural modernization in the rest of Asia as building on their collaborative efforts before the war. As historian Nick Cullather shows, what Carruth calls American food power was key to the Cold War competition in Asia, especially in propaganda campaigns. Faced with the recent success of Chinese communism and land reform, American officials claimed to provide an even better future for the rest of Asia, through the Green Revolution. Meanwhile China represented the U.S. as the true site of hunger, due to rampant inequality, where poor children had to eat out of garbage cans. The chapter reads Eileen Chang's *The Rice-Sprout Song* (1954), originally written in English and translated into Chinese by the author, as an engagement with this propaganda war but as nonetheless transcending it. A major Chinese-language writer in Shanghai in the 1940's, Chang had left China for Hong Kong, where she found work with the United States Information Agency. I argue that the novel draws on tropes from the 1930's discussed in chapter two to criticize the Communist program in the countryside, but goes beyond this to question the larger Enlightenment modernization project that unites the Chinese Communist and American technocratic objectives. I emphasize in this reading Chang's use of premodern culture and her representations of animals. Although this novel is usually separated from Chang's earlier Chinese-language writing, I demonstrate continuities with her short fiction and essays from her early period on Buddhist cosmology and classical Chinese painting. Even more than Lao Xiang, discussed in chapter three, Chang does not present rural subjects as the other of the urban readership. Where earlier chapters analyzed

writers from multiple competing American and Chinese political positions, showing points of broad continuity, the dissertation ends with this novel that is both American and Chinese, which rejects the assumptions of both sides in the Cold War about the future of rural modernization.

In terms of textual analysis, each chapter in the dissertation examines one main novel that it compares to multiple other shorter works of both American and Chinese literature. Chapter one, as a kind of prelude, takes up literature written in both the U.S. and China at the turn of the century that examined the same issue, the future of exchange between the two. As exchange increased over the next decades, then, chapters two, three, and four each analyze texts that were addressed to joint U.S.-China rural projects, and immediately translated and circulated in both English and Chinese. This shows the enduring importance of literature throughout these decades in imagining the problems and potential solutions in the countryside, and how Americans and Chinese (and Hong Kongers and Taiwanese) were simultaneously invested in them. I begin with two canonical American works that both, in their own way, reassure the reader about the future of American-Chinese relations, and end with two lesser-known Chinese works that both, in their own way, challenge both American and Chinese hegemonic approaches to the countryside. Organized in this way, the latter two works are seen to speak back to the earlier ones, emphasizing the semi-colonial dimension of the U.S.-China relationship during this period.

Chapter 1

Food Empire, Trade Boycott:

Literature and the Future of U.S.-China Relations in 1900

This chapter explores the role of food in representations of the relationship between the U.S. and China around 1900. By analyzing Frank Norris's novel *The Octopus* (1901), I build on work by Colleen Lye and other scholars who have shown the connection between food and race in both American literature and anti-Chinese-immigrant discourse during this era of imperial expansion. I will read these works within a larger context that includes works of fiction and popular culture produced in China as part of a 1905 campaign to boycott American goods in protest of the treatment of migrant workers in the us. For Chinese writers and activists who wrote in support of a boycott also used tropes of food and hunger to represent the mistreatment of Chinese in the U.S. and at home. In other words, at this time both Americans and Chinese used food to link these two concerns, the movement of products in one direction and of people in the other. This helps to show more clearly that *The Octopus*'s vision of an American food empire is part of an international struggle over the future of the U.S.-China relationship, grounded in food sovereignty. Seen in this light, American ideas about food and empire appear not as a one-way projection but rather as part of a larger, international discourse of race, nationalism and capital informed by Social Darwinism.

Central to this mode of analysis is that American and Chinese literary representations overlapped rhetorically with practical policy-oriented arguments, both governmental and business. In this way, imaginative literature contributed to the terms through which later economic and political decisions were made. As John Eperjesi has argued,

> imaginary contacts between Asia and America, rather than following real contacts as re-presentations of an actual exchange, provided the symbolic structure through which real exchanges were defined and interpreted. Fantasies of the China market [in the 1890s] supported political and economic movements across the Pacific long before that market was realized and were in dramatic excess of its actual potential. (79)

The Octopus imagines a transpacific wheat trade on such a scale as to reorient U.S. production for export rather than domestic consumption, and this *before* the wheat trade approached anything like this scale, or even before the widespread industrialization of American agriculture imagined in the novel that would make it possible. I will extend this reading to argue that food is the specific commodity whose symbolic role comes to exceed even its material economic importance in the transpacific relationship, the one that most clearly links producers and consumers, precisely because of its status as life-giving necessity rather than luxury good. Moreover, just as Eperjesi has argued that *The Octopus* influenced how Americans imagined the China market, William Conlogue has shown that the novel popularized an image of industrial agriculture that had been unknown to most Americans and would only be fully implemented in the coming decades.

In fact we need to see these two future developments as intrinsically linked. For Norris, the closing of the frontier involves simultaneously the reorganization of agricultural labor and a new connection with China. In the novel, it is only the infinite, insatiable Chinese hunger that will make possible an equally infinite growth in American industrial production. As Lye and David Palumbo-Liu rightly argue, American writers use East Asian racial form to mediate an understanding of economic change. We can understand this in a larger context as food is also a

key symbol in structuring the imagination of Chinese boycott literature and propaganda. Just as *The Octopus* draws on economic boosterism and political speeches of the day, the Chinese boycott literature is only minimally removed from political action. And yet writers use that distance, however small, to imagine larger changes needed beyond the boycott itself. One novella in particular, *Extraordinary Speeches of the Boycott* (1906), foregrounds its rhetorical position by narrating a series of dialogues among fictional boycott participants. The central character argues for the importance of developing domestic agriculture if China is ever to be truly independent of U.S. control, and at the end of the text he turns from urban activism to large scale farming to achieve food sovereignty, which will be a major focus of the Communist Party.

This chapter thus contributes to Transnational American Studies by approaching U.S. ambitions in China through a transnational framework. In their critique of U.S. imperialism, New Americanists such as Amy Kaplan took *The Octopus* as a key text for linkage of continental expansion (Manifest Destiny) with military control of the Pacific (Hawaii, Guam, the Philippines, etc.), as it linked what had been seen as "regional" literature of the American West with international capitalism and foreign military strategy. One of the limitations of the New Americanists, however, was that their object of study, the "Cultures of U.S. Imperialism," is basically the same as the older nationally-defined American literature, even as they submit it to a scathing ideological critique.[1] This limitation was addressed in the late 1990s by a group of Post-Marxists who perhaps went to the other extreme, downplaying the level of the nation to focus on the Pacific as a regional space crossed by global flows. For Rob Wilson in particular, the contemporary Pacific has been forged through these flows of capital, labor, information, and media images which simultaneously invest the Pacific with a privileged status in the history of

[1] See Carolyn Porter on this point.

capitalism since the late nineteenth century, and also limit it to a minor, regional status which cannot claim global authority.

The paradigm of Transnational American Studies seeks both to critique U.S. imperialism and understand cultural production as emerging out of cross-cultural encounter. This mode of scholarship attempts to be anti-imperial in its choice of texts as well as what it says about them. As Hsuan L. Hsu writes in the introduction to a special issue of the *Journal of Transnational American Studies* titled *Circa 1898: Overseas Empire and Transnational American Studies*:

> In addition to enhancing our understanding of diverse cultural and historical offshoots of the events surrounding 1898, these essays indicate the importance of developing comparative methods of analysis that would cut across multiple sites of colonialism and resistance without re-centering the U.S. (6)

These studies demonstrate that cultural and political changes during this period should be understood as contested and contingent, rather than as the unfolding of an ideal "imperial logic." This chapter contributes to this project by adding a transnational cultural study of the U.S.-China relationship during this period. In the first sentence of his introduction, Hsu explains the title *Circa 1898* by listing a number of events immediately before and after the critical year 1898 that has become synonymoUS with U.S. imperialism, among them "the China Relief Expedition in which U.S. troops participated in 1900-1901" (2). And yet, beyond this sentence there is no discussion of China in the issue, as there is very little scholarship in American Studies that meets the issue's standard for transnational study by working with Chinese materials. I seek to remedy that by bringing Chinese anti-American literature and cultural production into conversation, or argument, with its American contemporaries.

By comparing American and Chinese texts from the same period, I wish to take seriously both sides' contention that this is an imperial relationship. Again, these fantasies are not simply projections but inform the material relations between them. Both American Studies and Chinese Studies have been relatively late in accepting the implications of Postcolonial Theory, due to the resistance to the idea that the U.S. was or is a colonial power, and the fact that China was never formally colonized.[2] Yet Americans were very clear in debating the pros and cons of imperialism in 1898 before deciding in favor of it, and were equally clear once they felt they had finally "lost" China with the Communist victory in 1949, a time when Mao celebrated the fall of "the American colonial government in Nanking."[3] In 1962, at the height of the Cold War and the year after the end of the policy disaster that was Great Famine, the PRC memorialized the 1905 boycott of American goods as the opening of resistance to American imperialism. Researchers gathered and published hundreds of pages of poems, short stories, novellas, newspaper articles, posters, and other ephemera (A Ying).

In their polemics around 1900, both the anti-Chinese American labor leaders and the anti-American Chinese activists understood their struggle in Social Darwinist terms. Both calls to action warned that they were newly unfit for the changing modern environment and would have to act accordingly. The difference is that in the U.S. social Darwinism in understood in terms of biological race, where the "Anglo-Saxon" body could not keep up with the more efficient "Asiatic" body, while in China the Darwinist competition was understood to be between forms of political organization that were more or less for different historical environments. Moreover,

[2] Tani Barlow (1997) gives an overview of this trend.

[3] Mao, "Farewell Leighton Stuart."

what is interesting is how literary form follows, informs, or accompanies these forms of Social Darwinism. In the U.S., literary naturalism accompanies biological racial theory, and food secures a sense of nature that spans the range from agricultural production to physical consumption. In China, it is popular songs and literary representations of discussion, of liberal exchange of ideas, that attempt to call the new national community into being. Here artists demystify the commodification of food in order to map unequal trade relations and advocate for independence based on food sovereignty.

1. China as Supplement to the World Market in *The Octopus*

Explaining why he wrote *The Octopus*, Frank Norris said that he believed the settling of the American West had been of such world-historical import that it deserved to be told in a great work of literature. His view of the West was heavily influenced by Frederick Jackson Turner's famous thesis, in "The Significance of the Frontier in American History" (1893), that the frontier had been the decisive factor in factor in shaping a distinctively American culture, and moreover that this period was now at an end. When the 1890 census found that nearly all "frontier" land had been occupied, this meant that the first chapter of American history was over, while the next chapter remained unclear. Thus Norris wanted to celebrate the frontier, but also to memorialize it, to monumentalize it in a loftier literary form than the popular western genre fiction. Having studied the form of the medieval romance at the University of California, he dreamed of seeing a *Song of Roland* for modern America, a song of the West. He planned a trilogy of novels, or following his interest in medieval literature, what we might call a song cycle.

The first novel, *The Octopus*, was based on a historical event, known as the Mussel Slough Incident, a deadly 1880 land dispute between the Southern Pacific Railroad and wheat-growing ranchers in Tulare county, in California's central valley. Ostensibly weighing the

conflicting interests of the ranchers and the railroad, *The Octopus* is ultimately more interested in placing the Mussel Slough incident within the larger geographical scale of the emergent global wheat trade and the larger temporal scale of the closing of the frontier. Following *The Octopus*'s description of wheat production on newly-industrialized California farms, the second book, *The Pit* (1902), traces the wheat's distribution through commodities markets in Chicago, and the never-completed third book was to cover consumption "in a famine-stricken Europe or Asia," as he wrote in a synopsis (Norris 1994, 7). The song of the West turns out to be the story of the expanding global market for American agricultural commodities.

Norris's epic scope did not prevent him from conducting detailed historical research into the Mussel Slough Incident itself. The dispute centered on the price at which the Southern Pacific would sell the land abutting the railroad, which had been granted them by the federal government. The railroad circulated advertisements soliciting the public to lease the land from them temporarily, apparently with the option to purchase it for between $2.50 and $5 per acre. The ranchers who leased these large plots of land pooled their capital to build an irrigation system that transformed the arid region into productive farmland for wheat and hops. Once the crops were a success, however, the railroad declared that the land would be sold at market value between $17 and $40 per acre, and that the tenants would have to either pay or move out. In response, the ranchers organized a Settlers' Land League and armed themselves to defend their claims. On May 11, 1880, a U.S. Marshall escorting the new legal owners attempted to evict the tenants of the Mussel Slough ranch. In the shoot-out that followed eight men were killed, most of them ranchers shot by one of the new owners. While many readers at the time of the book's publication praised its attack on the railroad monopoly and support for the common farmer, later generations have emphasized that Norris portrays the ranchers as capitalists who care more about

windfall profits than about hard work or the land, the traditional virtues of Jeffersonian agrarianism. Indeed, the author emphasizes the ploy of the Settlers' Land League to influence the election of a state commission that would favor their side in the legal case—when this corruption is exposed near the end of the novel the ranchers lose their popular support.

Norris maintains a distance from the ranchers by telling much of the action from the perspective of an outsider, Presley, who is a San Francisco poet visiting his friend, Buck Annixter, one of the ranchers who will eventually be killed. Presley is hoping, like Jack London and Norris himself, to write the first great literary work expressing the essence of the American West. There is some disagreement among scholars over how the land is portrayed in the novel, and in this it is helpful to note that Presley tries out multiple writing styles as his view of area changes. In the first chapter Presley witnesses the beauty of the natural environment, and goes on to record it in a pastoral celebration of beauty and harmony. In a strange ending to the chapter, Presley repeats word-for-word in his writing long passages that had appeared as narrative description ten pages earlier, and in this way Norris self-referentially emphasizes both the centrality of Presley's perspective and also that the novel itself is a work of descriptive writing. In the next chapter, however, the pastoral landscape is replaced by images of the massive new farm equipment used in planting the wheat, which Norris depicts this in graphic terms as the sexual union between the machine and the earth. At this point, Presley is forced to confront the land dispute and the competing economic interests that are driving the industrialization of agricultural commodities, and attempts to incorporate these into an enlarged view of the West. The industrialist Cedarquist assures Presley and the ranchers that the continued expansion of American agriculture depends on reaching the inexhaustible demand of the China market. A famine in India provides the opportunity for him to arrange a humanitarian shipment of grain,

which serves as a test run ahead of increasing transpacific exports. After the victory of the railroad, Presley tries his hand at politically committed poetry, publishing a successful georgic poem titled "The Toilers." Local attempts at political mobilization fall apart, however, after the Settlers' League's conspiratorial plot to influence the commission is exposed. Resigned to the power of industrial progress, Presley decides to accompany Cedarquist's famine relief voyage. The novel ends with him looking out to sea, as he decides that his friends' deaths do not mean much in the grand scheme of things. All is for the best in the best of all possible worlds, for toilers may come and go, "*But the* WHEAT *remained*" (651, original emphasis).

Because it is ultimately the story of large-scale natural and historical forces that dwarf the characters' moral choices, *The Octopus* is classed as work of literary naturalism. Florian Frietag points out that while all farm novels must feature natural forces to some extent, it is the total failure of the characters' attempts to influence the social world around them that gives *The Octopus* a specifically naturalist form as compared to most American farm novels. At the same time, I believe it is also worth keeping in mind Norris's own preferred formal terms from ancient and medieval poetry rather than modern prose, the epic and the romance. It is an epic because it is intended as telling the heroic story of a whole people. And yet it is a "naturalist epic" in that, however improbably, humans ultimately give way to the wheat as true hero of the West, uncontainable as both a commodity and a natural force. All previous work on *The Octopus* addresses political economy is some way, and just as Norris intended to write one novel each on production, circulation, and consumption of wheat, commentators have tended to focus on one of these moments in the economic sphere as it was organized at the turn of the twentieth century. Environmental critics from Leo Marx to William Conlogue have focused on the rural scene of production and shifting generic conventions for representing it. Critics primarily interested in

naturalist form, such as Walter Benn Michaels and Mark Seltzer, have focused on circulation during the late-nineteenth-century financialization of the economy. Finally, critics focused on race and imperialism, such as John Eperjesi and Colleen Lye, have focused on the export to China and the Chinese cooks on the ranch. What reappears across much of this criticism that focuses on the new economy, however, is a tendency to downplay the land dispute at the center of the plot, since the ranchers are themselves capitalists engaged industrial agriculture. The land dispute plot, however, is crucial to Norris's goal of writing the true history of the West, especially the transition from the frontier period into a new age. By organizing the first book of the "epic of the wheat" trilogy around a real event, Norris's overall strategy is to record historical reality and celebrate it within a larger, reassuring narrative of enlarged of production and circulation. The reason that there is so much focus on writing and recording in the novel, I argue, is that Norris sees writing itself as crucial to the history of the west, and hopes, through his own writing, to participate in it. What we see throughout the book is a consistent reversal of common-sense causality: production depends on consumption, the stability of the continent depends on overseas empire, and physical production depends on writing and information management. This is how we should understand the relationship between writing and the land in *The Octopus*: writing is practical, supporting the development of industrial farming to the point of export to China in a new food empire.

As portrayed in the novel, the Mussel Slough incident is a symptom of the lack of access to sufficient demand for industrializing U.S. agriculture. For as the ranches become connected to a global food market, they are exposed both to greater opportunities and increasingly volatile risks. Before the production process is even introduced in the novel, Norris highlights the communications technologies that make "the office […] the nerve-centre of the entire ten

thousand acres of Los Muertos" (53). Magnus and his son Harran would sit up half the night watching "the most significant object in the office," the stock ticker. History's first automated printer, it spells out their fortunes one character at a time:

> At such moments they no longer felt their individuality. The ranch became merely the part of an enormous whole, a unit in the vast agglomeration of wheat land the whole world round, feeling the effects of causes thousands of miles distant—a drought on the prairies of Dakota, a rain on the plains of India, a frost on the Russian steppes, a hot wind on the llanos of the Argentine. (54)

The occasions for these transcendent feelings of connection are foreign crises that affect the price of their own wheat. Yet because circulation is limited by the railroad—its physical and geographical capacity as well as its monopolistic organization—there is an equally limited amount of profit that the railroad operators and the ranchers must fight over. This is the central contradiction of the novel, as Norris relates the railroad both to a system of veins that facilitates circulation and also an octopus that strangles the full vital force of production.

While the ranchers are awaiting the results of their legal case, the character of Cedarquist gives a long speech proposing the China market as the only long-term solution for American production. A former industrialist transitioning into shipbuilding, he addresses the opportunities made possible by the Spanish-American War, speaking as an oracle from the past to the "youngsters" reading the novel at the turn of the century: "Our century is about done. The great word of this nineteenth century has been Production. The great word of the twentieth century will be—listen to me, you youngsters—Markets" (305). Cedarquist goes on to explain the fundamental problem of the business cycle, that production must expand to stay competitive, but the saturation of the market leads to bankruptcy for most producers and consolidation of industry

into fewer large corporations. Faced with certain degeneracy and death, a staple of the naturalist decline narrative, the booster provides a solution that will save the country: “We must march with the course of empire, not against it. I mean, we must look to China” (305). Empire—like the wheat or the railroad—is propelled by quasi-natural forces that individuals can neither help nor hinder. This speech takes place at the midpoint of the novel, and the development of the plot ultimately vindicates Cedarquist’s logic, ending with the wheat harvest shipping out for famine relief in India, understood as the transpacific test run for the ships that will export future harvests to China.

John Eperjesi has shown that this vision espoused by the character Cedarquist is largely based on two contemporary figures, Charles Conant and Albert Beveridge. Although Western writers had dreamed of making a fortune in the China market since the days of Marco Polo, it was Conant who popularized the idea that new overseas markets were the only solution to economic recessions at home. The late nineteenth century saw a fall in profits from manufacturing and a rise in financialization, not unlike the late twentieth century.[4] Thus the closing of Cedarquist’s U.S. factories prompt him to look to China. Like Karl Marx, Conant argued against classical economists that supply and demand could not remain in balance, and that overproduction crises, or recessions, were not an aberration but a structural and repeating feature of capitalist markets. Conant proposed that what he called the problem of "oversaving" on the part of Americans could be counteracted by controlling foreign markets through

[4] White goes into this comparison in detail. For Arrighi (2007) this is a cyclical process that has accompanied the rise and fall of different capital centers.

Imperialism, which would not involve the political difficulties of direct rule as in "Colonialism."[5] Furthermore, while many celebrated the China market, the Senator Albert Beveridge did so with Cedarquist-like rhetorical flourish. In a speech in 1900, while Norris was writing *The Octopus*, Beveridge argued: "The Pacific is our Ocean. More and more Europe will manufacture the most it needs, secure from its colonies the most it consumes. Where shall we turn for consumers of our surplus? Geography answers the question. China is our *natural* customer" (in Eperjesi, 74 emphasis added). The China market has been called a myth not because there was no market, but because the idea of the market involved a complex narrative of world-historical developments in China and the West, and so structured plans in excess of actual conditions. In Beveridge's rhetoric, the myth emerges as a historical narrative grounding the United States's destiny in the inevitable unfolding of natural processes.

The Octopus goes beyond Beveridge by reimagining the problem of the business cycle as a problem of population. Cedarquist presents the only solution as a great increase in circulation capacity to reach the inexhaustible hunger of the Chinese:

> As a market for our production—or let me take a concrete example—as a market for our Wheat, Europe is played out. Population in Europe is not increasing fast enough to keep up with the rapidity of our production… We, however, have gone on producing wheat at a tremendous rate. The result is overproduction. We supply more than Europe can eat, and down go the prices. (305)

[5] With the U.S. and urban China now saturated with consumer goods, today it is rural Chinese who are chided by economists for "oversaving."

The problem of overproduction turns out not to be overproduction at all, but the lack of population increase. Food is not to be produced to feed the population, but ideally the population would be grown to meet the supply of food. As in many places in the text that enter into elevated language such as this, the word wheat is capitalized to indicate its divinity.[6] Wheat is the "concrete example" that stands in for all American goods, due to its seemingly-natural production on the farm—growth—and consumption as food—digestion.

Food is the key commodity of the coming twentieth-century where population must be made to depend on the global market. Whereas Cedarquist laments that the European population does not increase to meet U.S. supply, a suitable population does exist in China. Together with the standard Malthusian argument of an ever-expanding number of bodies who have overrun a limited food supply, there is also a decline in the quality of Chinese food, and so the danger is to each individual body. This is the fuller context of marching with empire:

> We must march with the course of empire, not against it. I mean, we must look to China. Rice in China is losing its nutritive quality. The Asiatics, though, must be fed; if not on rice, then on wheat. Why, Mr. Derrick, if only one-half the population of China ate a half ounce of flour per man per day all the wheat areas in California could not feed them (305).

The supposed inability of the Chinese to feed themselves, and specifically the deficiency of their rice crops, is a boon to American agribusiness. Norris did not invent this idea, which reflects one competing view of Chinese agriculture among Americans at the time, which will be taken up in

[6] In addition to the end of the novel, referenced above, there is also a long theological discussion explaining death and resurrection in terms of planting wheat.

detail in the following chapter. Briefly, one common view of nineteenth-century Americans had been that China was the preeminent traditional agrarian society, but around the turn of the century, however, as China's position in the world continued to decline and the U.S.'s continued to rise, the agrarian hierarchy was also reversed, and soon American agricultural experts such as Lossing Buck began traveling to China to teach. Indeed there was a crisis in Chinese rural economy at the time, though Norris does not find the cause in European or American interventions, nor even in domestic political failings. He reverses the causality so that Empire will deliver food to Asia rather than famine, and moreover applies the naturalist trope of degeneracy to Chinese agricultural production. Chinese agriculture does not have an economic problem of production or circulation, the two great "watchwords" of American development, but instead a biological problem, the degeneration of the species itself. As we will see below, agriculture is understood in *The Octopus* to be propelled by a vital force, the nutritive quality perhaps, that is passing away in the Orient, replaced by the younger vigor of the wheat.

The sublime hunger of the Chinese can never actually be relieved, so California wheat production can continue to expand indefinitely, without ever again saturating the market. Cedarquist predicts how such market "effects" will continue to help them in Europe, yet somehow not hurt them in China: "When in feeding China you have decreased the European shipments, the effect is instantaneous. Prices go up in Europe without having the least effect upon the prices in China" (306). China remains insulated, unaffected by changes in the rest of the world. It is simultaneously the key to international business success, and forever outside of the world market, playing a supplementary and ultimately mystical role. As the text continues, the mathematical sublime established in the Chinese population is transferred to American wheat, which itself becomes infinite: "We hold the key, we have the wheat,—infinitely more than we

ourselves can eat" (306). The sublime quality of the wheat has actually begun with its infinite consumption in China, and then has been logically extended to an infinite production in the U.S. Here we see most clearly how the myth of the China market is the condition of possibility for imagining an infinitely expanding agricultural commodity production. This is how the qualities of the hungry Chinese body, discussed in more detail below, play into the transformation of the meaning of the land in the American West at the "close" of the frontier. The key to China's role in the novel is that it is not simply a new market, but one where the "laws" of markets cease to apply; it is the limit point of capitalism beyond the horizon.

2. Circular Empire: China as the End of the Frontier

What is important for Norris is the direction of historical change, and so the details in *The Octopus* need only be plausible. When Magnus questions Cedarquist on particulars, this lack of precision is as enticing as the East itself:

> "He [Cedarquist] was vague in his replies… However, his very vagueness was a further inspiration to the Governor... [who] saw only the grand coup, the huge results, the East conquered, the march of empire rolling westward, finally arriving at its starting point, the vague, mysterious Orient. (320)

Norris uses the adjective "vague" throughout the novel to indicate a character's intentions when his or her reason and common sense are overwhelmed by emotional excitation. This can happen either in business dreams, as here, or also in feelings of romantic love. The novel continuously oscillates between the precise calculation of grain rates, land values, and train schedules, and the "vague" stirrings of personal ambition, revenge, and love. This language encapsulates the tension between the realistic and the romantic that we saw earlier. In this passage, we see that the same word sums up the Orient, another object of ambition and love. Whereas Cedarquist has just given

a pseudo-scientific account of nutrition and population figures to argue for the China trade, it is the fact that he cannot prove any of it that makes it so desirable; it must remain mysterious.

The more China and America are brought together, the more China consumes American products, the more it becomes America in its world-historical meaning. The China trade will be nothing less than,

> A new world of markets discovered, the matter as important as the discovery of America… They would be its pioneers. Harran would be sent to Hong Kong to represent the four… the sailing of that ship, gorged with the crops from [their] ranches… would be like the sailing of the caravels from Palos. It would mark a new era; it would make an epoch. (319-20)

China is another America, another New World for the extension of the world market because it is a point beyond the current world. This voyage of the new caravels takes advantage of the world being round, a route to the Indies--the real ones this time--that bypasses both the Eurasian and the American continents. The Spanish explorers, the continental pioneers, the American businessmen in Hong Kong—all are equal agents of adventure, exploration, prospecting. The epic glory of American ships depends on securing the economic market. And these ships carrying wheat over the water are so inevitable, that they are ultimately not even needed: "He saw his wheat, like the crest of an advancing billow, crossing the Pacific, bursting upon Asia, flooding the Orient in a golden torrent" (320). Once the wheat becomes the ocean itself, flowing in a new geographical direction, it will also reorient the economic organization within the U.S:

> The torrent of wheat was to be diverted, flowing back upon itself in a sudden, colossal eddy, stranding the middleman, the entre-preneur, the elevator-and mixing-house men dry and despairing, their occupation gone. He saw the farmer

> suddenly emancipated, the world's food no longer at the mercy of the speculator, thousands upon thousands of men set free of the grip of Trust and ring and monopoly acting for themselves, selling their own wheat, organising into one gigantic trust, themselves, sending their agents to all the entry ports of China. (319)

By flowing over the water to China, the wheat itself becomes water. By evading the Trust, they become a trust. As many commentators have noted, The Octopus constantly invokes the popular hostility for the middleman in late-nineteenth century American agrarianism while ultimately suggesting that all capitalist enterprise, even farming, operates on the same principles.

This sense of geography as destiny follows from Frederick Jackson Turner's thesis on the historical end of the frontier in the American West, widely influential from Norris's time well into the twentieth century. In "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," a paper delivered to the American Historical Association in 1893, Turner argued that the frontier had been the decisive factor in shaping the course of U.S. history, and that the end of the frontier meant the closing of the first period of that history. *The Octopus* is addressed to Turner's thesis in a double sense: the advent of industrial agriculture proves that California is no longer a frontier, while the interest in China expands the westward push beyond the continent. As Turner put it, "Up to our own day American history has been in a large degree the history of the colonization of the Great West. The existence of an area of free land, its continuous recession, and the advance of American settlement westward, explain American development" (Turner 1). Here colonization is understood as overtaking and ruling "free" land.

Many commentators at the time and since have seen the frontier thesis as underlining the importance of expansion across the Pacific. What separates the actions around the Spanish

American War, the era that U.S. politicians openly debated imperialism as a policy, from the earlier settler colonial policies on the continent and Hawaii is first that these areas of Asia are not imagined as empty "free land," and second that they are occupied for their strategic geographical positions, specifically for access to the China market. For Frank Norris, moreover, the end of the frontier can be pinpointed to the specific moment of U.S. military action in China, when U.S. troops joined with an international force to put down the Boxer Rebellion in 1900. In a significant essay that has received little attention from critics, "The Frontier Gone at Last," he wrote that "[u]ntil the day when the first United States marine landed in China we had always imagined that out yonder somewhere in the West was the borderland where civilization disintegrated and merged into the untamed" (Norris 1903, 69). Once the marines have landed, that is, Americans can no longer imagine that there is a frontier to the west. The frontier is by definition untamed, uncivilized, whereas China is understood to be a civilization of ancient provenance—in *The Octopus*, as we have seen, it is in fact the first empire, ancestor of the present U.S. Thus moving into this area is no longer frontier expansion, but meeting, in Turner's words, "other growing peoples [to be] conquered" (Turner 2). Finally, "the day" when the marines landed and the frontier vanished took place while Norris was writing the novel, which perhaps partly accounts for Cedarquist's oracular style.

Norris's conception of the U.S. encounter with China as the *historical* as well as geographical end to the frontier is what links the land dispute plot to the dream of the China market. When the ranchers read the circulars advertising land that is virtually free, they are still operating with a frontier mentality. Their leader, Magnus Derrick, in particular is presented as a veteran of the gold rush, a 49'er, who has shifted to ranching as a new form of prospecting. When the railroad comes to charge the current market value, however, the frontier has been

closed. Although commentators on the novel have tended to analyze either the environmental meaning of new agriculture, or the representation of China and the Chinese, but not both, the structural connection between these two foci needs to be emphasized. As Cedarquist explains to the group, there can be no going back to the economics of the frontier, but they must compete in an industrial capitalist market. The only way profits can be guaranteed in this new world is through the China market, and in order to secure this ideologically, Asia must be seen as having been America's destiny all along. The mysterious decline of Chinese rice provides the possibility for the rise of American Wheat. All of this underlies Norris's sense of a new age of industrial agriculture.

Thus, I follow William Conlogue's argument that *The Octopus* should not be understood as pastoral, the term that is most often used to describe the representation of the land in American literature. In the U.S. context, the pastoral is used slightly differently than its classical meaning in the Western tradition, in which is the countryside is imagined by urban cultural elites. Instead, Leo Marx famously argued that Americans' attitudes toward rural space betrayed a contradiction, both idealizing the scene of natural purity and simultaneously displaying enthusiasm for industrialization. Literary writers displayed this tension by producing a compromise formation captured in Marx's paradoxical term "complex pastoral," which is somewhat analogous to the classical pastoral's position as the cultivated middle space between the city and the wasteland. *The Octopus* is one of his key examples, not only because the railroad is the paradigmatic "machine in the garden" but more specifically because of the novel's vivid depictions of industrial agriculture as the sexual union of machines and the soil. Whereas Marx establishes the complex pastoral as a trope that repeats across the full range of fiction and non-fiction genres, for Walter Benn Michaels *The Octopus* represents something more specific,

which is the "central problem for naturalism, the irruption in nature of the powerfully unnatural" (212). Citing passages where one of the characters compares planting and harvesting to death and rebirth, he concludes that "Norris's utterly idealized account of the production of wheat as the emergence of a spiritual body out of a natural one can coexist peacefully with an utterly materialist account of the growing wheat as a mechanical force" (202). Thus the more important binary in the novel for Michaels is not between nature and machine but between the ideal and the material.

Conlogue helpfully cuts through the binaries that accompany the idea of the pastoral, whether they are conceived of as country and city, nature and machine, or ideal and material. He focuses instead on labor and management, arguing that the novel is part of a minor tradition of "American georgic" concerned with historical shifts in agricultural practice. In support of this he advances a more robust definition of industrialization as a confluence of technologies: not only machines, the focus of so much criticism on *The Octopus*, but also management technologies such as record-keeping, mapping, and other quantifications together make up what he calls "the new agriculture." In redirecting the discussion to industrialization as a whole, Conlogue emphasizes that what Norris is describing is itself an emergent phenomenon. Many critics treat the mechanical and managerial technologies depicted in the novel as typical of the time period—indeed taking them as the hallmarks of this era—reserving their detailed analysis for how Norris, as a naturalist writer, makes sense of them. Conlogue, on the other hand, gives significant attention to the history of farming practices to argue that these technologies of industrial agriculture were largely unknown to the American public at the time. Thus the book should be read as playing a role in reporting, popularizing, and celebrating them. The novel is not a reflection of historical changes in agricultural labor practices, but can be seen as itself a part of

that history. It promotes new forms of labor organization by, among other things, celebrating new farm equipment in ecstatic sexual terms.

In this way, *The Octopus* advocates for the future development of both the China trade and agricultural industrialization, suggesting that neither can exist without the other. Norris pays special attention to the record-keeping and communications technologies as new forms of writing necessary for the new agriculture, and we can add these to the several modes of representing the land that saw Presley and the narrator experiment with. We have already quoted some of the description of the Los Muertos ranch office whose, "appearance and furnishings were not in the least suggestive of a farm" but rather of the headquarters of an international farm (53). In this book about the mechanization of agriculture, moreover, the first machine we encounter on the ranch is the "typewriting machine," and the most significant object, again, is the stock-ticker, which makes the farmers feel themselves part of a global whole as they watch updates being printed before their eyes (53). Writing as record-keeping does not passively reflect an external reality but by identifying imbalances and inefficiencies will spur on new enterprises.

Between the scales of the typewriter to keep accounts and the stock-ticker to know the world, the text features a map as a medium-scale technology of representing the farm as a whole. Because the ranch is a business enterprise, every feature of the landscape needs to be measured and recorded, accessible at any time. But the reader, like the farmer, can also refer to this information at any time: at Norris's request, the first printed edition contained a "map of the locality" in the "frontmatter," and this map has generally been read as part of the overall reality-effect of the book.[7] And just as the printed novel incorporates the map, so this textual description

[7] See Berte (2005) for an extended analysis of this map in relation to the narrative.

of a map is curiously suggestive of narrative: "A great map of Los Muertos with every water-course, depression, and elevation, together with indications of the varying depths of the clays and loams in the soil, *accurately plotted*, hung against the wall between the windows" (53, emphasis added). Here, plotting is the process of spatially representing the exact conditions of the soil so that it can be best utilized. But surprisingly, every description of a map in the novel contains this same phrase; later, in the local railroad office we see "a vast map of the railroad holdings… the alternate sections belonging to the Corporation accurately plotted," and in the San Francisco office of Lyman Derrick, again on the wall "the different railways of the State were accurately plotted in various colours, blue, green, yellow" (288). Here we can note that the word "plot" condenses three central elements of *The Octopus*: the graded plots of land under dispute, the conspiracy plot to gain their ownership, and the narrative plot which decides the outcome.

A final form of writing that *The Octopus* highlights as playing a decisive role in the development of the West is advertising, and this is in fact the most central to the plot. Conlogue has shown that *The Octopus* reproduces almost verbatim many sentences from the actual pamphlets that the Southern Pacific Railroad circulated to encourage ranchers to begin leasing the land. He interprets these circulars within a contrast between the "paper value" of abstract legal content, on the side of the railroad, and the "work values" of those actually improving the land, on the side of the ranchers. I would argue, however, that such a contrast does not hold in the novel, as the ranchers both approach farming as an industry like any other and also make their case in terms of this "paper value" of the written text. Instead, we should see the competing interpretations of the advertisements as different ways of valuing the land before and after the close of the frontier. The exaggerated and even confusing syntax in which these "circulars" are introduced in the novel foreshadows their grand role at the center of the legal case: "Long before

this the railroad had thrown open these lands, and, by means of circulars, distributed broadcast throughout the State, had expressly invited settlement thereon" (96). Like the newspaper and the stock ticker, this early broadcasting medium disseminates business information throughout the country. The term circular links writing to the theme of circulation epitomized by the railroad itself, and to empire circling back to China where it began, by way of America.

The legal question of ownership, and so the outcome of the plot, hangs on the interpretation of these texts. It is the newspaperman Genslinger—his Wild West name juxtaposed to his profession as a writer—who first suggests that the railroad will sell at a higher price than the ranchers anticipated. To this, the rancher Annixter responds that their writing is their bond: "Haven't we got their terms printed in black and white in their circulars? There's their pledge" (99). The printed text of the circular is linked to a moral code and a clear division of right and wrong. But a closer reading of the black text on the white sheet reveals an ambiguity: "'When you come to read that carefully,' hazarded old Broderson, 'it—it's not so very reassuring. 'Most is for sale at two-fifty an acre,' it says. That don't mean 'all,' that only means some'" (118). Here the entire Mussell Slough incident, indeed the entire plot of the novel and the future of California wheat farming, comes down to textual interpretation.

The importance of reading for this narrative arc is brought home when the ranchers learn the outcome of their court case, the authoritative interpretation of the circular's text. Tellingly, this comes at the conclusion of Cedarquist's speech, when Magnus in the midst of imagining his son in Hong Kong, having marched with the course of empire full circle back to its origin in China. At this point he overhears a stranger reading aloud the afternoon newspaper: "It was in the course of this reading that Magnus caught the sound of his name," (321). Called by name by the text, he listens on to the full reading of the verdict: the League's plot has failed to secure the

plots of land, and his ultimate fate will be to lose the ranch. By quoting these circulars verbatim, then, Norris enfolds authentic material from the historical incident into the text of the novel, to tell the true story of the West. Furthermore, by announcing the verdict at the moment that Magnus is listening to Cedarquist's speech, Norris suggests the link between the land dispute and the China market, which is the close of the frontier. As we saw above, in "The Frontier Gone at Last" Norris dated the decisive end of the frontier to the arrival of U.S. marines in China in 1900, the year before *The Octopus* was published. This was the moment America finally reached and bordered on another civilization to the west, with no wilderness separating them. The closing of the frontier was the closing of the circle of civilization. The railroad's case in the novel is not the victory of paper values over work values, but rather the historical transformation of the land from an open space of prospecting into a closed loop of industrial production. Indeed, Magnus and the others are already operating their farms as businesses, and Norris portrays this economic contradiction as moral hypocrisy, which weakens Presley's identification with them.

3. Real Subsumption of Labor and the Chinese Body

In understanding *The Octopus*'s representation of the new agriculture, then, Conlogue corrects earlier scholars' focus on the machines themselves and redirects attention to changes in the organization of agricultural labor. Namely, he points to the technical management of large-scale wage labor. Still we can connect this insight to larger economic changes by employing the more precise vocabulary of Marxist analysis, as well as examining the role of racialization in U.S. labor history. Palumbo-Liu, for example, has argued that Americans have long understood their own modernization through reference to Asia. In the case of *The Octopus*, Lye has given perhaps the fullest account of the importance of racialization for the novel, in which all of the cooks working on the ranch appear to be Chinese. These men are represented as docile workers,

feminized by their labor in food production. Chinese prepare the food for both the owners of the ranch, these minor capitalists, and also for the workers planting in the fields. Their presence working at the Derricks' ranch underscores the modernity of industrial production, its post-frontier character.

While Norris is notorious as one of the most unrelentingly racist "major" writers in the history of American literature, Lye's work illuminates the importance of food in anti-Chinese racism of the time and how Norris engages with it. In particular she points to the American Federation of Labor pamphlet *Meat vs. Rice, Anglo-Saxon Manhood Against Asiatic Coolieism*, authored chiefly by Samuel Gompers, which explicitly links Chinese labor to modernization and industrialization. It does so, moreover, by asserting a biological connection between body and food. The pamphlet appeared in the months before the Asian Exclusion Act was made permanent. The original Exclusion Act, issued in 1882, prohibited immigration for ten years, and was renewed in 1892 for another ten. During this period anti-immigrant writers presented the "Asiatic" and the "Anglo-Saxon" as separate biological types. In fact one of the words that Turner himself used when speaking of the frontier was the Anglo-Saxon "organism." Turner's form of white supremacy was slightly different, however, as he used this term metaphorically, with Anglo-Saxon cultural spirit moving through history as an organism. The anti-immigrant writers, on the other hand, use organism in a direct physical sense: the Anglo-Saxon and the Chinese are separate biological entities in Darwinist competition for resources.

The root of the problem was that Chinese supposedly ate less food, which indicated a superior, more efficient body. This is not yet a quantitative discourse of calories, but the qualitative differences among foods are seen to give different levels of sustenance. For Senator,

Hon. James G. Blaine, writing in 1879, three years before the original Exclusion Act, dietary needs define race as adaptability.

> You cannot work a man who must have beef and bread, alongside of a man who can live on rice. In all such conflicts, and in all such struggles, the result is not to bring up the man who lives on rice to the beef-and-bread standard, but it is to bring down the beef-and-bread man to the rice standard. (quoted in Gompers 22)

It is not just that there is no question of labor solidarity, but this lack of solidarity is blamed on the Chinese themselves. The rice standard is a kind of bare human subsistence, on which "the beef-and-bread man" cannot survive, an instance of what Eric Hayot has identified as a tradition of Western views of the Chinese as the limit case of humanity. Exclusion discourse placed Chinese as more efficient than whites, whose "manhood" is wasted in repetitive tasks such as mining and service work. Lye shows that the Chinese were for this reason seen as more "modern," more suited to a future of proletarian work. The Anglo-Saxon's supposedly large, violent, inefficient body had been well adapted to hunting and Indian-killing, an era that had ended. Thus the anxieties around Chinese Exclusion were partially a result also of the closing of the frontier.

The Octopus represents the Chinese as docile and feminized, but for that very reason as more refined. Unlike anti-Black racism, where the African is animalized in contrast to the European, in the American West it is Anglo-Saxons who are closer to animals because they are more alive, virile, and so on. They are "red-blooded Americans." When the Anglo-Saxon farmhands and the Chinese cooks appear together, it is when the former are eating, and Norris's description emphasizes the scale of the operation, the frenzy of impersonal activity: "The half hundred men of the gang threw themselves upon the supper the Chinese cooks had set out in the

shed of the eating-house… The table was taken as if by assault; the clatter of iron knives upon the tin plates was as the reverberation of hail upon a metal roof" (132). The way the Chinese "set out" the food appears refined in comparison to the naturalist cacophony of "the gang's" eating, as unstoppable as the weather. The cooks are set apart from the farmhands, but are an integral component of the large-scale ranch. Like the new machinery, the Chinese cooks allow for the rationalization and division of labor of the new agriculture, as opposed to the archaic animal nature of the farmhands: "It was a veritable barbecue, a crude and primitive feasting, barbaric, homeric. But in all this scene Vanamee saw nothing repulsive… this feeding of the People, this gorging of the human animal, eager for its meat." The feasting is both "barbaric," those outside of civilized discourse, and "homeric," the origin of Western civilization—this is a tension internal to the Anglo-Saxon race, internal to "the People" and their holy destiny of Indian-killing, and is best captured by the phrase "the human animal." The otherness of the Chinese, who are not hungry for meat, is of a different order, on par with the introduction of machines into the landscape. The labor of "the gang" is what is being replaced by mechanized agriculture, whereas the Chinese domestic servants' positions are secure, as they work in the house feeding the ranch's owners as well.

Norris signals the defeat of the white workers when, for all the talk of Chinese famine, it will be a white farmer who actually starves to death in the novel. Mrs. Hooven, the widow of a German immigrant farmer killed at the irrigation ditch, is dispossessed of the family's land by the railroad and travels to San Francisco with her two daughters. This account of proletarianization is formally the most elaborate section of the book, with the events presented out of temporal sequence. The teenage daughter, Minna, becomes separated from her mother and young sister, and after witnessing the "horrors" of Chinatown she is the first to face the shock of

starvation: “The idea of her starving, of her mother and Hilda starving, was out of all reason. Of course, it would not come to that, of course not. It was not thus that starvation came” (579). After long descriptions of her physical hunger, she is able to survive by becoming a prostitute.

The narrative then juxtaposes the mother’s plight and a dinner party held by San Francisco elites including Cedarquist and one of the railroad barons, as well as Presley due to a series of convenient accidents. The dinner party takes only a few hours while Mrs Hooven’s story unfolds over many days, but the narrative cuts back and forth between the rising dramatic tension of the two plotlines. After twenty pages of intercutting, the section climaxes with “‘My best compliments for a delightful dinner’… ‘she has been dead some time—exhaustion from starvation,” (613). The Hoovens lose each other because they are country folk unaccustomed to the scale of the city, and because, as German immigrants, they do not speak perfect English. In the racial schema employed by Gompers and Norris, they are not Anglo-Saxons, and so are technically not part of the labor competition. In the new world of U.S.-Chinese relations, their Europeanness is a comical archaicism that cannot survive: they must either die, as the parents do, or assimilate into degrading wage labor, as Minna does.

Lye convincingly argues that Asian Exclusion is the central social context in which *The Octopus* was written. As a consequence she argues that Cedarquist’s focus on the China market is a projection of these racialized labor conflicts at home, and here I propose a different explanation, one which takes seriously both the immigration side and the export side. She comes to this conclusion because Cedarquist’s interest in insatiable Chinese hunger seems to contradict the logic of the anti-Chinese immigrant discourse we have been discussing:

> Clamoring Asiatic hunger reverses a racial economy in which too-easy Asian satiation, in the Asian exclusionist rhetoric of the period, popularly portends

> American starvation. The question of Asian consumption levels could well refer to the pressures placed upon American businesses, whose drive to lower domestic wages and need for overseas markets went hand in hand. (84)

This is part of Lye's general focus on how U.S. East Asia policy is related to representations of Asian Americans. But the boycott as a social movement shows that the political consequences of American China policy operate in both North America and East Asia. Any contradictions in *The Octopus*'s view of political economy are familiar from neoliberal globalization at the turn of the twenty-first century, which again advocated for restrictions on racialized immigration but not on goods.

We can see this already in the nineteenth-century Exclusion discourse itself, which Cedarquist's speech does not in fact contradict. Consider this 1886 memorial to Congress, after Chinese had allegedly struck so as not to work alongside white workers: "To begin with, they have a hive of 450,000,000 Chinese to draw from, with only one ocean to cross, and behind them an impulsive force of hunger unknown to any European people" (quoted in Gompers, 14). The Chinese are not rational but propelled by impulse, not individuals but a group mind. This naturalist conception of the world, where hunger is an external force, driving them out of the hive from behind, is of a piece with both Turner's view of forces and what we will encounter in *The Octopus*. The insect comparison is typical, as shown in an address by Morris M. Estee before the State Agricultural Society at Sacramento, in which the Chinese are so hungry as to be counterproductive in agricultural labor because they eat more than they harvest. He recommends barring from "our orchards, vineyards, hopfields and grainfields […] the thieving, irresponsible Chinaman, who like the locusts of Egypt, are eating out our substance" (quoted in Gompers 21).

It is apparently when working in the fields that such a voracious hunger comes to the fore, unlike the machinic and docile mode when engaged in modern service work.

The broader point, however, is that Chinese hunger also underlies U.S. imperial reach in Asia. As we saw above, Norris describes a shift from war and empire to trade and markets. Lye tends to focus on the rupture between these two, so that empire is now a euphemism or exciting metaphor for what is actually the cold economic logic of the market. I am instead following Eperjesi in emphasizing the continuities, seeing economic power as a new form of empire.[8] For Western understandings of China have long taken famine to be a crucial component of its political system. In *The Spirit of the Laws* (1748)--the most influential text of the Enlightenment on comparative political systems--Montesquieu argued that while the Chinese had the most advanced methods of intensive farming, this could never keep up with their large population. This imbalance somehow derives from a contradiction between low fertility of the land and high fertility of the Chinese female body: "The climate of China is surprizingly favourable to the propagation of the human species. The women are the most prolific in the whole world. …[However,] China, like all other countries that live chiefly upon rice, is subject to frequent famines" (Chap. 21). Writing in the mid-eighteenth century, the author does not even explain, let alone support, these fertility dynamics. By comparison, Norris's version at the turn of the twentieth century is relatively sophisticated, with its pseudo-scientific theory of the decline of Chinese rice's nutritive value. I raise this long history of the idea of Chinese hunger here to argue that, far from a projection of immigration discourse, it is the historically-primary way of thinking

[8] This argument originally derives from Lenin's *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism* (1917).

about China in terms of food. Montesquieu understood famines to be so endemic as to regulate Chinese politics:

> "When the people are ready to starve, they disperse, in order to seek for nourishment: in consequence of which, [they]… march up to the capital, and place their leader on the throne. From the very nature of things, a bad administration is here immediately punished. The want of subsistence, in so populous a country, produces sudden disorders." (Chap. 21)

Thus the authoritarian rulers are compelled to rule well and provide enough food for the people lest they be overwhelmed by the hungry population. Montesquieu here applies his famous theory of checks and balances to the Chinese system, but these checks are not a separation of powers among institutions but the environmental power of fertility and hunger that checks the emperor. It is a domestic economy rather than a political economy.

We see these same themes repeated in the U.S. in the late nineteenth century, that China is a land of overpopulation and famine, and that individual Chinese are satisfied with less. It underlies Cedarquist's vision of Empire marching westward: whoever can feed the Chinese is their rightful imperial ruler, and so the mandate falls to American industry. However, whereas Europeans already viewed the Chinese in terms of food in the eighteenth century—unmatched agricultural innovations coexisting with famine and limited dietary needs—this was in the context of an inquiry into social questions, above all religious, political, and economic organization. By the time we reach the mid- to late-nineteenth century, and specifically in the labor market of the western U.S., these food characteristics were reconceptualized in terms of biological race. One aspect of this is the dehumanization following from extreme hunger, which animalizes them, as in the above quotations where the Chinese emerge from a "hive," feed like

"locusts," and are biologically different from the "beef-and-bread man." These are the characterizations that the Chinese boycott proponents are fighting and they show what is at stake in refusing consumption. Where the Americans use food distribution as a weapon to conquer China, the Chinese politicize food consumption. Where the Exclusion supporters politicize the theory of evolution through biological races, the boycott supporters apply the theory of evolution to the history of political forms to show the need for a strong nation.

4. To Eat Our Own Products

American Studies scholars have often noted the contradictory attitudes of love and hate that Americans have felt toward China, which in this period can be seen in the contradiction between the twin discourses of the dream of the China market and the nightmare of Chinese invasion, the yellow Peril (Lye, Palumbo-Liu). While psychoanalytic and other theoretical frameworks can illuminate the dynamics between these two tendencies, we can understand the more direct connections between them by foregrounding the Chinese experience of the U.S. In the U.S. this is primarily a class difference, between the workers who oppose competition, that is, who want a monopoly on the labor market, and the merchants and industrialists who want to increase exports to China. This is not, however, always understood as a direct class conflict, as for example Gompers (1902) argues that the boycott threat will never become a reality, and so Chinese workers can be excluded without hurting American capital in Asia. Frank Norris, on the other hand, is more dubious about the China trade's effect on American workers, as we have seen when Mrs. Hooven starves in San Francisco. The larger point is that U.S. texts from this period generally do not see a causal link between the China market and Chinese immigration; they are two contemporary phenomena which must both be managed. The Chinese proponents of a boycott of American goods, however, articulate a direct connection between the two: cutting

off foreign trade is an appropriate response to the mistreatment of Chinese nationals in the U.S. While this is partly a practical matter—the only way ordinary Chinese can affect the us, in however small a way—it also reflects the historical and economic links between Western imports into China and Chinese immigration to the Americas, both of which are the result of Chinese decline and Western military interventions. While many American Studies scholars tend to treat Chinese Exclusion as an internal development in the unfolding national history of race and labor, we should see that this is also a pivotal moment in the history of China. The campaign in support of coolie labor is the first Chinese social movement to be articulated in nationalist terms.

On the other hand, while the boycott is often described by historians of China as the first Chinese social movement to define itself in national terms, this relationship with the U.S. at the origin is generally seen as somewhat incidental and not central to the development as Chinese nationalism as a whole. In this chapter I have been arguing that we should recenter this relationship in considering the early twentieth-century development of both countries. For this reason I find it less helpful to stress the in-betweenness of the migrants; they do not so much move between two fully-formed nations as their movement causes the two places to overlap such that the internal politics of one become the internal politics of the other. They are central to the self-definition of each nation. Scholarship in Asian American Studies in particular has shown the importance of Chinese Exclusion to the twentieth century idea of the U.S. as a nation of immigrants (Jung). And this is even clearer in the Chinese case, since the treatment of Chinese in the U.S. is the occasion of the first social movement making claims on behalf of national unity.

While support for the boycott was strongest in the coastal province of Guangdong (Canton), where a majority of overseas Chinese were from, its ideological center was Shanghai,

the treaty port that saw the most overseas trade and the most exposure to Western ideas, and it was here that most of the novellas in favor of the boycott were published. The importance of literary publishing for conceiving of the relationship with the U.S. can be seen in the influential 1900 Chinese translation of Uncle Tom's Cabin under the more pointed title *A Black Slave's Cry of Freedom*. In Lin Shu's preface to the translation he proposes the black slave as a model for understanding the treatment of Chinese in the world at the time. He thus invokes an early inter-racial solidarity in the face of white supremacy. In fact some proponents of the Exclusion Acts had compared Chinese coolie immigration to the slave trade in order to demonize it, while proponents of Chinese immigration tried to demonstrate that this was free labor.[9] Lin uses the slavery comparison not to argue against Chinese labor in the U.S. but to assert the universal humanity of the coolie, following the slave, and call for their full emancipation (So 7). Furthermore, he connects the history of American slavery to the position of Chinese not just in the U.S. but in the world as a whole. As with the boycott five years later, the Chinese situation in the U.S. is taken as the starting point to understand the status of China as a whole. In the pro-boycott literature of these years, moreover, special attention was given to the indignity of Chinese arriving in San Francisco being held in "wooden barracks" awaiting processing and deportation, and these barracks were compared to Tom's wooden cabin.[10]

Moreover, the boycott discourse helps to show the manner in which Chinese writers interpreted and transformed Western ideas. As we saw above, Social Darwinism was the central theory with which American writers supported the Exclusion Acts—it was also the lens through

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[9] See Moon-Ho Jung, *Coolies and Cane*. In my reading of this controversy, never fully resolved, the key point that emerges is the aporia they find in defining "free labor" under capitalism.

[10] See especially the anonymous novella *The Bitter Society* (1905).

which Chinese writers approached it. Chinese writings on evolution at the turn of the twentieth century presented it less as a revolutionary theory than as an interpretation of classical Chinese philosophy that addressed the pressing social issues of the day. Yan Fu's translation of Thomas Henry Huxley's *Evolution and Ethics and Other Essays* (1893), more than any other work popularized the idea of evolution. While the translation itself was obscure, the reading public quickly applied the central idea to China's position in the world. Historian Guanhua Wang reports that "At this time, even some grade school and high school students were familiar with the phrase '*wujing tianze*; *shizhe shengcun*' (species that compete with each other are selected by nature; and the fittest will survive)" (145). This formulation appears in the couplet form of a classical aphorism, an invitation to memorize and invoke it as conventional wisdom in a wide range of situations.

Chinese writers specifically linked this idea of competition to the classical philosophers Mozi and Mencius's emphasis on self-improvement. This is then how it is used in much of the literature and speeches in support of the boycott: not as biological race but in the need to act in such a way as to become more competitive. This why nationalism was promoted, as a more evolved and successful political form that can compete with the U.S.:[11]

> The origin of states is the result of competition among nations. However, I would like to turn the axiom the other way around: every [people] that wants to preserve

[11] There is an interesting symmetry between Americans wanting to become an "empire" to deal effectively with China, and Chinese wanting to transform from an empire to a nation to deal effectively with the U.S.

> itself in the competitive world has to establish a nation state… The [results of] the evolution of group organization are called states (*guojia*). (quoted in Wang 147)

Nationalism is understood in terms of evolution because of the need to combat Chinese Exclusion, which was itself justified in terms of Social Darwinism. The conflict with the U.S. was referred to in Darwinist terms, as the "treaty struggle" (*zhengyue*), which implied the struggle or competition in which only the fit would survive.

Indeed, the evolutionary framing of the issues lent the boycott movement a millenarian urgency out of all proportion to what a boycott might achieve, not unlike the apocalyptic rhetoric of the American proponents of Chinese Exclusion themselves. In the popular play *Haiqiao chun chuanqi*, a character speaks with the gravity of Norris's Cedarquist:

> The competition of things, and natural selection, is the universal principle of heavenly evolution. Haven't you gentlemen all heard? [We] cannot survive without competition. And [we] cannot compete without organizing into a group… The hair-thin chances of survival [for Chinese] hang on today's boycott against the American treaty. (quoted in Wang 149)

In these examples we see that Social Darwinism was largely interpreted in social and political terms: unlike the rhetoric of Chinese Exclusion in the U.S. it is not racial bodies that are more or less fit, but instead forms of political organization. Nevertheless, what the two sides share is this: both feel A. that in the past they themselves were the most fit, but that B. the environment has recently shifted radically to the point that they are now less fit, and so C. they must rally together as their only chance of survival. As we saw above, in the white supremacist logic of the AFL, the physically dominant white body was less adaptable to the feminizing modern work than the smaller, more efficient Chinese body. The difference is that because the white Americans think

in term of biological race, change is out of the question, and they have no choice but to reject open competition (in this case a "free" labor market). Because the boycott activists think in terms of political forms, which are by definition historically mutable, there is much greater hope for the future.

To understand the special drama of food products in this discourse, we can examine two songs composed to popularize the boycott. As most people were illiterate, popular songs and plays were the chief means through which supporters spread their ideas to the urban population. Compare the different tone in these two excerpts, one from a song focused on cigarettes and the other on flour. The song about cigarettes uses satirical lyrics in the form of a Cantonese love song:

> You are really down and out,
>
> American cigarettes.
>
> Look at you, down and out.
>
> I think back to the way you used to be…
>
> We've had a relationship
>
> In which until now there has been no problem.
>
> I thought our love affair would remain
>
> Unchanged until earth and sky collapsed…
>
> Ah, cigarette,
>
> You have the word American in your trademark for everyone to see
>
> So I must give you up along with my bicycle.
>
> Our love affair today must end.

Ai, cigarette please don't blame me.

Perhaps a time may come when we meet again,

But it must be after the Americans abrogate the treaty.

Then as before I shall be with you again.[12]

The lyrics playfully mock the consumer's attachment to the disposable, superfluous commodity, while the form of the love song evokes such a situation of conflicting feelings. It moreover places the U.S. and China in a relationship of give and take that depends on mutual respect and consent. Cigarettes are largely imported at this time, and associated with modern, urban life. Furthermore, while the cigarette has done the singer wrong, this is a kind of fickleness on the part of the American beloved, and there might yet be a happy ending.

By contrast, in another song, also in Cantonese but focused on food, the tone is much more serious. This song encourages patriotic Chinese to use rice flour, produced in China, rather than wheat flour imported from the U.S. The song begins by locating the hearer on a specifically Chinese holiday, the Mid-Autumn Festival, when people traditionally eat mooncakes, small pastries filled with bean paste that resemble the full moon. This darker tone would not work with cigarettes, or bicycles for that matter, which are luxurious amusements that connote modernity:

It is about the time of the Mid-Autumn Festival.

Tens of thousands of families

have their mooncakes ready

to celebrate the bright moon.

[12] Translation of both songs by Guanhua Wang, 163.

But if you use American flour,

the cakes will not be clean

[because] flour from the Flower Flag [country: U.S.[13]]

is made with Chinese blood.

So, please make a change

and use rice flour to make mooncakes,

It is easier and faster to make;

and it is cheaper and tastier.

Let us unite together

with our body and soul;

let us make a resolution to eat our own products,

Thus the moon and the sun will be bright again…

Both songs refer to the relations between heavenly bodies, but in the second this is for dramatic rather than ironic effect. For the boycott to take on the stakes of life and death, it needs a more fundamental commodity than the cigarette. To eat wheat flour is to eat at the expense of the

[13] This euphemism came from the design of the U.S. flag seen on merchant ships in the mid-nineteenth century.

Chinese in the U.S., and so this is figured as cannibalism.[14] The idea of Chinese blood connects the hearer to the Chinese in the U.S. with both nationalist and racial overtones. Where the cigarette was an individual romantic relationship, mooncakes bring the family and the extended family of the nation together for the Mid-Autumn Festival. The asymmetrical contrast between "American flour" and "rice flour" naturalizes wheat as American and rice as Chinese.

Like these popular songs, the novellas in support of the boycott were hastily written, and are generally considered to be of little to no aesthetic value; as such literary criticism on them is scant. Historians have rather used the texts as archives both of boycott ideology and the reality of life for Chinese migrants at the time. The forms of the texts vary from realistic, detailed descriptions of hardships faced by Chinese migrants in the Americas (*The Bitter Society*) to fantastical journeys crossing undiscovered continents (*The Golden World*). One novella, *Extraordinary Speeches of the Boycott* (1906), from the later stage of the movement when some of the popular enthusiasm had waned, takes the form of extended dialogues by multiple characters, discussions and arguments over the strategy and viability of the boycott. Written anonymously, authorship is attributed only to "A Chinese Cold-blooded Man." As there is minimal plot—most of the length is taken up by two friends' visit to a tea house where they debate with several strangers—scholars have considered it of low artistic value, or that it is a political essay written in the form of a novel (A Ying, 17). The hero of these discussions is a strange man referred to only as "Sick Man," who speaks various Chinese dialects and even

[14] Cannibalism is a common trope in late Qing and modern Chinese literature. The most famous example is Lu Xun's "Diary of a Madman," (1918) one of the first and most influential works of modern Chinese fiction. I discuss the evolution of this trope in chapter four.

foreign languages. Based on his extensive knowledge of the exclusion laws and the current treaty situation, other characters wonder whether he has returned from the U.S. but this is never made clear.

Wang notes that the analysis of boycott politics delivered by characters in *Extraordinary Speeches of the Boycott* is more subtle and far-reaching than that in non-fiction sources, including newspaper and periodicals. As a series of discussions, it stages the issues of the boycott for the reader to consider. As a work of fiction, maintaining the slimmest distance from pressing organizational questions, it is able to take a more comprehensive approach to the problem than non-fiction works do, including to reflect more fully on the limitations of the boycott strategy. Sick Man notes that many American products are cheaper than their Chinese counterparts, but he does not call on his countrymen to make a patriotic sacrifice to buy these more expensive products. In other words, he does not think boycotting is a winning strategy. Instead he outlines a long-term solution in the slow development of local manufacturing that can support the goal that "Chinese buy Chinese" (chap. 7). The narrative ends with Sick Man becoming a business man and traveling to Jiangsu province to develop a large-scale farm employing hundreds of workers capable of producing great quantities of food products, tea, and mulberry leaves, together with a textile factory. The long-term solution to Chinese Exclusion in the U.S., as imagined in this text, is import-substitution through large-scale agriculture in China that can compete with the farms that we see in *The Octopus*. In both Norris's text and *Extraordinary Speeches of the Boycott*, the medium of fiction at once allows the writer to step back and consider a comprehensive, long-term solution to the pressing issues of the day, and also forces the writer to provide a detailed and plausible resolution. In structuring a plot, the fiction

writer cannot simply appeal to the enthusiasm for an immediately pressing action that we find in non-fiction political propaganda such as *Meat vs. Rice*.

5. Reading *The Octopus* in Beijing

The following chapters will trace the continued history of Americans hoping to feed China, both in terms of exports and famine relief, and in modernizing agricultural production in China itself. Coming to power in 1949, the Chinese Communist Party rejected U.S. "aid" and involvement in China as colonial intervention, and Mao explicitly criticized American shipments of relief flour as traps to ensnare the Chinese people. This did not take a leap of faith or flash of dialectical insight, as this is what Norris's Cedarquist, following the senator Albert Beveridge, had advocated publicly from the very beginning. In the early Cold War of the 1950's, most American cultural production was predictably censured in China, but in 1957 Beijing published a new translation of *The Octopus*. Perhaps coincidentally, this was the year of the "Hundred Flowers Movement," when restrictions on publishing were briefly relaxed and intellectuals were even invited to make constructive criticisms of government policies. The translator's afterword makes clear that the novel was selected because of its depiction of class conflict in the context of monopoly capitalism, and the discussion focuses on genre, analyzing whether the novel was an example of realism or naturalism. These terms were extremely politicized for the Communists: realism was understood to reveal the real social totality underlying everyday experience, and the characters' positions in relation to it. Naturalism, by contrast, was understood to minimize human agency while focusing on extended, trivial descriptions of phenomena without penetrating to the real totality. Just as American critics have struggled to reconcile the tragic and triumphant moments of *The Octopus*, the translator, Wu Lao, sees in it both realist and naturalist tendencies. The novel is seen as of interest to the Chinese reader as a canonical example of

"critical realism," and the afterword begins by praising Norris's unusually detailed, comprehensive account of the workings of monopoly capitalism at the turn of the century.

Interestingly, the problems begin with Norris's attempt to write in the epic mode, which Wu links to the issues of the "new" West that we discussed in relation to Turner: "Although *The Octopus* is prose, it is an epic novel. He uses a broadsword to carve out the story of this new land (*xindi*) and these new people" (697). Wu follows most critics, and cites Jack London on this point, in identifying Norris's position with Presley's, as I have also done in this chapter. For him, however, it is the interest in the epic elements that lead both Presley and Norris astray:

> Presley is overwhelmed by the West's vast, magnificent scenery; its simple, rustic people; its unrestrained, enthusiastic way of life; and considers the important story to be here. But his thought at this moment is abstract, and he cannot help but be thrown out of his fantasy into cold, harsh reality. (697)

In Wu's reading, the main point of the novel is Presley's, and Norris's disillusion with an ideal West, whereas the author writes the politically-relevant sections with a directionless outrage that soon burns itself out. Returning to Presley:

> Finally, he dejectedly and lazily decides to take a trip to India. On the ship he comes to this conclusion: although individuals may suffer, mankind will endlessly reproduce; although the forces of evil are running rampant at the time, "virtue" will eventually triumph. The poet in this way takes social contradictions to be an abstract contradiction between good and evil. This betrays Norris's naturalism. (697)

What is interesting here is the translator's matter-of-fact equation of the religious language with naturalism. This is not seen as either puzzling or as a grand synthesis, the two ways American

critics have treated it, but simply as symptomatic of the politically-unengaged writer: naturalist "forces" are a modern form of spirituality.

The curious point about the afterword, however, is the complete absence of the topic this chapter has focused on: China. While Wu claims that the novel is worth reading for its detailed description of monopoly capitalism, what these details are—including the necessity of the China market to the future of American production—goes unremarked. What is important about monopoly capitalism, like any other kind, is that it is bad for the worker. Summarizing the novel's conclusion, he says only that Presley "decides to take a trip to India," as if on a passenger liner, omitting that he is accompanying a shipment of famine-relief wheat intended to open transpacific distribution, a practice that Mao had explicitly condemned. What should we make of this conspicuous omission? The translator effectively glosses over the representation of Indian and Chinese peasants as starving, and the notion that American farming was sufficiently productive to send a surplus across the ocean. A Marxist analysis of monopoly capitalism—the ostensible reason for investing in a translation of the 700-page novel—would emphasize the decisive role for Norris of the overproduction crisis, and the need for ever-expanded markets. Such an exercise, however, cannot be seen to impinge on the nationalist triumphalism of the CCP. As I will examine in chapter four, during the 1950's China was engaged in a fierce propaganda battle with the U.S. over its socialist modernization of agricultural production, officially rejecting the advice of American academics from previous decades (while in practice adopting most of their recommendations). Attention to the history of U.S.-Chinese transnational connections would be a political liability in both countries at this time. Ironically, the Chinese of the novel, including those working on the Derrick's the ranch, the site of production itself, must be "excluded" from the account of the novel in order to preserve the nationalist conflict.

Nevertheless, it is significant that the first explicitly-nationalist Chinese social movement was the boycott of American goods. The CCP effectively hoped to realize the dream of the 1905 boycott, throwing out the American flour and, as in *Extraordinary Speeches of the Boycott*, building up agricultural production to secure national independence. Where *The Octopus* uses naturalist form to portray U.S. capital, empire, and racialization as unstoppable historical forces, the boycott literary and cultural production uses sentimentalism to call the people to action and realism to reflect on political possibilities. This ongoing competition would produce several competing forms of representation over the following decades.

Chapter Two

A Transnational Agricultural Network:

The Good Earth on Chinese and American Farms

In filming their adaptation of Pearl S. Buck's novel *The Good Earth*, MGM engineered perhaps Hollywood's most meticulous reconstruction of a foreign environment. To duplicate the built environment, between 1933 and 1934 the studio sent multiple expeditions to the Chinese countryside to photograph the dwellings and obtain household objects (Brownlow 1989, 81-82). They purchased at least one entire village, including buildings, farm equipment, and cooking utensils, shipping all of it back to California for use in the production. In reconstructing the title character, the earth, the studio strove for the same level of authenticity. They hired a team of Chinese immigrants with experience in traditional farming practices to plant rice, wheat and millet on a barren hill, twenty miles north of Hollywood. The farmers maintained the plots for over a year so that they could be filmed in all manner of conditions, rain or shine, planting or harvesting, and their efforts were key to the film's marketing campaign, which boasted of recreating the Chinese countryside in America. Buck's Pullitzer Prize-winning novel, published at the beginning of the depression, had become one of the best-selling books of the decade by inviting Americans to appreciate and identify with Chinese farmers' hard work, thrift, and self-reliance. Released at the height of the Dust Bowl, in 1937, the film climaxed with farmers overcoming another natural disaster, a locust plague, on their American, Chinese farm.

While this remaking of the land in the other's image may seem like an aesthetic oddity, in fact at the same moment in multiple sites in China teams were attempting to reconstruct U.S. rural practices, especially on barren hills and other former wastelands. These experiments were

the result of decades of collaboration between American and Chinese agricultural experts, a transnational network that assumed that beneath their numerous historical and cultural differences lay a fundamental shared connection to the land. From the 1890s to the 1937 Japanese invasion, a steady stream of American agriculturalists travelled to China to research Chinese agricultural practices and recommend improvements. These were graduates of the new U.S. agricultural colleges, and an increasing number of Chinese also travelled to the U.S. to become trained agronomists. Buck actually participated in the most influential of these studies, *Chinese Farm Economy*, which was authored by her husband at the time, John Lossing Buck.[1] Buck translated for him and edited the manuscript in the year before she wrote *The Good Earth*, basing its characters on people she knew while they lived and conducted research in rural Anhui province. This partly explains why the novel was widely read and debated in China, where five separate translations were published between 1932 and 1935 alone, appearing alongside the earliest leftist fiction set in the countryside.

While the Chinese who embraced this exchange did so for straightforward reasons of technical knowledge, financial investment, and general modernization, American motivations were more complex. In the previous chapter we saw that around the turn of the twentieth century, the American fantasy of the China market inspired military interventions in Asia and the Pacific, including in Beijing to help put down the Boxer Rebellion, a peasant revolt against foreign incursion. In Frank Norris's *The Octopus* (1901), the figure of the starving Chinese, whose hunger is infinite and insatiable, promises infinite growth in U.S. industrial agriculture with no fear of overproduction crises. Norris portrays an unexplained recent degeneration of Chinese

[1] Henceforth referred to as Lossing. I use Buck to refer to the novelist.

rice's "nutritive value" as the underlying cause of a historical transformation in which American empire will be based on feeding China. The transnational agricultural network provides a different kind of solution to this problem, improving Chinese crop production itself. In his history of the experts in agriculture and agronomy (the discipline of agricultural economics, distinct from plant biologists) who travelled to China, Randall Stross argues that they were not a unified group, and over the decades they went for different reasons, including Christian charity and missionary goals. The Rockefeller Foundation, which sponsored many projects in China, saw global hunger, like global disease, as a long-term problem that the U.S. would ultimately be confronted with as its wealth and influence in the world grew. This idea ultimately derives from Spengler's warning about the future ascendency of Asian populations who would overwhelm North America, which also informed fears of the "Yellow Peril" at the turn of the century. In this sense there is a continuity of investment in Asian hunger from Norris's time through the agricultural exchanges that Buck participated in. As historian Nick Cullather argues, Lossing's work would in turn inform U.S. Cold War strategy of raising consumption levels in Asia through industrial agriculture, to head off peasant revolutions on the Chinese model. I will take up these continuities in chapter four. In chapter three I will look at another project in rural China sponsored by the Rockefeller Foundation that was contemporary with the transnational agricultural network but envisioned a more sweeping approach to modernizing all of village life. This was the Mass Education Movement, led by the American-educated James C. Yen, in which the American experts who participated were anthropologists rather than agronomists.

Buck is therefore of paramount importance to understanding the history of ideas of food and agriculture in the U.S.-China relationship this dissertation tracks. Within the scope of literary history, I will argue that *The Good Earth* can and should be understood within the development

of both American and Chinese literature about the countryside. Given Buck's success and historical importance, there have been surprisingly few studies of the novel's form over the years. This is first of all because critics have understandably always focused on to what extent Buck represents China positively or negatively. While each generation has provided new insight into this question, I believe there are ultimately a finite number of positions on it, so we can also see a history of cyclical repetitions (and thus many articles announcing the "rediscovery" of Buck). The second reason few scholars have focused on form, in my view, is that the form is legitimately difficult to pin down—scholars' offhand introductory statements about the novel use a range of adjectives including naturalist, realist, romantic, sentimental, Biblical, and even "vague." Thus I will offer an original reading of the novel as combining a narrative structure borrowed from the American farm novel, especially those of Willa Cather, and a split point-of-view characteristic of Chinese rural literature, especially that of Mao Dun, and a focus on mood inspired by Marcel Proust, from whom Buck includes an epigraph. Here I employ Florian Frietag's concept of the North American farm novel as a genre that flourished from the late nineteenth century to the middle of the twentieth as the continent became more urbanized. As in China, in the U.S. representations of rural space have been a site of concentrated ideological investment linked to a shifting history of national identity, and Frietag presents the farm novel as broad genre of novels set on a farm, that has seen formal shifts over the course of this history. I will show that while studies of this literature almost never group *The Good Earth* with these other farm novels, it fits perfectly within their history of development. As such, it is in fact the most widely-read American farm novel ever written, and I argue that its introduction of elements from Chinese rural literature influenced further American representations of farms and farm work through the 1930's and beyond.

Previous studies that devote significant attention to agriculture in *The Good Earth* by Blake Allmendinger (1998) and Colleen Lye (2004) both see it in the tradition of American frontier literature, so that all the affinities it presents between the two nations must be understood as projections complicit with US expansionist interests. I instead read *The Good Earth* as Buck's intervention into Chinese and American discourses on the countryside, discourses of natural and economic growth that already intersected through the transnational agricultural network. In the last few years scholars Alexa Weik von Mossner and Richard So have, in different ways, sought to recuperate Buck as a cosmopolitan figure by distancing her from the history of Orientalism. While helpful for opening a more nuanced view of Buck as not simply projecting Western fantasies onto China, these scholars go to the other extreme of presenting Buck as an individual genius, who, along with a small group of other writers, was able to bridge two disparate traditions. The concept of the contact zone should help us see that there existed already a space of encounter or even overlap where Chinese and American intellectuals were working. By understanding more fully the network of agricultural experts within which Buck wrote, it will be more difficult to identify where one country's practices end and the other's begin, complicating a sense of two clear cultural traditions that one person could combine. Instead, we will do better to think of "Chinese agriculture" as one of many concepts about China that Arif Dirlik argues were the co-creation of Western orientalist writing and Chinese self-orientalist writing. I am less interested in attacking or defending Buck and more interested in understanding how American and Chinese ideas about the countryside have intertwined and how they transformed during the 1930's.

At a broader level, then, this chapter argues that *The Good Earth*'s binational success illuminates a historical world that has otherwise passed into obscurity: it shows that for a time a

significant number of readers in both the US and China saw correspondences between their two countries as continent-sized agrarian nations of world-historical importance. The rural situation had become one of the most pressing social issues in China at the time, as it soon would in the U.S., and many already framed their reform plans in relation to U.S. methods and categories. The relationship between the two farms described above, the studio farm and the experimental farms, tell us something about the role of Orientalism in the U.S.-China relationship in the 1930's. The farms mirror each other because they were nodes in the same transnational network of agricultual development, but an asymetrical network where one farm is the aesthetic recreation of the other, and one is the material reliance on the other's knowledge. The 1930's also saw a back-to-the-land movement in the U.S., a new literary interest in rural poverty, and a growing desire for "traditional Chinese agriculture," especially by Lord Northbourne, who coined the phrase "organic farming." This third site of farming, Western experimental farms in the image of China, are not so easily dismissed as the movie set, as they have profoundly shaped contemporary ideas of health and the pastoral. We should think of this asymmetrical encounter as producing multiple outcomes, rather than reproducing fixed power relations. That is, we should see multiple articulations of Orientalism.

1. Buck Criticism in Historical Context

Pearl S. Buck remains an oddity in literary history, and in order to understand the role that *The Good Earth* has played we should be conscious of the contradictory ways she has been understood as an author and a public intellectual. On one hand she is among the most worldly of American authors, raised in China and fluent in mandarin. *The Good Earth* in particular was written in China, set in China, and had arguably its great success outside of the US, where it was soon translated into dozens of languages. It tells the story of a family that is forced to leave their

farm and travel to Shanghai, where the father, Wang Lung, finds work as a rickshaw driver. When the urban poor riot in protest of their condition, however, Wang Lung and his wife, O-lan, are able to steal enough money to return to the farm and buy up much of the surrounding land. As his wealth increases, Wang Lung neglects the land as well as his wife, but comes to realize these mistakes and affirm the memory of both at the end of his life. In China alone, seven different translations of the novel appeared within five years, making it the bestselling American book in the country up to that time; critics generally praised it, some even calling its depiction of rural characters superior to Chinese literature of the time. As an author, Buck was exceptional enough to become only the second woman, and first American woman, to win the Nobel Prize in literature. In this era of World Literature, Buck might appear as the most important American author to study, at least following David Damrosch's definition of the World Literature text as one whose meaning was enhanced through translation and international circulation.

At the same time, however, the consensus holds that Buck's writing is instead overly, even painfully, familiar. She is dismissed as derivative, as perfectly middlebrow, and fifty years ago her writing had already slipped from the status of Literature into the category of young adult fiction (Thompson 162). Buck herself cheerfully acknowledged that she began writing for financial reasons, to be able to divorce her husband and support their disabled daughter herself, and after her success continued on publishing for political reasons, to encourage a positive American view of East Asia. Detractors derided her work as a mix of sentimentalism and reportage. Faulkner's quip that he would prefer not to win the Nobel Prize [sic] if it meant being in the company of "Mrs. China-hand Buck," condenses the several negative associations that have attached to her: not male, not correctly American, and not a literary writer. Buck fits

uneasily into the canon of American literature because she is at once too strange and too familiar to be worth reading.

In this chapter I am arguing that the larger reason that these two aspects of her image feel contradictory is that we do not appreciate how closely American ideas of agriculture, and indeed ideas of what America is, are bound up with ideas of China. The farm space is the most domestic, traditional, and national space, while China is the civilizational other, and *The Good Earth* is a high point of connection that helps us appreciate the longer intertwined history. But a more general reason for her odd status is that, as Dirlik tells us, the biographies and careers of individual Western Orientalists, these experts of the East, have rarely been examined in detail outside of Said's original study. She is actually one of the most prominent, one of the few known by name to the general public. Dirlik suggests that for all their influence, they actually fit less neatly than other figures into our understanding of the history of colonialism:

> while we have no difficulty thinking of "Westernized Chinese," which is the subject of much scholarly attention, we do not often think of the "Sinified Westerner." If we do, the distinctions between self and other, or subject and object, crucial to the analysis of Orientalism, become blurred though not necessarily abolished. (101)

Dirlik gives Lawrence of Arabia as a famous example of the "Orientalized" westerner, but Lawrence could only dream of growing up bilingual in the Orient as did Buck and other children of missionaries to China. In fact it is a bit curious that Dirlik does not mention her in his article--perhaps she is so prominent that she is an exception to Orientalists' typical anonymity in post-colonial studies. I am here speaking of actual Orientalists: academics and other intellectuals whose area of expertise was known as the Orient, rather than the broader sense of all

representation and knowledge about the Orient, including artists and literary writers, who of course do receive great attention. Buck made her name in literature but smoothly transitioned to the status of public intellectual who lobbied for closer ties between her two countries and famously had the ear of Eleanor Roosevelt. Late in life she took to wearing traditional Chinese gowns at her homestead in Bucks County, Pennsylvania (no relation), and her tombstone, which she designed herself, gives her Chinese name but not her English one.

Probably no other American writer is so fully identified with another country, including immigrant writers, who are typically domesticated into a paradigm of American multi-culturalism. Indeed, changes in Buck's reputation can be pegged directly to the history of Sino-US relations. She was an important figure in the nations' alliance before and during WWII, and her work was celebrated in both countries. Hers is a perfect example where the popularity of her book helped the popular appeal of an alliance with China. In the early Cold War, however, her international status made her suspect in both places: she was attacked as a Chinese-loving communist by the American government and as a Chinese-hating anti-communist by the Chinese government. Dirlik notes that this experience is typical:

> Their "orientalization" was what qualified the orientalists to speak for the orient. To the extent that they were "orientalized," however, they themselves assumed some of the exoticism of the orient, which on occasion marginalized them, and even rendered them ideologically suspect at home. (101-102)

By the late 1960's she was beginning her long fall into obscurity. During the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) she was denounced with new fervor, and though she lobbied hard to accompany Nixon's trip to China, China refused her a visa. With the growth of the Asian American movement at the same time, she was understood to be an Orientalist who dehistoricized China

and marginalized Asian-American voices. With the end of the Cold War, and China's full embrace of consumer capitalism and entry into the WTO, the 1990's and early 2000's saw a gradual softening of this attitude and discussions of her career in a somewhat wider context. Liu Haiping wrote the first English-language overview of Buck's reception in China, while Blake Allmendinger and Peter Conn began to write about her with the disciplinary authority of mainstream American literary history, and Conn wrote a full-length biography. Colleen Lye, moreover, connected her work to U.S. economic development, and began to point out her ambiguities as at once complicit with U.S. power abroad and also the individual most responsible for the repeal of the Chinese Exclusion Act.

In the past few years, scholars in both countries have begun returning to her as a cosmopolitan figure. Many Chinese scholars of English and American literature have embraced her, while Wang Juan, Bu Yuwei, and Chang Xiaomei have begun to compare her to her Chinese contemporaries, as I do here, and I will discuss their readings in detail in the final section of this chapter. In English-language criticism, Weik von Mossner and So both consider Buck outside of the lens of Orientalism. In *Cosmopolitan Minds: Literature, Emotion, and the Transnational Imagination* (2014), Weik von Mossner seeks to recuperate Buck's sentimentalism as producing in her readers a felt emotional connection for the characters that carried over to Chinese as a whole. So, in *Transpacific Community: America, China, and the Rise and Fall of a Cultural Network*, emphasizes Buck's bilingualism, her sustained engagement with premodern Chinese literature, and her work in publishing English-language works by Chinese writer Lin Yutang. These scholars thus approach Buck as an individual writer writing for a certain purpose, rather than as the sign of an unequal U.S.-China relationship. We can historicize this recent scholarly shift as coincident with a new change in that relationship, namely China's economic rise

bringing it closer to equal footing with the US. This change in large-scale power relations has apparently allowed for a loosening of the need to defend China—the relationship between the two is no longer seen as imperialism. Buck is a sympathetic figure onto whom current near-equality can be projected back into the past, and we can note that both Weik von Mossner and So's readings on the whole return to the same terms in which Buck was praised in the early 1930's: her deep feeling for the Chinese that she communicates to the reader, her expertise in classical Chinese literature, and the success of the novel in China itself.

So reads Buck within a new model for understanding U.S.-Chinese relations in the mid-twentieth century that he proposes, and deserves special comment. His bilingual readings of Chinese and American texts are a crucial contribution to the methodology of Asia-Pacific-American Studies, showing the potential for the multi-lingual, counterpuntal readings produced in fields such as Chicano Studies, Caribbean Studies, or Comparative Literature. In establishing the novelty of his approach, however, he tends to simplify what has come before. Speaking of the critique of Orientalism by scholars focused on both U.S. imperialism abroad and anti-Asian American racism domestically, he writes:

> although such work aspires to create a counter-Orientalist interpretation of the Pacific, several recent studies still situate Buck within the tradition of U.S. Orientalism, and thus as enabling a Euro-American vision of the Pacific, rather than generating a more complex vision of this region and how it operates. (88)

In this account, the concept of Orientalism is a simplistic view of the world that cannot account for a complex reality. As I will discuss below, this is an impoverished understanding of the concept, which charts the historical production of supposed cultural differences.

In fact, it is So who proposes separate cultures which meet in the middle, the ocean. He affirms how

> Huang interprets the trans-Pacific as a place where people and ideas meet, new concepts emerge, and poetics and counterpoetics coexist and struggle against each other. Such "crossings," Huang writes, encourage new cultural practices and a "reterritorialization" of political ideas. In this light, I read [Buck's concept of] natural democracy as an enabling discursive space in which Chinese and American cultures met, hybridized, and mutually transformed each other. (89)

I would like to point out two difficulties here. First—and this is a common view in cultural studies, not particular to So—in this vision of the trans-Pacific what is emergent is necessarily good. In fact the post-war Pax Americana and Maoist authoritarianism were both emergent political forms during these decades that developed in dynamic counterpoint, but because they are bad they do not have the status of crossings or reterritorializations. They are exterior to trans-Pacific space, and function as its background. As mentioned in the introduction to this dissertation, Christopher Connery has criticized the tendency to celebrate the "dynamism" of the multi-sited Pacific since these are the terms of capitalist modernization of recent decades. Rather than evoking the Pacific Ocean, my object of study is located in the dirt of the two continents. Second, So suggests that there were pre-existing, separate Chinese and American cultures which could meet and become hybridized (by Buck). Postulating a separate East and West which encounter each other only recently and through the Western expert is the foundation of Orientalist discourse. Below I will demonstrate how this worked in the case of ideas of Chinese agriculture, and the important contribution that Buck made to this history.

So makes two very important contributions to our understanding of the production and circulation of *The Good Earth*, but this basic misunderstanding or redefinition of who Orientalists were and what they did predetermines his interpretation of those findings. First, So gives an inspired reading of Buck's translation of the pre-modern Chinese novel *The Water Margin*, arguing that she incorporated certain of its formal features into *The Good Earth*. This certainly demonstrates Buck's great talent and expertise, but the argument that this makes her not an Orientalist is puzzling since translating pre-modern Eastern works is the signature practice of the classic Orientalist. It is the central thing that establishes the identity and authority of the Orientalist, just as it establishes Buck's authority in So's text. He argues that Orientalism is not a helpful concept because it is related to fantasy and projection (xxii). But this is a simplification of the concept, as, first of all, Orientalism is a discourse. That is, it does not represent some exterior or pre-existing power relations, but is itself a distribution of power that structures who can know and what can be known. So's resistance to Orientalism is part of a larger theoretical project to challenge the centrality of representation in literary studies, especially transnational and ethnic studies. A central concept for him is Communication, and he demonstrates the importance of particular communications technologies that made transpacific connections possible in the first place, namely the radio, the typewriter, the telegraph, and so on. Here his research into the marketing and circulation of *The Good Earth* is also extremely helpful. He shows that marketers of the Chinese translations emphasized that the novel was a success in the U.S., and that Buck herself translated positive Chinese reviews and sent them to her publisher, who marketed them in the U.S. as proof of the novel's authenticity. So celebrates this process of bringing two worlds together, and this is certainly a positive aspect of moments in capitalist globalization such as the international market for *The Good Earth*. He uses actor-network theory

to emphasize material communication between individuals, and follows Latour in downplaying the importance of the nation as well as the importance of representation. In my view, however, what circulates through this network is precisely national representations. To speak like Lacan these representations are fantasies that structure the possibilities of interactions, or to speak like Ranciere they parcel out a particular distribution of the sensible that determines what is perceived as the same and what is perceived as different. And paramount among these distinctions that the writers under discussion are exploring are the boundaries of national identity and national culture. While the particular community of writers that So examines were liberals, they worked within a highly politicized domain, and as I will argue below that Buck's mode of representation actually shares much with her contemporary leftists, because they share similar ideas of the nation and the rural people.

In other words, all of the actors in this network believe that people are distributed into civilizations, so that there is a real thing called traditional Chinese culture as well as a real Chinese people. These are ways of reining in the vast variety of lived experience and parceling them out into fixed discreet categories. Since these civilizational distinctions do not hold in intellectuals' lived experience in the city, they designate the countryside as the site of tradition and the center of Chinese culture. The basic categorical difference between China and the West was of course originally produced in the West in the service of Western power. As we saw in chapter one, the racial schema of Americans at the turn of the century opposed the Anglo-Saxon to the Asiatics as biological types based in the type of food that was necessary to sustain each. By contrast, for Chinese intellectuals during the Republican period, and hence for Buck, the key distinction was not biological but cultural and historical, the difference between modern Western culture and backward Chinese culture.

Again, on the largest historical scale we can of course understand this distinction as being originally produced in the West. But, at the more detailed level of shifting definitions of just exactly what constitutes Chinese and Western cultures, intellectuals from both sides contributed to transforming these concepts. According to Dirlik, Liang Shuming, the most famous advocate of traditional Chinese culture as an original utopian, egalitarian society, was partly influenced by Rabindranath Tagore's gospel of Asian superiority—and Tagore himself was originally inspired by what he thought was a Chinese book celebrating China, but was in fact written by an Englishman.[2] Dirlik goes on to examine more contemporary scholarly works by both Chinese and Americans that are technically Orientalist, in that they assume an insular, ancient and enduring Chinese civilization, but that affirm this difference against the hegemeony of Euro-American social science categories. His conclusion is that while Orientalism originated from Western colonialism, in its long history it has been mobilized for many political projects, including the anti-imperialist:

> however "condescending" they may have been in their "veneration" of "oriental" cultures (in Raymond Schwab's words), orientalists have also been responsible for introducing elements of Asian cultures into their societies, for their use of the "orient" in self-criticism, as well as in the critique of Euro-American modernity.

[2] "Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson, *Letters from John Chinaman* (London, 1901) (Subsequently published in the US in 1903 as *Letters from a Chinese Official: Being an Eastern View of Western Civilization*)" (Dirlik 103 fn. 19, 105). Internationally, *The Good Earth* was likewise sometimes mistaken as a Chinese novel.

This is certainly what *The Good Earth* did when it appeared at the onset of the depression. Nostalgic as it may be, the public received it as a way to articulate a critique of the excesses of 1920's capitalism, as well as the industrialization of the previous decades. We do not need to see this as a defense of traditional Orientalism, but simply as a more accurate account of how intertwined East and West have always been, even when they deny it most fervently. It reminds us that a Westerner being "pro-China" does not mean that Orientalism has been superceded.

Reviewing the historical overview of Buck criticism earlier in this section, from Depression-era praise to McCarthy-era suspicion, from 1970's critiques of her Orientalism to 2010's distancing of her from it, we find that virtually all discussion of *The Good Earth* is a form of moral criticism. It was after all published in 1930, when moral criticism was still a dominant approach, before the advent of the New Criticism and its redirection away from morality and politics to insular form.[3] It was received from the beginning as a new public intellectual's intervention into perceptions of China. As a result, the dominant question has always boiled down to whether this is a good or bad representation of China. This is probably as it should be. A surprising result of this history, however, is that virtually all of these readings turn out to be in some way right: from the most reverent praise to the most vehement condemnation, almost none of them read as particularly misguided or wrong, but simply at times incomplete. This is the case for the very predictable reason that there are both positive and negative aspects of the novel's representation of China. And yet for all that, they are not fully satisfying. One searches in vain for a formal analysis of the novel, for a convincing explanation of why this work in particular played the influential historical role that it did. Rather than a moral evaluation of the novel, then, I make a historical argument about its form, specifically its narrative structure and point of view.

[3] Barbara Foley's *Radical Representations* gives a detailed account of this shift.

To do this we cannot compare it to a tradition of "the American China novel," which is not a genre, as Buck was the first and one of the only American writers to write such a thing, with all Chinese characters rather than from the point of view of an American visitor. Instead I compare it to the history of representations of rural life in both the U.S. and China, which do constitute genres that scholars have defined in detail.

In American literature, I draw most heavily on Florian Frietag's definition of the farm novel as a genre of North American literature, which he finds spanning the U.S. as well as the Anglophone and Francophone Canadian traditions. Defined broadly as "a novel that is set on a farm, features farmers as its main protagonists, and deals with farm life and agriculture," these works were embraced by readers from the late nineteenth to the mid-twentieth centuries, and illuminate the shifting ideological meaning of rural space and its centrality for conceiving of national identity during this long period of American urbanization (2). Frietag argues for this generic definition in place of the more common framework of regionalism because the latter inevitably turns to arguments on how to distinguish the region from the larger nation. Since these concerns are less relevant to a novel set outside of the U.S., the farm novel is much better framework for my reading of *The Good Earth*. He divides the genre into several recognizable forms that each contain examples from all three traditions that he examines: the two-part pastoral, dedicated to virtuous economic growth, such as Joseph Kirkland's *Zury: The Meanest Man in Spring County*; the naturalist farm novel, portraying the impotence of social agency, such as Norris's *The Octopus*; the Depression-era loss of the farm, such as *Of Mice and Men*; the farm epic, portraying a shift from cyclical to linear time, such as Louis Bromfield's *The Farm*. What is striking about *The Good Earth* is that it contains elements of every one of these forms. I do not see this as a weakness of Frietag's formal schema, but rather as part of the puzzle of what made

Buck's novel the most successful of all North American farm novel. It is a virtual compendium, or less charitably, a mixed bag, of the genre's historical forms, even though scholars never read it alongside these other works. Allmendinger is an important exception, and I have referred to his inspired reading of the novel within the genre of the Western in the introduction to this chapter. A form of regionalism, however, the Western does not attune us to *The Good Earth*'s focus on economic production and national identity in the way that the farm novel does, nor does it lend itself to comparisons with Chinese literature.

Literary studies tend to separate the rural and the transnational, though discussion of *The Octopus* has been an important exception since the 1990's. More recently, Allison Carruth, in *Global Appetites: American Power and the Literature of Food* (2013), shows that following WWI, literary texts, especially by female authors, often related changes in American farming to the nation's growing power abroad and the construction of an international food system. *The Good Earth* arguably goes further than any other text in this direction, as Buck had first-hand experience of growing international network of experts in food production. In terms of Frietag's periodization, we can locate it chronologically between the earlier two-part pastoral and the later Depression-era and farm epic novels. As I will argue below, given its success, and its use of formal elements that would only become common later on, it is possible that it influenced these later works, if only as a negative example.

Scholars of Chinese and Sinophone literatures have analyzed how early twentieth century cultural production developed within an asymmetrical international world, though much of this cross-cultural work is focused on urban intellectuals before the rise of leftist literature about the

countryside.[4] In terms of Chinese rural literature, I draw most heavily on Yi-tsi Mei Feuerwerker's *Ideology, Power, Text : Self-Representation and the Peasant "other" in Modern Chinese Literature* (1998), David Der-Wei Wang's reading of Mao Dun's *Village Trilogy*, and Han's *Chinese Debates on the Peasant, 1900-1949*. Returning to the question of moral criticism, I should note that claiming affinities between *The Good Earth* and Chinese leftist literature should not be taken as a trump card proving that it is a positive representation. On the contrary, more pertinent is the opposite point, that for all of the Chinese Communist Party's attacks on Buck, they may have affinities with her and her ambiguities. The current chapter does not attempt to take sides in political debates of the 1930's—we will not be unearthing any lost treasure. The situation today is drastically different and so choosing among them would not help us respond to the present crises, whether economic inequality, ecological devastation, or ethnic cleansing. Instead the chapter makes a contribution to our understanding of how the current situation came about, through a fuller understanding of just how intertwined American and Chinese ideas about the countryside were in the 1930's.

2. The American Farmer in China: *The Good Earth* and the Transnational Agricultural Network

In the previous chapter we saw that around the turn of the twentieth century, the American fantasy of the China market inspired military interventions in Asia and the Pacific, including in Beijing to help put down the Boxer Rebellion, a peasant revolt against foreign incursion. In Frank Norris's *The Octopus* (1901), the figure of the starving Chinese, whose hunger is infinite and insatiable, promises infinite growth in U.S. industrial agriculture with no fear of overproduction crises. Norris portrays an unexplained recent degeneration of Chinese

[4] For example Lydia Liu (1995), Shu-mei Shih (2001).

rice's "nutritive value" as the underlying cause of a historical transformation in which American empire will based on feeding China. In fact, many Americans around this time did begin to think less highly of agriculture in China, which they had earlier seen as an exceptionally successful agrarian society. In his study of American agricultural experts who travelled to China, Randall Stross shows that the earliest, in the late nineteenth century, went there to learn and to bring back what they assumed to be superior crop strains. By the 1910's, however, with the expansion of industrial scale and techniques, the roles of teacher and student had reversed, and American experts who went to China did so to set up experimental farms.

Chinese reformers embraced this exchange as an important component of importing Western technical knowledge. Reformers had argued for decades that Western technical knowledge would be needed to defend against colonial aggression following the Opium Wars (1839-1842, 1856-1860**)** that subjected the Qing empire to unfair trade relations. The court authorized the first student delegation to the US in 1880, sending a group of high school students to rural Connecticut, and the relation deepened after the Boxer Rebellion (1899-1901), which began when farmers blamed missionaries for bad harvests. After the rebellion was crushed by a coalition of foreign armies, these countries forced China to pay an indemnity to cover their military costs. The US mistakenly received more money than had been agreed upon, and rather than pay back the difference directly they designated it to be spent on major educational projects, including founding three universities and creating a scholarship fund for Chinese students to study in the US. Tsinghua University, China's leading science and engineering university in Beijing, was founded with these funds, as was Nanjing University, where the Bucks and many other American experts worked, and which later won a major Rockefeller grant for agricultural research. Many Chinese intellectuals studied agricultural science at Cornell and other American

universities before becoming prominent in other fields, including the philosopher Hu Shih. As the network extended into both countries, moreover, it was not necessary for Chinese to personally travel to the U.S. in order to see American rural industrialization projects as models from a similarly continent-sized, agrarian nation (Zanasi 2004, 127).

Pearl S. Buck is unusual among Americans who participated in this network in that she entered it from the China side. Raised bilingual by missionary parents in Jiangsu province and Shanghai, she attended college in Virginia before returning to China in 1914. She met and married Lossing, and the two moved to a small town in Anhui province where he began his research. Lossing was selected to head a Department of Agricultural Economics at Nanjing University, and in order to do so the two first travelled to Cornell so he could obtain a graduate degree. While there, Buck established her own academic expertise with an award-winning graduate thesis on the Chinese novel. Finally settling in Nanjing, Lossing enlisted his students to administer agricultural surveys in their home villages during school holidays. The multi-year study was the first survey that approached a national scale, documenting farming practices across several Chinese provinces and encompassing over 16,000 discrete farms. Edited by Buck and published in 1930, *Chinese Farm Economy* "serv[ed] as the standard text in the training of Chinese agricultural economists in the prewar years" (Stross 176).

In these early years of Lossing's survey work, Buck began her first sustained attempt to illuminate Chinese intellectual life for an American readership by translating the classical novel *The Water Margin* (*Shuihu Zhuan*). This narrative and its violent, rebellious heroes had become a common reference point for Chinese intellectuals as they increasingly argued for the political potential of the rural population. Reformers developed various interpretations that read modern ideologies into the text, including democratic and revolutionary tendencies (So 2010, 93). By

choosing to translate *The Water Margin* into English at this time, Buck was actively participating in the revaluation of the rural population, specifically by bringing this more dynamic picture of traditional Chinese culture to a world public who could not read Chinese. In titling her translation *All Men Are Brothers*, drawn from the Confucian adage "Within the four seas, all men are brothers," she encouraged American readers to see these heroes as universal models, a project that continued as she began to write fiction. At over 1,200 pages, *All Men Are Brothers* was only the second complete English translation of a canonical Chinese novel, and it was not published until 1933, when *The Good Earth* had already proven that there was an American market for Chinese content.[5]

Like her translation of *The Water Margin*, Buck's first novel, *East Wind, West Wind* (1930), directly explored a major concern of Chinese intellectual life for an English-speaking audience, specifically the difficulty in reconciling values divided along the axes of east and west, traditional and modern. *East Wind, West Wind* reads as two short stories joined together, one focusing on traditional culture and the other modern. The novel juxtaposes the two cultures through the content, with educated urban characters directly discussing how to reconcile them. In turning to the countryside for her next novel, however, Buck faced a question that was unresolved in Chinese literature of the time, how best to represent rural characters. Most Chinese intellectuals, concentrated in major cities, saw a vast cultural gap separating them from the mostly-illiterate rural population.

[5] The first was Charles Henry Brewitt-Taylor's 1925 translation of *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*.

Aesthetic questions of how to represent the countryside developed directly out of the political problem of national revitalization following nearly a century of rural economic decline. In trying to address the rural crisis, intellectuals debated the rural population's potential as modern political subjects. In the first decades of the century, most intellectuals had viewed recent peasant uprisings such as the Taiping (1850-64) and Boxer (1899-1901) Rebellions not as progressive political movements but as reactionary and excessively violent. The rural people themselves were therefore seen as too backward and lowly to contribute to a modern political project (Han 13). By the 1920s, however, national reformers focused on rural China, where 9/10 of Chinese lived, as the most pressing national issue. As I will discuss in chapter three, the Mass Education Movement, founded in 1923 by James Yen, a graduate of Princeton and Yale, promoted literacy as central to rural modernization and economic development. Buck repeatedly praised this work, and in 1945 published a book-length series of interviews with Yen titled *Tell the People: Talks with James Yen about the Mass Education Movement.* After a series of rural uprisings in the mid-1920s, moreover, many leftists began to reevaluate the peasants as a potentially-revolutionary class and critical ally. Most importantly, in 1927 Mao Zedong spent a month with peasant associations and militias in rural Hunan province, then led a small army from the region against the ruling Nationalist Party.[6] This began the Communists' transition from a urban political party to a rural army led by Mao. Charles W. Hayford (2013) notes that this was

[6] Mao wrote "Report on the Peasant Movement in Hunan" to persuade other Party cadres to trust the peasant rebellions. The army commanded by Mao was actually recruited and organized by local female peasant leader Li Zhen, who would go on to become the first woman promoted to the rank of major general in the Red Army.

only a few hundred miles from Nanjing University, where Buck would write *The Good Earth* the following year.

Literary writers during this period articulated changing views of the countryside through their portrayal of rural characters' subjectivity and agency. The highly influential writer Lu Xun expressed the earlier pessimism with his canonical *The True Story of Ah Q* (1922), which portrays the delusions of a landless peasant as he drifts into petty crime and is eventually executed. While Lu Xun's later rural characters are represented as morally superior to urban intellectuals, such as in "New Year's Sacrifice" (1924), still they are too ignorant to take agency over their own immediate circumstances, let alone become full political subjects. By the late 1920s and early 1930s, however, writers experimented with how to reconcile what they saw to be the peasants' general ignorance, with their newly discovered political agency. In her novel, Buck likewise tries to balance the characteristics of moral superiority, political potential, and relative ignorance of the modern world. A common device, which *The Good Earth* also employs, was to contrast a more short-sighted father with his children who are relatively more familiar with the larger world. Drawing on her experience with the transnational agricultural network, Buck uses the American farm novel genre to investigate the potential for economic growth, and its consequences for the rural people themselves.

Set near the end of the Qing dynasty in the early twentieth century, *The Good Earth* opens on Wang Lung's wedding day as he goes into town to collect his bride, O-lan, who has grown up as a slave in the wealthy House of Hwang. Through O-lan's ingenuity in home economics and her superhuman work ethic, the family prospers and is able to buy land from the decadent and wasteful Hwangs. But soon a drought leads to widespread famine and death, and though they refuse to sell their land, the family travels to the south by train. In the wealthy

southern city where they settle, Wang Lung earns very little driving a rickshaw, and the rest of the family is reduced to begging. One night, however, a riot breaks out, and during the looting Wang Lung and O-lan steal enough money and jewels to pay for their return trip and even to buy a great deal more land. They become one of the richest families in town, as Wang Lung hires a team of workers to tend to his landholdings, and begins a long moral decline by neglecting O-land and eventually taking a second wife. His two older sons are each educated and spoiled, while their father's decadence after O-lan's death alienates the third son, who runs off to become a soldier. Wang Lung finds some redemption at the end of his life by returning to live close to the earth and recalling the virtues of rural life. The novel ends on an ironic note as Wang Lung gazes proudly out at the land, while the two older sons conspire literally behind his back to sell it off after his impending death.

The overall plot development is a recognizably American tale of self-reliance and upward class mobility, and this is possible because Buck breaks with the dominant conception of rural Chinese as "peasants." As Jonathan Spence (2010) and Charles W. Hayford (2013) have noted, Buck's use of the word farmer, in such an internationally-popular novel, invited professional Sinologists and American political elites to begin to approach Chinese as contemporaries and potentially as political allies. This is because, in the colonial context of this cross-cultural description, the term peasant's connotation of European feudalism could also imply that the Chinese people were remnants of an earlier era. Chinese intellectuals also had difficulty defining the rural population, whom they referred to with the neologism *nongmin*, literally "rural people." This word is an example of what Lydia Liu has called "translated modernity," whereby Chinese intellectuals transformed foreign concepts for use in Chinese cultural practices, rather than adopting them wholesale, through neologisms that they often derived from outdated word

patterns.[7] Feuerwerker notes that the currency of *nongmin* was linked to a new orientation of intellectuals to the countryside as their object of focus. There had been a long moral tradition of intellectuals' responsibility to represent the needs of the common people, *min*, and with *nongmin* this responsibility becomes marked as specifically to the rural people (1998, 26). Hence, while *nongmin* is generally translated as peasant, it connotes more of a social group than an economic class, and debates ranged widely over whether rural society should be understood as a class structure, and if so how many classes there were (Han 40-44). For the Communist Party, among others, connecting *nongmin* to peasant was crucial in defining Chinese society as "semi-feudal," and therefore in need of full-scale revolution to become a modern nation.

In using the term farmer Buck aligned herself with Chinese and foreigners who saw the strongest parallels between China and the U.S. and in opposition to those who saw them as civilizational others. In particular, this means those who argued that China was already a capitalist country rather than a feudal one, and those who prioritized internal national revitalization over anti-imperial struggle.[8] On the other hand, the Mass Education Movement promoted the self-sufficiency of the Chinese "farmer" as a potential modern subject and stressed economic development over wholesale social transformation. Building on this conception of

[7] The term *nongmin* was one of many "classical Chinese-character compounds that were used by the Japanese to translate modern European words and were reintroduced into modern Chinese texts" from Japanese. Liu calls terms formed in this way "return graphic loans" (302).

[8] See Han, chapter three, on these several debates during the 1920s and 1930s. Although the Communist position would become hegemonic, as would their critique of Buck, the point here is that many different hypotheses and proposals were explored during these decades.

rural Chinese subjects as analogous to Americans, then, Buck goes a step further by placing a Chinese farmer within the characteristic narrative genre for exploring American farming. This places the focus on the farmer as an individual moral agent, rather than the peasant as representative of a social class. When Wang Lung first announces himself at the House of Hwang, "I am Wang Lung, the farmer," the position of farmer allows for a strong statement of personal identity (13). This differs markedly from, for example, the story "Water" (1931), published by the communist writer Ding Ling in the same year as *The Good Earth* which experimented with foregoing a single protagonist in favor of a large crowd. While communist critics at the time praised the story as advancing a collective subject, the dominant view has been that it portrays the people as an undifferentiated mass speaking in confused monologues without any believable voices.[9] By contrast, reviewers generally praised *The Good Earth*'s use of language and dialogue as authentic to the Chinese countryside, even some who criticized the book on ideological grounds (Liu 60). As a farmer rather than a peasant, Wang Lung is able to succeed aesthetically as well as economically.

Championing the virtues of hard manual work, economic thrift, and nuclear family bonds, *The Good Earth* reinforces the rural values of an American literary tradition stretching back to St. John de Crévocouer's 1782 "History of Andrew, the Hebridean" (Frietag 78). Buck's novel offers readers a reflection on the relationship between economic success and morality, but not by portraying quaint peasants satisfied with noble poverty. On the contrary, the central point of the novel is that Wang Lung becomes extremely wealthy, something a peasant could likely never do. Critics of recent decades consistently overlook the novel's plot because they focus almost exclusively on character and to what extent the character traits are stereotypical. While

[9] See, for example, H.T. Hsia *A History of Modern Chinese Fiction* (1971, 269).

virtually all commentary on *The Good Earth* focuses on the early pages with their evocative descriptions of farming and the family's adventure in the city, reading it as a farm novel brings into focus the full arc of the family's relationship to the land. By the halfway point of the novel Wang Lung has long returned to the farm, bought up the Hwangs' land, and hired out the work to wage laborers with a supervising foreman. The entire second half is concerned with the drama and intrigue of a family with too much money and not enough to do, and it is only at the end that Wang Lung thinks again of the land, though it is too late.

The Good Earth's narrative structure follows a template that Frietag calls the "two-part pastoral," which organizes farm novels as diverse as Kirkland's *Zury: The Meanest Man in Spring County* (1887) and Willa Cather's *O Pioneers!* (1913). The first section of this form focuses on the farmer protagonist's hard work in building a large and successful farm, while the rest of the novel explores the new moral questions that this increase in wealth brings (203). This narrative progression emphasizes a general interest in the American farm novel to identify a healthy economic ambition as distinct from unhealthy greed. Writers use agricultural bounty as a figure linking economic growth to the unfolding of the natural order, whose moral goodness is distinguished from the evil and unhealthy accumulation of wealth as an end in itself. In working hard to buy up the land from those around him who do not properly value it, Wang Lung resembles Alexandra Bergson in *O Pioneers!*, a novel published while Buck was studying English at Macon Women's College in Virginia. Undeterred by droughts that drive others off their lands, both protagonists have a vision of future prosperity that these others cannot see.

While Alexandra's ambition does not cloud her sense of right and wrong in face of social pressure, however, Wang Lung's later development better resembles Kirkland's protagonist Zury. Zury's work ethic slides into economic accumulation for its own sake, to the point of

cheating and exploiting those around him. Wang Lung, blinded by greed, likewise mistreats his wife and son. Both characters learn their lessons and are redeemed by the end of their novels. Frietag argues that novels like *Zury* do not fit the widespread pattern Leo Marx identified as the complex pastoral, in which American authors stage an encounter between machines and nature. They do not portray, as Marx described, materialism and capitalism entering from an outside, presumably urban, space but instead as developing within particular rural characters themselves. These farm novels "do not depict machines intruding *into* the garden, but human machines *within* the garden" (189). The human machine pursues accumulation through regimentation, careful accounting, and an abnormal industriousness, all of which are displayed by both Wang Lung *and* O-lan, who can be found back at work in the fields an hour after giving birth, and in contrast to every other character in their village. *The Good Earth* further resembles *Zury* in that the first half is written in a more realistic discourse, while the second half becomes more sentimental and romantic once the protagonist becomes wealthy and perverts the moral basis of natural growth into accumulation as an end in itself (Frietag 203).

At the beginning of *The Good Earth*, Buck establishes the pastoral mode by emphasizing the family's connection to the earth. Work appears as a dialectical process where separate objects emerge out of the earth and then return to work on the earth and produce new objects. The early section contains several self-reflexive descriptions of work and the soil, including the family's earthen oven that bakes itself into solid brick as it prepares food (2). The family themselves are likewise formed out of the earth, and critics have shown that they are racialized in an autochthonous or even geological sense.[10] Yet they do not emerge from the earth, but rather are formed out of it: "The woman and the child were as brown as the soil and they sat there like

[10] See for example Allmendinger (367), Lye (216).

figures made of earth" (41). As figures, they are a product of making, of poesis. Like the earthen bricks, they are earth given form which then works to produce more food out of the earth. Food emerges from the earth to feed the body, but food also emerges from the body to feed the earth. As the passage continues, O-lan breastfeeds the soil as her child: "Sometimes she lifted her breast and let it flow out upon the ground to save her clothing, and it sank into the earth and made a soft, dark, *rich* spot in the field" (41 emphasis added). The female body produces a surplus which directly enriches the soil. Money is the final component of this earth-based production cycle: "It had come out of the earth, this silver, out of his earth that he ploughed and turned and spent himself upon. He took his life from this earth; drop by drop by his sweat he wrung food from it and from the food, silver" (35). The body, which is itself transformed earth, transforms itself into food, and then into silver. They are already accumulating a surplus at this early stage, but this is a hoard rather than capital. They do not throw this extra silver back into the earthen production cycle, but instead physically bury it in the earth for safekeeping. (45).

Once the Hwang family begins to decline, and need money, Wang Lung seizes the opportunity to actually invest in more land. His primary motivation is pride, with the goal of surpassing the House of Hwang: "He was filled with an angry determination, then, and he said to his heart that he would fill that hole with silver again and again. And so this parcel of land became to Wang Lung a sign and a symbol" (56). The land's value is now not its use in producing crops but as an indicator of wealth, and this is presented in moral terms as a fit of anger. The transformation occurs before he ever travels to the city or sees a modern machine. When they do return from the city, however, where Wang Lung had suffered the indignity of pulling a rickshaw, the tone of the novel becomes more sentimental and romantic. His perversion of natural growth into accumulation for its own sake is paralleled in his indulging in pleasure for

its own sake, as he turns away from the earth-mother O-lan and toward the courtesan Lotus, or when near the end of his life he sleeps with a young servant girl in the household, seemingly for no reason except to spite his youngest and most virtuous son who cares for her. Buck wrote that she found the treatment of sexuality in classical Chinese fiction refreshingly open compared to the Christian fear of lust, (Conn 117), and Wang Lung here acts more or less like the lords in classical novels such as *The Dream of the Red Chamber*. O-lan even warns that the oldest son is becoming lecherous like "the young lords" of other great houses (219). Certainly the social question of women and traditional patriarchy was central to the May 4th Movement, and in surveying the Shanghai magazine *Eastern Miscellany* from 1931, where the first translation of *The Good Earth* was published, women and the family received more discussion than perhaps any other issue. In a novel written by a Westerner, however, these scenes can only register as Oriental decadence. So cites an unnamed early critic who wrote that *The Good Earth* was right for Chinese readers, who could approach it as engaged with particular and pressing social issues, but wrong for American readers, who would only have their broad, negative stereotypes reinforced (2016, 71). By locating Wang Lung's increasing lust within the two-part structure of the novel of virtuous growth, Buck contrasts it with a reproductive sexuality rooted in the earth, and a feature of the natural order.

3. The Chinese Farmer in America: Wang Lung's Organic Produce

The Good Earth thus portrays Wang Lung as a farmer, a moral agent and nascent capitalist, rather than as a peasant trapped by feudalism and in pressing need of remolding by elites. In this Buck follows the Mass Education Movement rather than those who prioritized political change. She draws on Decades later she sought to distance herself from the transnational agricultural network and Lossing's work specifically:

> I must confess that I had often wondered secretly what a young American could teach the Chinese farmers who had been farming for generations on the same land and by the most skillful use of fertilizers and irrigation were still able to produce extraordinary yields and this without modern machinery. (Buck 1954, 139)

Commentators have generally taken this quote to show that the couple was fundamentally split between the modernizing man who would do away with traditional practices, and the either culturally-sensitive or nostalgic woman who defended China as it was. The reading of *The Good Earth* that I am presenting here, however, shows the same fundamental interests of the agricultural experts, namely Chinese farm productivity. Wang Lung is in many respects the Cornell-Nanjing network's dream come true. By arguing for the excellence of Chinese agricultural practices, moreover, Buck concurs with the findings in Lossing's *Chinese Farm Economy* itself, the book she had just edited. Lossing's work credits Chinese ingenuity and intensive labor practices for their ability to produce higher yields per area of land than American farms of the time, even those with the latest machinery, and suggests relatively few changes in farming techniques. The practical recommendations focus more on improving roads and other distribution infrastructure.

As William Conlogue shows, however, industrializing agriculture did not depend on machines themselves but involved a broad range of technologies to rationalize production as a business, including the mapping, accounting and quantifying labor that Lossing and the other agronomists apply to the countryside. Likewise, as Wang Lung's business grows, he hires a foreman to manage his workers, and places his educated son in the grain market to handle accounts. Within American literature, Conlogue identifies these business technologies in the novels of Willa Cather, whose character Alexandra Bergson, I have argued, shares many

affinities with Wang Lung. Another of Cather's female protagonists, Enid from *One of Our Own*, also develops a successful farm business specifically due to her education in new agricultural sciences, and at the end of the novel embarks for China as a missionary. Cather was perhaps aware of the transnational agricultural network, as Enid fits the profile of Lossing Buck and others who were both Christian missionaries and agricultural experts. Following Cather's structure of the two-part pastoral, *The Good Earth* presents a process of rationalization that does not rely on physical machines, in order to dramatize the potential moral pitfalls of economic success, and in particular of Lossing's central recommendation, consolidating small holdings into larger farms. By presenting the Chinese farm as a successful family business, the novel follows what Stross argues were the main weaknesses of *Chinese Farm Economy*:

> "[t]he foreignness of its emphasis on farm efficiency, which accounted for its fresh insights, also accounted for its limited scope and awkward handling of the two most talked-about issues of the day in China: the seemingly explosive problem of tenancy and the questionable ability of the Nationalist government to help the rural areas. (178)

By dramatizing economic growth without addressing political realities, Buck's novel takes up the concerns of the transnational agricultural network out of which it grew. The decisive differences between the views of China in the two works lie not in questions of farm economy but morality.

Buck presents Wang Lung's moral strengths and weaknesses through the two-part pastoral as a question of natural order and reproduction, rather than Christian dogma. This contrasts sharply with *Chinese Farm Economy*'s asides condemning Chinese marriage practices and other moral questions, which stand out all the more because of how tangential they are from

the technical and quantitative focus of the rest of the work. Buck moreover backed her sympathetic portrayals of Chinese family life with widely-discussed condemnations of the foreign missionary enterprise as a whole. In fact the Nobel committee, in their statement announcing Buck's award, did not cite her novels by name but instead singled out her two biographies of her parents, *The Exile* and *Fighting Angel* (both 1936), which both portray her father's shortsighted and counterproductive missionary work as a kind of patriarchal tyranny over her mother (far exceeding the more human weaknesses Wang Lung falls prey to). Peter Conn argues that Buck contributed to a new movement in religious thinking in the U.S. in the 1930's, as one of several writers who tried to articulate a modern, less literal form of Christianity that could accommodate respect for other cultures as well as the widespread acceptance of Darwinian evolution (134). More generally, Conn shows that this decade saw a revolution in American conceptions of non-Western peoples, including Native Americans, fueled by Franz Boaz's new anthropology, within which Buck was a leading figure. *The Good Earth* is in fact the earliest published work that Conn cites within this transition. I believe we should not see her as simply one writer among many for this movement because China is not simply one culture among many for the American tradition, especially when it comes to defining virtuous economic growth. Reading *The Good Earth* as a farm novel, in fact the most successful American farm novel, illuminates certain assumptions about China already at work on the American farm.

Buck follows a long Western tradition of using the Chinese farmer as the figure of production that follows natural law. While the dominant strain of Enlightenment thought identified the Chinese as fundamentally a commercial people imagined to be shifty and

untrustworthy,[11] a minor strain of this same intellectual tradition portrayed them as self-sufficient farmers, happy, simple, and moral. In particular, the school of the Physiocrats, whom Marx credited with originating the idea that surplus value is created not during economic circulation but already at the site of production in agriculture, proposed that the Chinese agrarian economic system perfectly conformed to natural law, according to which all wealth is harvested from the earth. They advocated that Europe abandon its focus on commerce, and even take up features of the Chinese imperial system, based in natural law and therefore moral order.[12] Thomas Jefferson was an enthusiastic reader of the Physiocrats, and corresponded with Du Pont, one of the school's leading figures. When once asked about the future role of commerce in the US, Jefferson responded that "I should wish them to practice neither commerce nor navigation, but to stand with respect to Europe precisely on the footing of China. We should thus avoid wars, and all our citizens would be husbandmen" (quoted in Aldridge 1993, 96). The quotation suggests that the strongest early advocate of an agrarian democracy in the US did not think of this as specifically American but as following the pastoral Chinese model that the Physiocrats recommended for the West.[13]

Following Jefferson, other advocates of agrarianism in the United States increasingly looked to China as a model of virtuous growth in the early twentieth century, extending well beyond the specific transnational agrarian network that Buck and Lossing participated in. For example, F.H. King's *Farmers of Forty Centuries*, a study advocating the "permanent"

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[11] Montesquieu's *The Spirit of the Laws* (1748) is the most influential example.

[12] See Liana Vardi, *The Physiocrats and the World of the Enlightenment*.

[13] On the early American interest in China, see also Nan Z. Da (2013).

agricultural methods of China, Japan, and Korea, remains a touchstone for American environmentalists. Originally published in 1911, the book was reissued in 1927 and had a great effect on agricultural reformers of the 1930s and 1940s, including Lord Northbourne, who coined the phrase "organic farming" and referred to organic manuring as the "Chinese method" (Paull 2014, 42). Suggestive of the links between "traditional" farming and Orientalism, Northbourne became a scholar of comparative religion as well as agriculture, arguing for both "perennial farming" and "perennial philosophy," and translating a study of Eastern religious art. Among literary writers, the poet and essayist John Gould Fletcher, influenced by Ezra Pound's interest in Chinese poetry, was one of the "Twelve Southerners" who published the 1930 manifesto *I'll Take My Stand* in defense of southern agrarianism. In his contribution to the collection, focused on education, Fletcher proposes a timeless connection between the agrarian virtues of China and the South: "We employ our minds in order to achieve character, to become the balanced personalities, the 'superior men' of Confucius' text, the 'gentlemen' of the Old South" (120). Published just the year before *The Good Earth*, *I'll Take My Stand* can help us better understand the context in which Buck's novel appeared, and the interests of the public that made it a runaway best-seller.

The year 1930 saw a host of writers from across the political spectrum rethinking fundamental narratives of what America had been and what it would be in the future. Many who questioned the perceived excesses of the 1920s and saw in the Depression the possible failure of industrial capitalism revived Jefferson's ideas to advocate for a more direct participatory democracy and self-determination based in a robust rural culture and economy. Richard So (2010) has noted that Buck participated in this revival with her vision of a kind of transpacific Jeffersonian democracy, which included both improving the position of China internationally

and ending US limits on Asian immigration. She grounded this idea in an understanding of traditional China as an egalitarian, proto-democratic society. Whereas So interprets this as Buck's invention, however, this chapter demonstrates that these ideas were not new, but the product of an ongoing Orientalist production of a traditional China by both Americans and Chinese. Far from an application of Jefferson to China, we have seen the reverse, that Jefferson himself invoked China as support for his vision of an egalitarian agrarian society. In this light, the sustained engagement with the Chinese farmer in The Good Earth begins to look less like a random occurrence, an aberration in American literary history, and more like the most sustained experiment in how far this idea could be taken.

For it was not only Americans who dreamed of unifying modern technical knowledge with the virtue of Chinese traditional practices, as Chinese reformers likewise sought to balance these concerns. Fang Xianting, who advocated rural industrialization on the American model, at the scale of Tennessee Valley Authority, argued that in China such projects would not lead to the social problems seen in the US and Europe. As Margherita Zanasi explains:

> [f]or rural industrializers such as Fang Xianting… the rural question, in both its economic and moral dimensions, became a source of inspiration for constructing a model of rural modernity that aimed at combining Western models with the superior values that they ascribed to traditional rural society (143).

Fang's ideas illustrate Dirlik's understanding of Orientalism, and a number of points made in this chapter. In the first place, Fang articulates his plan as a synthesis of this China and the U.S. that were previously distinct from each other, much as Buck and her supporters depict her work as doing. Secondly, this is an example of anti-hegemonic Orientalism, an argument for the moral superiority of a supposed traditional Chinese rural society. Thirdly, as such, this image of a

Chinese pastoral is already the co-creation of Western and Chinese writers that has been superimposed over thousands of years of regional, ethnic, cultural, and linguistic diversity of daily lived experience (today celebrated by the state as "5000 years of Chinese tradition").

Fourthly, the specific synthesis that Fang is proposing—foreign industrialization purified by the nation's traditional rural values—was itself again first articulated by Jefferson, who argued that the US could adopt European manufacturing without creating an urban proletariat because of the virtues inherent in rural American space and its peoples. Leo Marx writes:

> Once the machine is removed from the dark, crowded, grimy cities of Europe, [Jefferson] assumes that it will blend harmoniously into the open countryside of his native land… At bottom it is the intensity of his belief in the land, as a locus of both economic and moral value, which prevents him from seeing what the machine portends for America." (150)

What we have here is a cycle of industrialization and purification. In the early nineteenth century, Jefferson develops a utopian argument for how the U.S.'s rural identity will allow it to industrialize without the problems of capitalism. One hundred years later, after all of those problems have ripened, the country is thrown into economic depression, and many at home begin to question industrial capitalism, Fang Xianting proposes that China is where this synthesis will be done right, purifying industry of its American decadence. The difference is that Jefferson locates rural purity in the land itself rather the people. As a settler-colonial society, whites must portray the land as unmarked by previous human history. As "a new nation," furthermore, the U.S. does not in 1800 have a long rural tradition, and so Jefferson appeals to China as the agrarian model, as we saw above. Fang is able to appeal to this idea of traditional China directly as that which purifies, and so just as Jefferson proposed the U.S. as the new China, Fang

proposes China as the new U.S. Buck inhabits this same world of concepts, and through her fiction foregrounds the overlapping elements between the two national discourses, unencumbered by the need for practical solutions that academic experts and political leaders faced.

Growing out of the transnational agricultural network, *The Good Earth* thus appealed to American as well as Chinese audiences interested in the morality of natural and economic growth, a phenomenon that they located specifically in these two continent-sized agrarian nations. The novel arrived in the United States at the onset of the Depression, when Americans were questioning received narratives of national history, of America as the land of progress, on an unprecedented scale.[14] This is the context in which we can begin to understand a novel set in China as the best-selling book in America for both 1931 and 1932. *I'll Take My Stand* and *The Good Earth* were soon followed by a host of popular works that that explored how the urban unemployed might return to the farm. While the term "back-to-the-land" is most identified with the 1970's, this movement was in fact the third wave of similar movements during the twentieth century. The original was in the first decades of the century, as the urban population surpassed the rural, and participants of the 1930's movement understood it as a revival. Dona Brown (2011) argues that the major writings of this period—non-fiction works such as *Flight from the City* (1933), *A Living from the Land* (1934), and *Five Acres and Independence* (1935)—reveal a slight ambivalence that was not present in the earlier back-to-the-land enthusiasm. These writers do not depict the farm as free from the precarity of the Depression, but only as a somewhat safer bet than the certain unemployment of the city. *The Good Earth* gives a similarly mixed review of

[14] See Conn (2009).

rural life, as drought and famine are always threatening, and there is no realistic way of overcoming poverty besides simply stealing from the rich.

Moreover, *The Good Earth*'s image of a destitute, hungry family forced to leave their farm is recognizable in an entire sub-genre of farm novels written during the Depression and Dust Bowl decade. In virtually every American novel written from this period in which farmers fight to keep their land, however, they fail and end up losing it. Frietag concludes from this pattern that these novels were written specifically to counter the pastoral back-to-the-land fantasies of the urban unemployed. He locates these fantasies in the popular press, but in fact no portrayal of rural life during the decade comes close to matching the readership of *The Good Earth*, so it would seem to be the central literary work that these more pessimistic novels are at pains to debunk beginning a few years later. As we saw above, ideas of Chinese and American agriculture were long intertwined, such that *The Good Earth* presents an alternative to contemporary American life which is consistent with longstanding values that readers associated with America as well as China, or the most American versions of China. As one of the last American novels of virtuous growth, we can begin to see that Buck's Orientalist pastoral influenced the further development of the American farm novel first of all negatively. As the works that soon followed it emphasize losing the land over regaining it, *The Good Earth* appears naïve in retrospect.

4. Searching for the Rural Other in China and the U.S.

Although the overall plot sequence of *The Good Earth* draws on the American two-part pastoral and the dynamics of virtuous growth, at the same time the novel minimizes the agency of the characters in building their fortune, instead emphasizing only their moral agency. While Wang Lung and O-lan are supremely hardworking, they do not actually win back their land by

their own efforts so much as through luck. They obtain the money to return to their farm and buy new lands when they happen to be present as a riot breaks out—they have no role in starting it—and then each of them independently comes across a great sum of money. For character-driven story conventions the role of luck would appear to be a weakness, but early Chinese reviewers praised this aspect of the plot development and its explanation for the family's eventual success. One noted that this improbable plot development dramatizes the precarious situation of the rural population as the novel does not portray success as likely or even possible through hard work alone, but only a kind of magical scenario can lift them out of poverty (Liu 60). Indeed the difficulty for politically-engaged Chinese writers during this period was how to both depict the magnitude and complexity of the national crisis while also offering readers hope for the future rather than despair. Buck dramatizes moral issues facing both rich and poor in rural China, while also making it clear that one cannot move from one position to the other on one's own merit.

Other reviewers of *The Good Earth* saw in this plot development the influence of traditional Chinese fiction, where fate might play a large role in the outcome of the narrative (Liu 60). Thus the novel was seen as a sincere engagement with Chinese formal elements as well as the content. So (2010) adds to this understanding with his brilliant bilingual reading of Buck's decisions in translating *The Water Margin* to argue that *The Good Earth* is a formal synthesis of the realistic qualities of the classical Chinese novel and conventions of American realism. Buck encouraged this reading of her work, though to such an extent that her consistent appeals to the authority of tradition tended to elide her relationship to contemporary Chinese literature and intellectual life. She overstated her connection to classical fiction precisely in order to separate herself from contemporary writers, both Chinese and American. Even her interest in the classical novel *The Water Margin*, which So uses to argue that she synthesized classical Chinese and

modern American literature, was not iconoclastic but followed decades of work by modern Chinese intellectuals who saw in this work a populist and potentially even democratic politics that could be relevant for the present. Buck often defended the simplicity of her style, its lack of "literariness," on the grounds that she consciously wrote to reach a popular audience, and the most important component of this rhetorical move is her rural subject, a modern literary concern which she projects into the past:

> No, a novelist must not think of pure literature as his goal… He is a storyteller in a village tent, and by his stories he entices people into his tent. And to farmers he must talk of their land, and to old men he must speak of peace, and to old women he must tell of their children, and to young men and women he must speak of each other. He must be satisfied if the common people hear him gladly. At least, so I have been taught in China. ("The Chinese Novel")

As Buck knew, however, traditional novels did not take farmers as subjects, but rather nobles or heroes. Chinese literature for and about farmers is a thoroughly modern phenomenon, and in this speech we see the Orientalist tendencies in her work to render archaic much of her knowledge of contemporary China.

In fact *The Good Earth* draws from modern Chinese literature by subtly undermining the rural protagonist's view of the world. Since the beginning, critics have criticized Wang Lung's ignorance as an Orientalist slander,[15] but this is arguably where Buck is closest to her Chinese

[15] The most prominent criticism of her work in the American press at the time was Kiang Kang-Hu's argument that her view of China was one-sided because it showed only uncouth characters

contemporaries, who assume a deep gap in knowledge and culture between the city and the countryside. On the whole, Chinese literature of the 1920s presents the peasants as moral but ignorant of the world around them, questioning their current fitness for political participation. *The Good Earth* likewise maintains an ironic distance between the reader's knowledge of modern life and the outside world, and the rural character's ignorance. Wang Lung never fully grasps the modernizing transformations around him, though they are shown to the reader whenever he ventures into the urban environment: when in the first chapter a barber jokes about cutting off his queue, a symbol of allegiance to the Qing empire, it repels him, but also serves to alert the reader to the historical period in which the novel takes place. Likewise, in Wang Lung's other encounters with modernity--the train which allows the family to find relief in the south, the political revolutionaries he sees there, the Western woman who rides in his rickshaw gives him a generous tip—each scene is meant to be understood by the reader but not the character. The reader is meant to smile at the dramatic irony while the distance between the two points of view delineates the farmer's consciousness and his moral authority.

The Good Earth participates in a cultural shift of the late 1920s and early 1930s where Chinese authors experimented with shortening the distance between the reader and the rural character, especially by mapping changing worldviews onto a contrast between father and son. In particular, Mao Dun's *Village Trilogy* of short stories, published just a few months after *The Good Earth*'s first Chinese translation in 1932, features many striking parallels to it. Both writers contrast an elderly father who understands the forces impacting his life as supernatural, with his

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and neglected high culture. Buck naturally seized the opportunity to strengthen her image as friend of the common people. See Lye (207).

more modern sons who understand these forces as social and economic. In Mao Dun's stories, the family works hard and mortgages much of their property to raise excellent crops of rice and silkworms, but due to disruptions in the market these cannot be sold and they end up further in debt. In the third story, the elderly Lao Tongbao dies, the family is on the verge of starvation, and the son leaves to join a local militia as Wang Lung's youngest son had done. In both *The Good Earth* and the *Village Trilogy* then, the final break between the fathers and the sons is represented by the latter's refusal to work the land, as they have rationally decided that it is more profitable not to.

While setting up similar family dynamics, Mao Dun's implicit criticism of *The Good Earth* is of course his more pessimistic view of both the contemporary rural economy and the traditional peasant worldview clung to by both Wang Lung and Lao Tongbao. This presents a problem of narrative form, as the *Village Trilogy*, like other leftist literature of the period, must address both the objective difficulties peasants face, in this case their helplessness before the economic logic of capitalism, while also suggesting hope for revolutionary change. David Der-wei Wang (1992) argues that "Spring Silkworms" overcomes this contradiction by absorbing the naturalist, objectivist vision of society, where individuals are at the mercy of larger forces, into the worldview of his aging peasant character, thus making it the very thing that the revolution needs to overcome. As he explains, "The deterministic elements of Zolaesque theory are again neatly reinterpreted by Mao Dun as a heritage of feudalistic consciousness and an environment of precapitalist society, which predetermine the Chinese peasantry's fate; the old concept of the Wheel of Fortune cycles through another turn" (52). Insofar as *The Good Earth* blends naturalist elements with the supposed fatalism of traditional culture, then, "Spring Silkworms" gives a direct response and criticism of Buck's view of the countryside. Lao Tung Bao sees the world in

the same way as Buck herself, and criticizing this view is a central to improving rural life.

Recent work by Chinese critics comparing *The Good Earth* with the Village Trilogy tends to present a balanced view that emphasizes the authors' different audiences and the explicitly ideological goals of their works. For example, Bu Yuwei and Chang Xiaomei argue that "in order to remedy the West's attitude toward China, Pearl S. Buck used her position as a literary writer to show, to the best of her ability, the positive, progressive side of Chinese traditional customs" (189). On the other hand, as a left-wing writer, "Mao Dun's goal was revolutionary consciousness-raising, and in such a representation of village life, traditional customs can only appear as ignorant and backward." Wang Juan gives a subtler reading of the two works, arguing that both writers appreciate traditional culture, even as both regret that it likely will not survive in the modern world. This follows an argument by the eminent literary critic C.T. Hsia that while the old peasant's worldview is ostensibly meant to be criticized in "Spring Silkworms," in fact the character and the peasants' religious spirit in general are presented with great dignity (163). Likewise, the titles of the three stories, "Spring Silkworms," "Summer Harvest," "Winter Harvest," invoke a seasonal, cyclical temporality at odds with the son's progressive revolutionary narrative, which is also the least convincing element of the story cycle. Perhaps this ambiguous sympathy for traditional culture, especially the complex ecological system of silkworm farming, partly accounts for why the story became a classic of modern literature praised by critics of varying political positions, while most later Communist fiction has been dismissed. Hsia even speculates that Mao Dun, "as if dissatisfied with the ambiguity of 'Spring Silkworms,'" added the more simplistic and didactic sequels to correct this tendency (163).

This attention to the ambivalence between tradition and modernity in "Spring

Silkworms" helps us bring out a similar complexity in *The Good Earth*, which uses the same contrast in point of view between father and son, with both a cyclical and linear historical temporality. The linear temporality must largely be inferred by the reader, but it is clearly progressing, just as the progressive social movement is succeeding with their famine relief project in Shanghai. Over the course of the novel the linear temporality gains ground, and clearly has the upper hand at the end. While the old man cannot fathom why his youngest son goes off to fight for the country, the reader understands the son is responding to changing historical conditions. With the final sentence of the book the point of view shifts to show the reader for the first time something Wang Lung cannot see, his older two sons planning to sell the land after his death. Selling part of the land marks the shift to the historical temporality that will drive *The Good Earth*'s two sequels. These follow the family's development from the farmer father in *The Good Earth* to the landlord, merchant, and warlord sons in *Sons* (1932), and finally to the grandsons in *A House Divided* (1935), one a student revolutionary and the other a scientist.[16] In his analysis of the development of the American farm novel after the 1930s, Frietag identifies a new form he calls the "farm epic," often appearing as a trilogy of novels, that dramatizes a transition from a cyclical temporality to a linear, historical one, and the transformation of the farming community that this brings (268). The *House of Earth* trilogy appears to have anticipated this trend, as Buck, like her Chinese contemporaries, tried to authentically represent a

[16] Wang concludes that Buck's trilogy supports a scientific or technocratic future while Mao Dun's supports a revolutionary solution, but if anything Mao Dun is more invested in modern technologies than Buck. As in *The Good Earth*, *A House Divided* dramatizes the rural crisis without attempting to suggest a realistic solution.

traditional villager's point of view in response to historical changes in the Chinese countryside.

Just as Buck shares a similar basic orientation to the countryside with Chinese leftist writers who criticized her, she also has an unexpected continuity with the American writers who presented such a different view of rural life. I argued above that the pessimistic American farm novels of the late 1930s responded to the naivité of *The Good Earth* as much as they did to the popular back-to-the-land nonfiction of that era. While works such as *The Grapes of Wrath* challenge the optimism of Buck's novel, they nevertheless follow her assumption, drawn from modern Chinese literature, that a fundamental distance exists between the rural subject and the urban writer and reader, a distance that needs to be overcome by the work of writing itself. Like Buck, writers such as Steinbeck or James Agee combined documentary non-fiction with fiction, and grounded the authority of their representations in their personal fieldwork among farm laborers. Steinbeck's 1936 series of investigative articles on migrant laborers for *The San Francisco News*, the research which formed the basis and credibility of *Of Mice and Men* (1937) and *The Grapes of Wrath*, was republished along with a series of Dorothea Lang's photos as *The Harvest Gypsies* (1938). In their "discovery" of rural poverty, as Sacvan Berkovitch put it, American leftist writers of the late 1930s closely resemble their Chinese counterparts travelling to the countryside to better understand and represent the rural crisis for their urban readership. Buck's research with Lossing in Anhui as part of the transnational agronomical network bridged these two worlds when it produced the best-selling American farm novel of all time.

In going to the field for authentic narratives with which to argue against Buck, later American writers must also repeat her hybrid literary and anthropological approach. Conn reminds us as a public intellectual she was part of a larger shift in conceptions of non-Western peoples informed by Boaz's approach to anthropology. As we have seen, the hybrid American-

Chinese countryside of *The Good Earth* allows both American and Chinese readers to imagine the Chinese countryside as more American. As a result, however, she also connects the American countryside with China to a far greater extent than earlier writers who had suggested this comparison. American farmers are pushed further away from urban readers, into an ambiguously foreign space.

The anthropological impulse can be seen in such works as *Tobacco Road* and *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, which inform the urban reader about the strange otherness of their rural subjects, and in both works rural characters appear ignorant and perverse. While the latter is often read as sympathetic, Gavin Jones emphasizes Agee's ambivalence toward the poor as hauntingly beautiful but incurably ignorant and perverse, and ultimately the erotic objects of his own pleasure (126). These are very nearly the terms in which *The Good Earth* is criticized, but Agee finds these anthropological specimens not in China but on tenant farms in the American South. Even as sympathetic a work as *The Grapes of Wrath* employs dramatic irony to mark the distance between the character and the reader, as when a tenant farmer defends his claim to the land on the basis that his grandfather "had to kill the Indians and drive them away" (33). American works of late 1930s echo the pessimistic Chinese works of the previous decade in their goal of representing the extent of the rural crisis, and the inability of farmers to solve it on their own, for an urban readership.

While in American literature the 1930s saw a widening gap between the country and the city, in Chinese literature the same period saw this gap narrow. *The Good Earth* is located at the intersection of these two trends. Whereas Chinese writers of the 1920s had presented the rural subject as irreducibly different from educated urban readers, writers of the 1930s, including Buck, sought a reconciliation between city and country. For the Communist Party, intellectuals

should inhabit the position of the peasants and the peasants learn from the party how to articulate their inchoate political consciousness. The Party developed its cultural policy internally in 1927, but its most famous articulation was Mao's 1942 *Talks on Art and Literature*. In these speeches, which set the rules for acceptable cultural production over the next 35 years, Mao identified literature as a key technology for the reconciliation of country and city. He ordered writers to leave behind the formal complexity of Lu Xun and his generation, corrupted as they were by urbanity and colonialism. All literature must take as its subject rural life, and must be written in a simple style intelligible to the uneducated. Immensely influential in its day, most literature from the Maoist period is read today more as an object of political history than aesthetic appreciation, owing to its deliberately simple form and didactic message.

Buck's writing has come to a similar fate. Critic Dody Weston Thompson suggested the comparison near the end of Buck's life: "She seemed gradually to cease caring about development of the novel as an expressive art form and to pursue more and more its uses as propaganda" (106). Indeed, the rejection of high culture in her 1938 Nobel acceptance speech anticipates the points Mao would make four years later: "a novelist *must not* think of pure literature as his goal… to farmers he *must* talk of their land… he *must* be satisfied if the common people hear him gladly" ("The Chinese Novel," emphasis added). The writer is obligated to reconcile the rural people to the city by claiming to speak in their voice. Buck's Nobel Prize was such an embarrassment to the literary establishment because her novels were out of step with the modernist focus on complexity and subjectivity, the difficulty of representation. She claimed a more direct power for literature, maintaining an "essential optimism, her belief that human nature is basically good and the world perfectible by rational means" (Thompson 109). Buck and the Chinese Communist Party agreed on these basic Enlightenment values, and that revaluing the

Chinese rural subject was central to this project. Narrowly surviving both the Boxer Rebellion and the Nanjing Incident, a chaotic 1927 battle between Nationalists and Communists, Buck abhorred social upheaval. Yet she generally praised the Communists after they came to power in 1949, and made it a point never to visit Taiwan or legitimize its government. When in 1971 the PRC denied her a visa to participate in Nixon's trip to China, she was devastated, and died a short time later. Although she had made her case for different policies in the 1930s, she always hoped that the Party would recognize her as a friend of the Chinese people who, like themselves, claimed moral authority by championing the village against the city.

Mao himself exhorted writers to overcome the divide between country and city through self-criticism of their own intellectual identity outside of the rural people, a dynamic that led to the many purges over the decades culminating with the disaster that was the Cultural Revolution. For Pearl S. Buck, the gap between the intellectual and the peasant was wider; as a foreigner there could be little chance of actually becoming the rural other. She sought to manage this gap first of all through the name farmer, which brought them into the same temporal reality. But the most singular feature of *The Good Earth* is its prose, which evokes a mood or a feeling more than it seems to describe an actual world, and I believe that this is the key to understanding how Buck approached the split. Although in her Nobel acceptance speech Buck characterized herself as a storyteller in a village tent, speaking to farmers in their own language, when she was still an unknown writer she opened *The Good Earth* with an epigraph from Proust's *Swan's Way* which affirms the legitimacy of artistic invention. The quotation is Swann's reflection on a phrase of music by the fictitious composer Vinteuil, and whether it can be said to have a real existence or is simply artifice. Swann has noted that he himself only has access to the memory of it, which is one more step removed from any reality it might have. What does Buck hope to show with this

epigraph, beyond that she has sophisticated literary taste? The reference to music first of all points to her rhythmic prose, whose biblical phrasing and Chinese syntax has an elevated or musical quality. Secondly, the reference to memory in the quote reminds us that she is basing her novel on a memory of her earlier time in Anhui, which partly accounts for the novel's oneiric quality. Swann decides in the end that the composer has in fact accessed a supernatural realm where the phrase does exist, and was able "to draw aside its veil, to make it visible" (498) Swann says that the proof of this

> was that anyone with an ear at all delicate for music would at once have detected the imposture had Vinteuil, endowed with less power to see and to render its forms, sought to dissemble (by adding a line, here and there, of his own invention) the dimness of his vision or the feebleness of his hand. (498)

If Buck is likening *The Good Earth* to Vineuil's work, then—contrary to how it was received by nearly everyone—it is not intended as mimetic. The work is not based on something in the world, but its authenticity depends on the consistency of its artistic form. And this is not an ideal form, in the sense of "the" Chinese farmer, as Deleuze explains: "This is precisely the originality of Proustian reminiscence: it proceeds from a mood, from a state of soul, and from its associative chains, to a creative or transcendent viewpoint–and no longer, in Plato's fashion, from a state of the world to seen objectivities" (108). The work of art produces new truths, and for Buck this was the truth of a new connection between the US and China, through the farmer.

In reviewing Buck criticism from many decades, I have not found a single reference to this epigraph, which shows critics' sustained disinterest in her actual literary influences, especially influences from high culture, in favor of presenting a figure of exotic singularity. Buck's use of the epigraph flies in the face of her later persona, after she moved to the US, when

she styled herself an outsider both to the West and to serious literature, and as an expert in all things Asian. This is the sentence immediately preceding the two that Buck quotes, referring to the musical phrase:

> Human as it was from this point of view, it belonged, none the less, to an order of supernatural creatures whom we have never seen, but whom, in spite of that, we recognise and acclaim with rapture when some explorer of the unseen contrives to coax one forth, to bring it down from that divine world to which he has access to shine for a brief moment in the firmament of ours. (498)

Perhaps this is how Buck originally conceived of Wang Lung, long before she moved to America, before the fame and fortune, the friendship with Eleanor Roosevelt and the need to defend her Nobel selection to the world. This is how she thought of him while sitting in her third floor study in Nanjing, reminiscing about her time in Anhui. For so many twentieth-century Chinese intellectuals, the peasant "other" was a figure that defined them, yet remained elusive. The central problem for the intellectual was how to represent the peasant in an authentic way, how to access his consciousness. Buck approaches this problem with a romantic view of otherness, the other as divinity which cannot be experienced directly but whose form crystalizes through the work of art. Human as Wang Lung was "from one point of view," the Chinese farmer was in fact a supernatural figure whom she was able to coax down "from that divine world to which he has access to shine for a brief moment in the firmament of ours." In Wang Lung's case, the divine world that he has access to, but which Buck does not, is the good earth. Thus, unlike in earlier American farm novels, for her the countryside is at a metaphysical distance from the reader that can only be bridged through literature.

Chapter Three

Rural Reconstruction through Literacy and Literature: James C. Yen and Lao Xiang

The previous chapter evaluated how Pearl S. Buck's fiction responded to the U.S.-China agronomist network that flourished from the 1910's up to the Japanese invasion of southern China in 1937, in the context of dominant representations of the countryside in both countries. The 1930's saw considerable experimentation and rethinking as compared with the following decades. For the U.S. the dominant technical approach remained industrialization, but there was also significant pushback due to the depression, including labor activism and a popular movement among urbanites to move to the country and take up farming.[1] The dominant literary approach had long been the pastoral tradition,[2] but within the hegemony of the pastoral, scholars have identified numerous emergent sub-trends in the early twentieth century, such as William

[1] A movement of "People Back to the Land," as it was ironically called in an anonymous 1907 article in the *Nation*, is most often associated with the 1970's movement, which would be the third such movement of the twentieth century. The trend originated in the first decade of the century, then dissipated during the 1920's. Donna Brown analyzes the 1930's movement as revitalizing the earlier interest, but with a more sober view of rural life in the context of the Depression.

[2] Leo Marx famously argues that the form of pastoral common in the U.S., which he calls "complex pastoral," is only superficially critical of industrialization and in fact supports it. Conlogue argues for a more contested literary terrain on which authors have advanced competing values for the future of agricultural work and rural space.

Conlogue's American Georgic (2001), or what Sacvan Bercovitch (1994) calls the discovery of poverty, or indeed the widely-used framework of regionalism. In China, following the massacre of urban Communists by the Nationalists in 1927, the CCP reoriented itself from an urban workers' political party to a peasant army. The Party shifted course multiple times in response to shifting alliances, crises in production and management, but the fundamental technical prescription for the countryside was land reform, that is the redistribution of property, and their literary program continued to grapple with how to represent the coming-to-consciousness of the peasants. As in the U.S, then, the Chinese 1930's saw a great deal of experimentation in rural projects and representations before the Communists consolidated hegemony. Based on this complex landscape, I have argued that for all their political differences, Pearl S. Buck shares with leftist writers around 1930, such as Mao Dun, a tragic approach to the rural Chinese population, as well as representing them as vastly distant from their urban readership. Borrowing distancing techniques such as dramatic irony from the previous generation of Chinese writers, both portrayed rural characters as morally superior but intellectually inferior to the reader, as in Lu Xun's canonical story "New Year's Sacrifice." Moreover, Chapter Two argued that in order to achieve this, famine appears in this fiction as a central rural trope to present the countryside as a space of crisis which the characters are struggling to understand. What has long been considered fundamentally opposed turns out to have surprising overlap.

The final two chapters of this dissertation turn to consider writers that are also part of the long history of the American and Chinese encounter in the countryside, but that look at it in a different way, portraying a less stark contrast between the country and the city. The current chapter examines the Mass Education Movement and the program for Rural Reconstruction, both led by the dynamic James C. Yen. Emerging alongside the agronomists and the Communists in

the 1920's, Rural Reconstruction represents a third approach to rural transformation. Like the agronomical network, the movement Yen led grows out of a U.S.-China network, though one that is largely separate from the more well-known technical work of Lossing Buck and others. Born in rural Sichuan and a graduate of Yale and Princeton, Yen conceived of teaching all of rural China to read as the basis for transforming the nation. With a grant from the Rockefeller foundation, he implemented a pilot program in Ding Xian county in Hebei province not far from Beijing. Rather than the developmental economic focus of the agronomists, or the revolutionary political focus of the Communists, James C. Yen's program for Rural Reconstruction is centered on universal enlightenment through education. It is a humanist alternative to both quantitative development and historical materialism, based on a different view of village life and of the rural subject. As we have seen, for the agronomists the main rural problem is economic, and the solution is technical, while for the Communists, the problem is political-economic, and the central remedy is land reform. For Rural Reconstruction, however, there are four intertwined rural problems, and no one of them can be solved without addressing all of them: disease, illiteracy, poverty, and weak civic administration. The primary remedy, however, is education, with the idea that literate citizens will be able to participate in solving the other three problems together with the volunteers.

Yen aligned with Liang Shuming, an influential intellectual who was at this time overseeing a rural experiment in the southern province of Shandong. The two launched the Rural Reconstruction Movement as a nation-wide (or at least trans-regional) alliance of rural reformers who attempted to remain independent of both the ruling Nationalist (KMT) government and the Communist resistance. Although Rural Reconstruction has become a historical footnote to the civil war between the two major parties, reconsidering them can give us a fuller picture of the

diversity of ideas about the countryside at the time. They represent a rural component to the so-called "third force," or liberal political parties that remained separate from the KMT and CCP. Moreover, Yen continued as an unaligned rural reformer in the later period. As I will take up in more detail in chapter four, the early Cold War in Asia drew from and intensified the 1930's competition between the American agronomists and the Communists over what rural modernization would look like. For the PRC this became a rhetoric of peasant revolution throughout Asia, and for the U.S. government this became the "green revolution" of technical advancement pioneered by Lossing Buck and others. Yen, declared an enemy of the PRC for previously working with the Americans, did not settle in the U.S. and never visited Taiwan. He instead set up a regional program of Rural Reconstruction as an NGO based in the Philippines to spread the Ding Xian grassroots model throughout Asia, later extending to Latin America and Africa. His story thus provides an intriguing alternative to the two competing regimes of development during the Cold War in Asia, as a third force that likewise originated in the Chinese countryside before World War II.

The work in Ding Xian was intended as a demonstration that high rates of literacy actually required far fewer resources, and could be achieved much faster, than was previously believed. Thus a fundamental component of the program was to publicize the ongoing results of their work and make available resources that could be adapted and implemented in other provinces. In spreading their ideas, literature played an important role, and in order to better understand how MEM participants understood the village and the character of rural subjects, I will examine two works of fiction by the most prominent writer involved in the project, Lao Xiang, and contrast them with the more famous and canonical writers discussed in chapter two. In the nonfiction polemical essays of James C. Yen and the fictional works of Lao Xiang, and in

a somewhat different way in Eileen Chang's political novel *The Rice-Sprout Song*, which chapter four takes up, rural characters are not types, but have a wide range of views that conflict with each other. The psychological complexity that these characters show, and their difficulty in understanding each other, rival the complexity typically shown in urban characters. When hunger and famine arise in these works they play a different role than for Buck or the Communists, as they bring the reader closer to understanding the experience of the characters, rather than the distancing the characters as representatives of a traditional rural society.

Although the author is largely forgotten today, Lao Xiang's story "A Country Boy Quits School," (1934), enjoyed a great deal of success and comment at the time. The story is a satire of typical national education practices set up in or even enforced on the countryside. As such it provides excellent insight into how the MEM sought to differentiate themselves from typical practices through a better understanding of what would actually help rural subjects themselves. The second focus of what follows is Lao Xiang's novella *Quan Village* (1940), whose characters, the author claimed, were based on people he had known in the small village where he had lived and worked in Ding Xian county. As a medium-length work of fiction, portraying the village as a whole, it serves as a comparison to the fiction of similar length discussed in the other chapters of this dissertation. Its form is as unusual as its politics when compared to how more well-known writers—whether Chinese or American, communist or anti-communist—represented the countryside. Along with James C. Yen, Lao Xiang is furthermore important for this study of the U.S.-China relationship in the Chinese countryside because many of his works were quickly translated into English by, among others, the author Lin Yutang, who published them with the John Day Company under the direction of Pearl S. Buck and her second husband Richard Walsh. In 1944 Buck published a book-length interview with Yen, and in 1951 published Lin's

translation of *Quan Village*. I argue that this literary translation was an attempt to keep alive the "Third Force" alternative even as the Korean War solidified the opposition between the two countries. This shows Buck's continuing affinity for the MEM political position into the 1950's and the early Cold War. Although Lao Xiang's Ding Xian writings received national attention and were quickly translated into English for an American audience, the current chapter represents the most extensive English-language treatment of his work to date.

1. James C. Yen and Mass Education

James Y. C. Yen (Yan Yang-Chu) was born in 1893 in Pachung county in Sichuan. His father practiced traditional Chinese medicine and gave his son an education in the Confucian Four Books and Five Classics by the age of ten. Missionaries in Pachung arranged for Yang-chu to study at the School of Western Learning in Paoning. Attempting to "make Christianity Chinese," the missionaries lived in typical local accommodations, and the head of the school, William B. Aldis shaved the front of his head and wore a long queue in the Chinese style (Hayford 16). Aldis made a lasting impression on Yen: "He loved us, mothered us, fathered us… we believed in that Christ in whom he believed" (quoted in Hayford, 16). Historian Charles W. Hayford writes that at the school Yen came to see Jesus as a reformer who spoke the truth independent of what had come before: "Looking back, Yen felt that he as a young man needed the militant and revolutionary touch of Jesus' iconoclasm to complement the Confucianism and Buddhism which he still acknowledged as an important part of his makeup. In Christianity, Yen found love and power for the service of China." (16) He wanted for a time to become a missionary himself, but soon embraced salvation on a national level through changing social conditions. In this Yen resembled many social reformers of the time, including Sun Yat-sen, the first president of the Republic of China, who was baptized in the Congregational Church of the

U.S., and his protégé Chiang Kai-shek, a Methodist, who led the KMT in purging the Communists and eventually moved the party to Taiwan.

Alongside Yen's interest in Christianity as social reform, his sense of modernity was also informed by a new emphasis on physical culture widespread among Chinese reformers seeking to combat the image of the frail traditional scholar. Most famously, new martial arts clubs linked modern exercise and a discourse of physical health to Chinese indigenous tradition. After four years in Paoning, 90 miles from his home, Yen enrolled in a middle school (high school in the American system) in Chengdu, the capital of Sichuan, 200 miles away. In recalling these years, Yen noted that unlike his wealthier classmates, he always walked these distances to travel home, and sometimes could not afford to pay for lodging along the way. He later estimated that he walked 4,544 miles during his school career, and Hayford writes that "these hikes gave him physical toughness and discipline, as well as a close-grained view of the countryside" (17). These reflections connect the three core subjects of foreign education, modern physical health, and first-hand experience with village life, and echo his later integration of health and literacy on the same level as the more standard economic and political reforms. He noted that his American teachers taught him to play baseball, including how to throw a curveball, and upon leaving he took a job as sub-warden at the Chengdu branch of the YMCA. It was through the international network of the YMCA that he was able to travel to the U.S. to study at Yale, and many of the American contacts that helped popularize and fund his work in China over the next decades were made also through the Y. Yen developed his approach to a new China in the optimistic nexus of missionary Christianity and vibrant physical fitness.

Yen began his mission for universal education during WWI, when he worked with Chinese coolie laborers through the International YMCA in France. Like the majority of his Yale

classmates, Yen was inspired by the patriotic fever of the war, and several of his fellow Chinese students attempted to enlist in the U.S. army, but were denied (Hayford 22). Instead they joined the War Work Council of the International YMCA and were assigned to help with the Chinese Labor Corps (CLC). France and Britain had difficulty employing support staff during the war, and turned to recruiters in China who had for decades contracted coolie laborers to work throughout the western hemisphere (I discuss this labor system in more detail in chapter one). During the war, coolies contracted by Britain and France first went to North America, and travelled by train through Canada "in what were reputed to be sealed freight cars" (Hayford 24). They then crossed the Atlantic to France, where they did work such as loading and unloading supplies and building infrastructure. Yen and the other Chinese YMCA volunteers set up recreation tents for the workers modeled after those that their American counterparts had set up for the soldiers. Much of their time here came to be spent not in organizing recreational activities, however, but in drafting letters home for the illiterate workers, and reading the letters that arrived for them.

Soon they determined that this time was better spent teaching the workers themselves to read. Yen and a few colleagues taught evening classes which proved very popular, with the workers going directly from their work to class. They found that a standard textbook was too literary and impractical, so Yen and another Chinese who had been studying in the U.S., Daniel Fugh, designed new lessons based on the spoken language of these workers, most of them from northern China, and used only the most basic written characters. Hayford observes that this was similar to the approach taken by the earlier missionaries in spreading their ideas in China (26). Although there are perhaps 40,000 total Chinese characters, and around 4000 would be needed to read a typical popular work such as a newspaper, Yen and Fugh wrote simple, topical texts that

required no more than 1000 characters. More importantly, and to the amazement of the rest of the workers, nearly all of the forty students who registered for the first three-month course were able to learn the full 1000 characters and pass a graduation exam. The exam consisted of reading comprehension questions and writing a short letter. Yen held a graduation ceremony to celebrate the graduates, where he presented them with diplomas and sashes. The next day, he recalled, 2000 workers registered as students for the following three-month term. As the growing number of graduates needed more to read, Yen began editing a small newspaper, *The Chinese Weekly*, that introduced new readers to news of the war and the world at large. Yen wrote it out by hand and the pages were copied by lithograph—in February 1919, they produced 10,000 copies, and within three weeks increased it to 15,000 (Hayford 27).

Based on the success of this educational program, Yen felt that he and his colleagues had proven that anyone could learn to read in a short time. At this point Yen decided to return to China and dedicate his life to educating all of the illiterate rural population. He explains this new ambition as his reaction to a particular letter that he received at the camp from one of the workers, which read:

> Mr. Yen, big teacher: Ever since the publishing of your paper I began to know everything under the heavens. But your paper is so cheap and costs only one centime a copy, you may have to close down your paper soon. Here please find enclosed 365 francs which I have saved during my three years labor in France. (quoted in Mayfield 12)

With moving anecdotes such as this one, Yen confirms that his educational efforts reach the common people while affirming their morality and presenting them as collaborators on the grand project. As discussed in the previous chapter, Chinese intellectual identity had long included a

moral commitment to the common people who could not represent themselves. Yen emphasizes the way that the literacy program inspires its students and transforms them into full intellectual participants. By teaching the coolies to read, Yen fulfills this commitment by breaking down the distinction between the intellectuals and the people itself. His Christian mission is to transform the position of the common people within the Confucian ethical system. Speaking of the letter quoted above, he writes, "That is the kind of thing that touched me. I determined to use my life to enlarge his life. The word 'coolie' [*kuli* 苦力] became for me a new word. I said, I will free him from his bitterness [*ku* 苦] and help him to develop his strength [*li* 力]" (quoted in Mayfield, 4, interpolations mine). He invests the word "coolie" with narrative, as the two characters map the historical transformation from bitterness to strength. We may recall that the Latin word "modernus" was first used to distinguish the Christian era from everything that had come before. It marked a new historical possibility of salvation that had not existed in the Pagan era. Likewise, Yen's modernity is a time when the light of education allows the people to leave bondage behind and find their own national salvation.

Yen returned to China and together with Liang Qichao, Hu Shih, and other leading intellectuals founded the Mass Education Movement (MEM). The MEM ran several literacy campaigns, and developed new versions of Yen's original character primer geared specifically to rural or urban life in China. This work attracted considerable attention. In 1922 a group of radicals led by Mao Zedong participated in one of the campaigns (this was before the founding of the Communist Party), though they commissioned their own version of the *1000 Character Primer* with more radical content (Hayford 45). The Party later incorporated the teaching method in villages after coming to power, though they emphasized that a historical transformation could only be achieved by force and through strong leadership. By contrast, while Yen said that he

would help the coolie pass from bitterness to strength, he does not claim that he himself transforms historical categories, but rather that he facilitates the common people's initial access to their innate individual abilities. As we will see, he felt that once the spark is lit, the people have no further need of reformers like himself.

2. Reimagining Education in Lao Xiang's "A Country Boy Quits School"

Because Ding Xian was not an end in itself, but was set up as a national model, publicizing the project was as important as the work itself, if not more so. Yen thus recruited teachers, doctors, and agricultural and other experts from nearby Beijing to volunteer their time teaching as well as writing about the experiment. Lao Xiang (老向, also written Lao Hsiang), penname of Wang Huandou, (1898-1968), was the best-known writer working with the MEM in Ding Xian. Unlike nearly all the other participants, he had himself grown up in a farming family in rural Hebei, outside Shiji county-level town. When he graduated from middle school (*xiaoxue*), he was to return to farming because the family had no money to continue with school. His teacher saw so much potential in him that he paid the boy's way to study in a teacher-training high school, and Lao Xiang later earned the highest score in the entrance examination to Beijing Normal University. Studying in Beijing in 1919, he was swept up by the "New Culture" Movement (1915-1923) that dominated political and cultural discussions during this period. In the same year, he joined the KMT. After graduating he returned to his hometown and served as a primary school principal, hoping to spread scientific literacy, though he was fired when a chemistry experiment he was performing set the school building on fire. In 1923 he enrolled in Beijing University's Chinese Literature department, a vibrant center of the New Culture movement, and soon began writing short stories and essays. Like his long-time friend Lao She, author of many highly regarded works such as *Rickshaw Boy* (1937), Lao Xiang used North

China vernacular speech in much of his writing, and focused on everyday life among the common people. In 1930 he continued his interest in rural education by joining the MEM and moving to Ding Xian county. He helped administer the education project in Zhugu village, a poor, backward area, where he lived for three years.

During this time he contributed frequently to the MEM's nationally-circulated journal, *Among the People* (*Min Jian*, 民间). One of his most widely-read stories was a satire called "A Country Boy Quits School" (村儿辍学记 1934) that helped illuminate why national education methods were insufficient for the rural poor. It would be difficult for an author to know more about this subject than Lao Xiang, who had attended such a school himself as a child, had worked as a principal there, and had worked with the MEM to develop a new curriculum. Hayford quotes the literary scholar Hsu Kaiyu as saying that when he read the story as a teenager, he experienced it as life-changing after realizing that his family's errand boy was the same age as the boy in the story (115). "A Country Boy Quits School" soon appeared in several English-language translations, beginning two years later in 1936, spreading these ideas about rural education.

The story depicts a poor rural family who would never dream of sending their nine-year-old boy, Ah Chuan, to school because his labor is needed on the farm. A new local edict, however, declares that all children over six must attend, or the parents could be sent to jail. On the first day of school, Ah Chuan brings home eight textbooks with impressive color illustrations. Unfortunately, the family is expected to pay $1.20 for the books, which the grandmother exclaims is "the price of eight bushels of corn!" (125). Learning to read will take food out of the family's mouths rather than provide more—the grandfather notes that an almanac, which has many more words in it, and that might actually be useful for their farm, costs

five copper pennies. After a long debate, the family decide to accept the book fee as a stroke of bad luck, like a natural disaster. Ah Chuan, told to study diligently, goes to school at dawn, but is turned away because the teacher is still asleep. Returning later, he must endure a lecture about punctuality.

After the straightforward difficulty of paying for the books, more subtle difficulties arise from their content. The family are impressed by the illustrations, until they see that they show foreigners performing actions in foreign ways, such as using the wrong hand to turn the sewing wheel. The father observes that "It really all looks like the foreign preacher," in the city (124). Ah Chuan reads aloud all evening the first sentence in the book, "This is mama," but when his mother looks and sees the foreign woman there, becomes angry that the boy has forgotten her. The family debate just whose mother it is, and next day Ah Chuan asks the teacher, who replies, "It is the mamma of any boy who reads this book" (129). The answer is confusing to the whole class since it resembles none of their mothers, and the exchange highlights the way that textbooks present material in the abstract and expect readers to imagine themselves within the fantasy realm world of the book rather than seeing the book as relevant in their own world. Every boy in the class, (there are no girls), should imagine himself the son of this foreign woman, living in an imaginary land.

The fantastical quality of the textbooks is extended with a later lesson that says "the cow prepares the meals; the horse eats noodles" (130). The puzzled family again speculates that it is a foreign horse, like one seen in the travelling circus, until the teacher scolds Ah Chuan and says it is just for fun. He is relieved, for he had been doubting there existed such people who "eat bread and drink milk and go into a park and play tennis-balls,' which he has never seen, and now he knows that these are merely said for fun in the books" (131). Beyond the general uselessness of

the teaching materials, these episodes satirize the failure of teachers to contextualize the material and explain how the village and the school relate to it. This contrasts with MEM's program in civic and political education, whose texts, as we will see, educate students about China as a whole and China's place in an international world including the U.S.

The last straw is a lesson on the family. Ah Chuan again reads his lesson aloud, which states that in a family there are mother and father, brother and sister. On top of the difficulties with her daughter-in-law, this insult from the authority of the written text is too much for grandmother to bear: "Now, I am not wanted any more. I know I have no place in the family," and proceeds to break up some old cooking utensils (134). These farcical reactions to the text by the mother and grandmother are intended humorously, but they hyperbolically point out problems with the top-down national education program based on foreign models. Certainly, reformers in the 1920's and 1930's routinely explored how the Confucian family system limited women's freedom, and called for new marriage laws and other changes, though most of this discussion was focused on the upper classes. In this story, however, the so-called modernizing force of foreign educational models is seen as undermining women's position in the family, especially in the extended family. Liang Shuming, who with James C. Yen founded the national Rural Reconstruction organization, argued that the so-called extended family was in fact the basic organizing unit of Chinese society, and any approach to reform that does not recognize this is bound to cause problems within the family. At the end of the story, Ah Chuan's father placates the grandmother, declaring that his son will no longer attend school: "I prefer to go into the county gaol" (134). The school is nothing but a compulsory tax that appropriates the child's productive labor, with a criminal penalty for nonpayment. The final line underscores that none of this drama is visible outside of the home: "And next morning, Ah Chuan's father dismisses a

hired farm hand, and the teacher makes a cross against Ah Chuan's name in the pupils' register" (134). The story maintains that the records and statistics, in short the discourse of educational planning and policy, do not explain anything about why people in the villages are or are not invested in particular programs.

"A Country Boy Quits School" was first published in the Shanghai magazine *Analects* edited by Lin Yutang, and within a few years multiple English-language translations had been published.[3] Lin himself produced the first translation in 1936; a popular author on both sides of the Pacific who wrote many successful books about China for Americans, he was an ardent supporter of Lao Xiang's work. Unlike the dominant trend of Chinese writers during the 1920's—who looked to create a New Culture that avoided the pitfalls of both Chinese tradition and Western colonialism—Lin celebrated traditional Confucianism as well as Christianity, and ran afoul of both the KMT and the CCP. He met Pearl S. Buck in Shanghai in 1933, and she introduced him to her publisher Richard Walsh with The John Day Company. In best-selling English-language books such as *My Country and My People* (1935) and *The Importance of Living* (1937) he presented Chinese culture as witty and refined, and as wiser and less neurotic than American materialism. Like Buck, and James C. Yen for that matter, he promoted a universal humanism that drew from both Chinese tradition and Christianity, and the Chinese left attacked him as apolitical and bourgeois.[4] His second book for The John Day Company, after *My*

[3] 《村儿辍学》, *Lun-yu* (論語, *Analects*) 34, (Feb. 1, 1934): 487-490.

[4] Lin also oversaw the compilation of a massive English-Chinese dictionary (completed in 1972), and spent decades trying to perfect a typewriter for Chinese characters, a project that ultimately bankrupted him. Later scholars have generally seen his idealism and his middle-brow style as

Country and My People, was a book of short stories translated from Chinese, including "A Country Boy Quits School," praising it as a document of the MEM and enjoining educational reformers everywhere to read it (123). Along with Lin, Buck and Walsh would meet Yen in 1944 and become key supporters of his plan for an expanded post-war literacy program.

3. Rural Reconstruction for the Chinese Farmer

Lin and Buck's interest in publishing Lao Xiang's fiction in English reflects a larger American interest in, and identification with, the Ding Xian experiment. In 1930, Hoover's Secretary of the Interior, Ray Lyman Wilbur, announced a new campaign to combat illiteracy in the U.S., explaining that it would resemble Yen's project in China. This follows Yen's intention for Ding Xian to be a model demonstrating that the method could be used elsewhere. *The New York Times* followed up Wilbur's announcement with a feature on "Yale's Yen" that was subtitled "His Method of Teaching the Illiterate Masses to Read and Write Serves as a Striking Example for America" (Peffer). Specifically, Wilbur was "copying" Yen's method for studying the local language and creating a textbook based on the most-used words in everyday speech. The *Times* article emphasized Yen's own description of the Ding Xian project as an experiment, in contrast to the sweeping plans of other Chinese reformers: "They aim to build slowly and permanently, and to this end have set up their human laboratory for experiment and study on a

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irrelevant to intellectual history, though there are exceptions. Diran John Sohigian's 1991 dissertation "The Life and Times of Lin Yutang" (Columbia University) was the first such academic study. More recently, see Qian Suqiao, *Liberal Cosmopolitanism: Lin Yutang and Middling Chinese Modernity*. In his *Transpacific Community*, focused on publishing networks, Richard So includes a chapter on Lin that focuses on his collaboration and conflict with Buck.

small scale." These features, which also resemble the experimental farms set up by American agronomists, also make the experiment relevant in the U.S. and beyond.

What distinguished Yen's projects from that of other Chinese reformers was that political and economic planning was secondary to education. Originally focused on literacy exclusively, he only expanded to other areas of rural life after the first few literary campaigns. As in the above anecdote about the gift of 365 francs, Yen explained that he expanded the program as a response to the needs of the people, or more exactly as the response to individuals who tell him their needs directly. In a later speech, he recounted this exchange from the first MEM project in the 1920's:

> There was a farmer who had just learned how to read. One day, he approached me and said: "Teacher, I can read. My neighbor cannot read. But my stomach is just as empty as his stomach." What that simple man said, it seemed to me, was not just a simple remark but a challenge. It made us feel so inadequate. For the first time in Chinese history, we had created a new literature for them. We did something very simple and modest about feeding their empty heads, but did nothing to feed their empty stomachs. (quoted in Mayfield 14-15)

Yen conceives of education first, and other projects for the village are extensions that make that education meaningful and sustainable. This is the opposite of either the agronomy-based studies or the CCP, where the priority is economic power, and education is seen as a necessary means to that end. As I will discuss in detail in chapter four, Maoist discourse of this period often related hunger to spiritual change, but with causality in the opposite direction: Mao and others take physical hunger as a foundation and extend it to a trope of political or spiritual hunger for change. Yen, however, begins with literacy and comes to the question of hunger only afterwards.

Similar to that later Communist discourse, then, Yen also presents learning as a type of food, "feeding their empty heads." Yet physical food will be an extension of the literacy campaign, rather than the other way around.

Central to James Yen's conception of the Chinese countryside is his view of the population as farmers. In the previous chapter we saw that Pearl S. Buck's use of "farmer" to describe the Chinese rural subject is linked to a much different understanding of rural society than the more commonly-used "peasant." Where peasant suggests that rural society has been a system of class-based oppression, under which the population are feudal and backward, the more neutral farmer suggests that they are independent businesspeople not unlike Americans. Writing in 1934, Yen sought to distance rural Chinese specifically from their counterparts in the Soviet Union:

> Unlike the serf-peasant of Imperial Russia or the depressed classes of India, the Chinese farmer is a free being. The lack of a strong central government has fostered his self-reliance and independence. Though poor, he is thrifty and industrious. Though unlettered, he is intelligent and an expert in intensive farming. (3)

A number of early twentieth-century intellectuals had advanced this conception of pre-modern Chinese rural life as somewhat anarchic, above all Liang Shuming, who by this time was collaborating with Yen to coordinate the national Rural Reconstruction network. Some contemporary scholars continue to argue that, until at least the late Qing, the state did not reach into the village, but rather surplus value was extracted and passed on toward the center by a

series of intermediaries including landlords and local gentry.[5] The vast majority of the population thus had no experience of the imperial state as such, nor even a conception of "China" or "the Middle Kingdom" as a unified entity[6]. Likewise, Yen conceived of the political dimension of the Ding Xian experiment as building an original civic consciousness where none existed before. The MEM's focus on a properly-local civic consciousness contrasts sharply with the large-scale models promoted by the two major parties: the Nationalists appealed to an underlying national or racial unity, while the Communists appealed to an even larger international connection. The MEM did not try to mobilize the villagers for a political project conceived in the city, which would make them only an extension of urban power, and for this reason they were criticized by the KMT government as insufficiently focused on nationalization. Instead, the MEM first sought to educate villagers as individual subjects and then encouraged these literate citizens to think in terms of their own self-organization. Only at that point would they be able to interface with outsiders on more equal terms.

Because farmers were conceived of as independent individuals, they were themselves potential teachers. The idea was to make the village self-sufficient. Ding Xian was an

[5] Long-term trends in Chinese economic history are beyond the scope of this dissertation, though we should remember that there was never such a thing as "traditional China," still less "the Asiatic Mode of Production." On the specific point of landlordism, during the Ming dynasty many peasants lost their land as commercialism increased, but this trend was reversed and peasants gained more tenancy rights from the late Ming (late 16th century) through the twentieth century (Richardson 69).

[6] See Dirlik (2015).

"experiment" because it was intended to demonstrate that the village could become self-sufficient with a minimum of resource inputs. While critics attacked them as a tool of the American government, in fact the funds that they received from the Rockefeller foundation all went toward developing the curriculum and teaching materials, with the idea that these could then be adapted and used throughout China at little additional cost (Hayford 162). Virtually all of the teaching itself was done on a volunteer basis, first by intellectuals recruited from Beijing. Once they saw how well the streamlined methods worked, locals who were already literate were able to teach their own classes, spreading literacy throughout the region: "In Ting Hsien [Ding Xian], we conducted only two experiment schools and six demonstration schools for the whole district. But the people of Ting Hsien ran 472 people's schools, that is, one for every village, all supported by themselves." (Yen, quoted in Mayfield 17). Due to Yen's focus on empowering the people of the villages to educate themselves, development theorist James B. Mayfield compares him to the Brazilian advocate of popular education Paolo Friere (xv).

In the Ding Xian project, the three foci of economy, health, and government were based on the foundation of literacy. The school was the center of the entire rural reconstruction in the village, in the way that the peasants' association was the center of the Communist project in the village. Students were first graduated from the program, then given something to read with their new literacy: straightforward articles on simple ways to improve agricultural yields and health, and on news of the world. Alumni of the basic course were furthermore able to learn a simplified accounting system so that they could keep their own accounts. They could also receive further training to become model farmers, growing new crop strains and demonstrating their success. Following the same principle as the junior-teacher-training, these model farmers were able to pass on their new knowledge to others in the village directly, without relying on MEM

volunteers. For Yen, “The experiment is conducted on the principle that the entire village is the school, and the life of the village is *incorporated* (not *imitated*) for the school curriculum and materials” (1934, 10, original emphasis). The programs beyond the basic literacy primer were all practical tutorials, in which the alumni learned to make improvements on their own already-existing plots. Yen uses italics to emphasize that the school does represent the world to the students, but includes it so that they engage with the world directly.

As they learned to read, then, villagers were also introduced to innovations in agriculture and animal husbandry, and to modern health concerns. For example, in an early reading lesson food habits are presented on a continuum of modernity and backwardness. To make the situation easier to understand, the lesson shows a drawing of a man pointing to a clock while sitting at the table to eat. Yen explains that “The story was a health lesson in regularity and moderation in eating, keeping food and dishes clean, eating fresh food and the penalties of violation. All of this was in a catching rhyme, easily remembered” (Yen 1929, 18). Here we see that health is a disciplinary regime. Villagers associate keeping clean with the newfound freedom afforded by the ability to read, and the further improvements to their life promised by economic improvements.

After graduating, new readers were able to read a short newspaper that Yen circulated, modeled on the earlier *Chinese Weekly* that he had produced for the coolie students in France. In addition to introductions to national and world news, the rural paper, titled *The Farmer*, further introduces tips for economy and health. Yen described the paper as

> a combination of American farm journal, popular science paper, current news digest and library of biographies. The Chinese farmer, hero-worshipper as he is,

> finds in this paper stories of Lincoln and pictures of President Coolidge, with his father, in overalls on the farm, alongside tales of the former Emperor. (32)

These stories encouraged farmers to feel their work connected to the great developments and great men in the outside world, namely the U.S. The text extends the Jeffersonian revival in the U.S. at the time to the Chinese, just as Buck would do in the years to come. Yet the Chinese farmer did not read these stories in order to become more like Americans. While Yen downplayed the nationalism of his program when presenting it to an American audience, he did not go so far as presenting the Chinese as proto-Americans, something for which Pearl S. Buck has been criticized. In the Ding Xian curriculum, the farmers learn about the U.S. as an influential country in the world, and indeed as another large agrarian country like China. As described in the quotation, Abraham Lincoln's biography is contextualized by placing it alongside biographies of great emperors.

In late 1933, the MEM gained a new opportunity to realize the principle that "the entire village is the school." Owing to how positively the projects were received, and to the weakness of the government itself, the MEM was given control over the county-level government with the responsibility and power to collect taxes and maintain order, such as by policing the sale of opium. Discipline then comes in the guise of the schoolteacher rather than the army, and while this choice maintained the project's importance as a model, it also made it unsustainable in this particular instance. They did not have a means for violent force, and so had to bend to the will of drug traffickers and warlords. Moreover, poverty actually increased in the years 1931-1933, as did emigration to other regions such as Manchuria. In his biography of Yen, Hayford argues that it is not possible to objectively evaluate the MEM's modernization program because the factors of the world depression, the Japanese invasion, and local wars made for large year-to-year

fluctuations. We might reply that these were the conditions of the time, and thus show that the Ding Xian program was not adequate to China's objective situation, bearing out critics' insistence on the importance of a national government and military. As Hayford sums up, "Even if there had been no Japanese menace, the paradox would have remained: if the MEM relied only on its own reform aura, it was subject to crippling resistance, but if it allied with any of the visible military powers, it was subject to cooptation, veto, and corruption" (179). As Japan gained control over Hebei province, the projects in Ding Xian continued, but Yen moved the headquarters of the MEM south to Changsha, Hunan, and engaged more directly in helping the KMT government work for national resistance. Due to their idealism, the MEM were unable to fully implement their vision. This decision, however, allowed the project to maintain its status as an experiment that could be studied and possibly repeated in more favorable circumstances.

4. Rural Reconstruction and National Resistance in *Quan Village*

Like Yen, many of those involved with Rural Reconstruction turned to mobilizing for national resistance against Japan during the war. This was the period of the popular front alliance between Chinese political groups, including both the KMT and the CCP. Lao Xiang's works from this time became his most well-known, including a modern version of the *Three Character Classic* with a wartime theme. Composed in the thirteenth-century, the *Three Character Classic* is a series of three-character verses that are easy for children to remember. Along with the *Thousand Character Classic*, it had been part of elementary education up until the late nineteenth century. In composing a new version with a wartime theme, Lao Xiang continued the MEM practice of creating educational materials focused on the target audience's most pressing concerns. He also maintained his interest in rural Hebei, where he had grown up and where he had participated in the Ding Xian experiment, and in 1940 published a novella set in the area

during the war, titled *Quan Village*, that reconsidered many of the themes of the MEM, in particular its four-part focus on education, health, agriculture, and civil society.

As we have seen, in "A Country Boy Quits School" the author created a snapshot of one family's experience with a village school to dramatize the problems with rural education that the MEM was attempting to correct. At 180 pages, the more ambitious novella *Quan Village* [*Quan Jia Cun*] (1940) attempts to represent the complexities of village life as a whole by using an ensemble cast of over a dozen major characters who interact with each other in different configurations over the course of a single day. Thus, with reference to Yen and the MEM, the novella provides a valuable point of comparison with the conceptions of rural life proposed by the writers engaged with different political and economic reform projects analyzed in chapters two and four of this dissertation. In chapter two I read two canonical works, Buck's *The Good Earth* and Mao Dun's *Village Trilogy* as in tension with two prominent approaches to village life, that of the transnational network of agricultural modernization, and that of the Communist revolutionaries. Here I will analyze the more obscure *Quan Village* as growing out of but in tension with the MEM, the latter understood as a third approach to rural modernization based on enlightenment through education. Like "A Country Boy Quits School," *Quan Village* was published by Lin Yutang, this time under his imprint Cosmic Wind, which had also published Lao She's *Rickshaw Boy* in 1937. Lin translated *Quan Village*, retitling it *Widow Chuan* [Quan], in 1951 for the John Day Company, seven years after Buck's 1944 book-length interview with James C. Yen. This shows Lin and Buck's continued affinity for the MEM political position at the onset of the Cold War, as an alternative to either the U.S.-aligned KMT or the CCP that now controlled China.

Although *Quan Village* features a war hero as one of its central characters, the war itself is represented as extremely remote from the village, both geographically and from the concerns of the characters. This is because the story, like "A Country Boy Quits School," is once again told from the perspective of the villagers looking out obscurely at the world. They know of the war as something impossibly exotic, only somewhat closer than the scenes of drinking milk and playing tennis in Ah Chuan's textbook. Representing the social life of the village as a whole, the novella has an ensemble cast of characters whose personal dramas intersect with each other only indirectly. The title is a pun on the family name Quan, which also means "whole." *Quan Jia Cun* can be read both as a village that takes its name from the Quan family, but also as "a whole-family village," emphasizing the village as a close-knit clan. I will furthermore read the novel as a portrayal of the village as a "whole," that is as a dynamic system—this system is janus-faced, maintaining a dynamic equilibrium among the villagers and constantly responding to changes from the surrounding region. Nominally set on a single day, the narrative includes many detailed back-stories and digressions, and so it is difficult to summarize as a single narrative. The central characters are Captain Quan, a military pilot and war hero paying a visit to his childhood village; "Hullo" (哈嘍) Quan, a jack-of-all-trades who received his nickname from working on a railroad construction team under an American engineer; Elder Quan, who wields authority as the village elder; Widow Quan, who makes a living performing religious rituals that she does not believe in, and who has equal or greater power than Elder Quan; and Quan Fei, a salt smuggler and former bandit. A dozen other characters also make significant contributions to the various sub-plots,

underscoring the sense that the village as a whole is the protagonist, which is very different from Chinese rural fiction up till this time.[7]

The story opens as Captain Quan rides into the village unannounced on a huge water buffalo, a bizarre sight among the wheat fields of the dry northern village. The Captain has lost one arm and the four fingers of his remaining hand in the war, and now that he is retired he plans to tour the country in the romantic style of an ancient official. They soon bring him to the ancestral temple for a reception and lunch in his honor chaired by Elder Quan, who has been humiliated by the Captain on a previous occasion. Much of the action during the day involves the various doings of Widow Quan and her independent-minded daughter, Dian-dian, and of Hullo Quan, who bustles around solving many small problems, such as tracking down the water buffalo after it runs off.

Two larger problems develop later in the narrative due to the work of Quan Fei, the salt smuggler and local villain. Firstly, he has framed an innocent farmer, Shih San-pao, for possession of illegal salt, and the latter is arrested on this day and tortured by the corrupt authorities who govern from the nearby town. Shih San-pao's son, Little Tiger, is forced to mortgage the family's farm in order to have his father released, though after the old man is brought home he dies the same night. Meanwhile, in a separate scheme, once Quan Fei learns

[7] Communist land-reform fiction of the late 1940's would later take up this attempt to represent a village as a whole, through the use of many minor characters. I discuss Ding Ling's *The Sun Shines over the Sangkang River* in chapter four. Still, land reform fiction, with its teleology toward, well, land reform, is much more dominated by a few central characters and cadres than is the free-wheeling and open-ended *Quan Village*.

that the Captain has arrived at the village, he travels to a nearby village and brings back the Captain's maternal uncle. This uncle had tormented the Captain as a child by not allowing his mother to be buried until the uncle and his family received elaborate sacrifices from the boy and even the whole of Quan village. Quan Fei convinces the uncle that he will gain from the incredible status that the Captain has against all odds attained, but instead he has money stolen from him by the Widow and is almost killed by a mob of villagers for revenge. The novella ends abruptly when, the next morning, the uncle convinces a disgruntled former employee of Elder Quan to kidnap Dian-dian, the Widow's youngest daughter, and carry her off to the nearby village.

In the preface to his translation, Lin Yutang writes that "I regard this story as one of the best creative works of modern Chinese literature, better than Lusin's [Lu Xun's] "'Ah Q'" (4). He was apparently the only one who thought so, as today it is almost completely unknown. Nevertheless, what his superlatives point to is how different the story is from the mainstream of Chinese literature about the countryside. In his overview he emphasizes the amoral character of the villagers:

> It is the presentation of the life and characters in a whole village, on the realistic side as a humorist chooses to see it. Here we have a conglomeration of cheats, gamblers, smugglers, and licentious, unfettered, uneducated, loud-speaking women and girls, very much deglamorized, so to speak. The author shows so much hidden affection for his characters that the story is not even satirical in intent. It is written as an honest and sometimes rollicking piece of human life, with no moral at all. (4)

Lin's calling Lao Xiang a humorist is notable because Lin elsewhere argued that the Western concept of "humor" was unknown in traditional Chinese culture and that he himself tried to introduce it to Chinese readers through his own writings. When Lin says that "the story is not even satirical," this is true in the sense that the individual characters are not satirized. Told in third-person omniscient narration, everyone thinks things through relatively clearly from his or her own perspective, and while they may have different values no one is presented as a fool.

Lao Xiang's humor is apparent from the opening pages, as the Captain arrives on his grandiose water buffalo. Our first view of the village is of a crisis in the fields, in the form of the swarm of locusts. The entire village is out to drive them off with loud sounds in the traditional manner. This is a somewhat standard trope of the difficulty of rural life, and reminiscent of a scene in *The Good Earth* where the family's days-long battle against locusts appears as a kind of biblical plague. Here, however, the farmers all drop what they are doing to see the stranger on his odd animal. When they realize it is Captain Quan returned, they forget all about the locusts, who happily go back to destroying the crops. It is only when Widow Quan sets off firecrackers in her courtyard to conclude an unrelated religious ceremony that the locusts are inadvertently scared away. The locusts first appear as a serious economic concern, but soon turn into a joke as just part of the absurdity of Captain Quan's visit. The episode announces that the novella will be a very different, comical view of village life.

In *Quan Village*, Lao Xiang presents the village as the interaction site of dynamic social forces. The author shows a social-scientific approach with framing statements such as these at the opening of chapter four:

> When a distinguished son of the clan returned to the village, inevitably there was an upset of the delicate balance of forces in the community. People who usually

> lived apart came together; some relatives became more important in their own eyes or in others' eyes. The Hero's very presence in the village meant that certain scheming minds would become active and ready for mischief, although the Hero himself might be entirely unaware of it and sleep through his entire stay. (37-38)

The balance of forces referred to is not a naturalized nor even a traditional cultural balance. It is the currently-accepted compromise of, for example, the Widow's power over the Elder. When the Elder decides not to press the Widow, we learn the back-story that the Elder once tried to take her to court in the nearby town. She contrived to accompany him along with her daughter, and while there she impressed upon him her family connections to clerks in the court system. By making him yield, she gained a hold over him that has endured into the present, but which could nonetheless change. Often when two characters encounter each other in the novel Lao Xiang interpolates this kind of detailed backstory of exactly how they stand in relation to each other. Moreover, this example is typical in that the relationship between the Widow and the Elder involves her relations in town, and indeed their physical movement to the town and back. The village is not a world unto itself, but relations extend out in all directions.

5. The Continuum of Country and City in *Quan Village*

This is a very different conception of rural society from that found in Communist fiction, which relies on a strict differentiation between the country and the city. Such a contradiction is decisive already in the earliest Communist fictional representations of the countryside, like "Water" or "Spring Silkworms," which do not clearly define the role of the Party. The Maoist embrace of the "peasant" as the new revolutionary class on par with "workers," but not overlapping with it, necessitates a clear distinction between these two spaces that arguably did not exist geographically. Moreover, Maoist theory connects distant locations in a very different

way than a simple spatial extension. Instead, as elaborated in the influential essay "On Contradiction" (1937), different political struggles are seen as expressions of the same underlying struggle, just operating at different spatial scales. At the top of the hierarchy, the dominant world-historical contradiction is between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. This expresses itself regionally as the contradiction between the imperialist powers and semi-colonized China. Within China it operates as the contradiction between the colonial port cities and the earth-bound interior, and more generally between the cities and the countryside. At the village level, the contradiction is between the gentry together with large landowners, and the poor peasants who do not own enough land to survive but must sell their labor on others' fields. As all of these scales are linked as expressions of the same central contradiction, land reform in the village is directly linked to global proletarian revolution, and fighting Americans in Korea will become a logical extension of the gains made in the countryside. It also shows what is at stake for urban cadres, tainted by their connection to the city, who are assigned to the villages and must prove their revolutionary enthusiasm. We will explore both of these topics in chapter four.

By contrast, Lao Xiang represents Quan Village as a node in a network. The network of villages including Quan village and the neighboring villages extends out to the regional railroad lines that Hullo Quan worked on, and beyond that to the war against Japan. The fame that Hullo Quan and the Captain enjoy is proportional to how far out into this network they have travelled, and a sense of nationhood is glimpsed only dimly in the impossibly-distant land that the Captain flew over in his plane. The author largely hides the relationship with the rival village during the first half of the novella, and only gradually reveals how important it is during the second half. With this narrative strategy, the reader gradually comes to appreciate how the already-familiar

relations within the village have been partially shaped by past interactions with the other village. Lao Xiang gives a group protagonist that is not a social class but rather the village itself. Although made up of many families, the villagers share the same surname as a marker of their group identity, and although they have their own internal contests for power, they are united against the outside clan. The novella follows Liang Shuming's theory, discussed above, that the clan is the basic unit of Chinese society, and so exacerbating class conflict could only pit people with intimate ties against each other. By foregrounding an inter-village rivalry, then, Lao Xiang explores an antagonism that is absent from Communist fiction and provides a different conception of rural society. In that body of work it would be inconceivable for one clan to be at war with another simply to settle old scores: it could only be the remnant of feudal thinking, the inability of villagers to recognize themselves as a class of peasants. The land reform fiction of the late 1940's generally portrays the village as a self-enclosed class-stratified society that outsiders enter into. This is more or less how Captain Quan arrives in the first chapter, though here it is highly ironic. The Captain's arrival is not a revolution but simply "an upset of the delicate balance of forces in the community," a jostling of the current configuration during which new opportunities arise.

Similarly, the novel also portrays the social issues facing the community as distinguishable yet interrelated with each other, following James Yen's idea of a four-fold approach to community revitalization. The novel portrays problems in the four areas of education, health, economy, and civic consciousness, and shows them to be interrelated. The characters who have the most progressive ideas for the village are the two who have some contact with the international world, Captain Quan and Hullo Quan, but these are not immediately viable as they would depend on a host of other changes as well. Just as social

forces and competing interests are dynamically balanced against each other, so that changes from outside, such as the arrival of the captain and his uncle, shift everyone's relationships slightly, so the four areas of the community depend on each other and one cannot be improved without improving another. For example, health is the most tangential of these four to the larger plot, yet it is the most pressing and terrifying to Captain Quan, who is the only one with any experience of urban modernity and the only one who is worried about health and sanitation. Health is clearly connected to modes of knowledge, as the captain's ideas of sanitation, which he imagines in terms of security, differ sharply from Widow Quan's expertise with herbs, which fits within her general expertise with things related to religion, women, and the night. She administers herbs that help women to abort unwanted pregnancies, but we also learn that one of her five daughters died from a self-administered abortion, suggesting the limits of the herbal method and showing women's health to be precarious. Medicine is represented as a domain in which women are traditionally experts, unlike the male-coded modern discourse on health.

For Captain Quan, health is a modern form of knowledge, but an excess of knowledge that leads to paranoiac fantasies. During the night, the Captain remembers seeing a yellowish deposit in the basin with which he had washed his face, and reflects on where the water must have come from, as there is no clean water supply. He begins to think it through point by point, in a parody of scientific argumentation, imagined through his experience in the military:

> Point One, there had been a big shower. Point Two, puddles had formed in the streets, mixed with all kinds of excrement. Point Three, this water, infested with millions of bacteria, had found its way to a crack and seeped down into the well…. Point six was the big, fatal question, whether he was going to suffer from dysentery and lie in agony for the next six weeks, that is, whether in wiping his

> face, any part of his towel could have touched the mucous membrane of his lips…. By count, there must be thirty million microbes of the most deadly and most virile variety racing at this moment in his stomach—past his duodenum—in his small intestines—the most energetic wriggling ones ahead while the army swarmed behind. This brought up Point Seven, whether there was a good hospital in town. It was certain that the doctors there who had allowed his foreign [dog] Kweifei to die from a mere wound were incompetent. (93)

Captain Quan's thought process is presented comically as his body becomes China, ill-prepared to fend off the invading foreign microbes. It is an open question whether either his body or China can return to a steady state of equilibrium. Clean water is of course a legitimate concern, yet the captain's thoughts are satirized because he has only a deductive argument for why he is doomed, why the hospital, like the nation, is inadequate. Any actual improvements would require first of all the optimism and sincerity of the Ding Xian reformers, through which they could build a comprehensive education and health plan for the village.

Economic problems are also bound up with education, but even more so with civic consciousness. The most tragic event in the story, Shih San-pao's death, intersects with the economy, but is more squarely a problem of governance. The local saying, "'It is better to own a salt shop than be a magistrate,'" refers to how government corruption in the salt trade exceeds even that of the court system (56). Lao Xiang had earlier written a biting non-fiction essay about the government salt monopoly in Hebei, which in practice made it nearly impossible to obtain salt at a reasonable price. After explaining the situation in detail, he satirically argued that the best course for the common people was to develop a new cuisine that did not include this flavor. Some details from the essay reappear in the novella, including this one:

> The land around [Quan Village] was covered with deposits of salt phospahate. In order to make it cultivable, one had to remove the salt deposits, but to do so was immediately to violate the salt law. What was worse was that when an old village woman carried a package of salt on a visit to the neighboring county, she could be charged with 'illicit intercounty traffic.' (58)

They cannot farm because they are forbidden from removing the salt from the fields, so the regulation and monopoly on a food seasoning directly impacts the cultivation of staple foods.

As we would expect given Lao Xiang's participation in the Ding Xian experiment, lack of education and information about the outside world play a role in the tragedy, but not simplistically so. After his father is arrested and beaten, Little Tiger faces a choice between moral obligation, understood by the characters as traditional morality, and economic security. He chooses to mortgage all of the family's property to bail his father out of jail so that he will die in custody, but it is apparent to everyone that, first, the father is about to die that very night anyway, and second, they will not be able to pay the mortgage and will lose their lands. , but he does not give this a second thought as it is his filial duty. Lao Xiang constructs a situation where the reader can identify both choices as unsatisfactory, demonstrating the difficulties that the peasants face. In *Quan Village* the court system and the salt monopoly are in practice a single unit, and a unit that functions through the work of more brazen criminals like Quan Fei. Within this world, and until there can be larger national reforms, the son's choice to mortgage the family property so that his father does not die in jail remains a virtuous act that separates him from selfish characters such as Quan Fei himself. His decision reflects the moral high ground ascribed to rural characters by all writers during this period.

What is unusual about this episode is the response of Hullo Quan, who is the only one able to understand that Quan Fei has orchestrated everything against the family. Outside of the captain, he has the most contact with international world, and correspondingly has more "progressive" ideas than his neighbors. Hullo Quan advises Little Tiger to kill Quan Fei, but he refuses. Hullo Quan then embarks on a long tirade cursing the ignorance, superstition, and timidity of both Little Tiger and all of the backward peasants of the village. This somewhat awkward passage reads as a parody of such attacks on traditional culture and the rural population by certain intellectuals. As described in more detail in chapter two, Chinese (and indeed foreign) writers of the early twentieth century typically saw the peasants as unable to contribute to building a modern nature due to their backwardness and ignorance. As intellectuals came to ascribe more hope to the peasants for the future, fiction of the 1930's often portrays the father character in this traditional, obstinant mold, contrasted with a more progressive son, as in and "Spring Silkworms" (and *The Good Earth*). As Communist fiction develops, the drama will be in the further development of class consciousness, with the Party playing a leading role.[8] In *Quan Village* meanwhile, while Hullo Quan is able to understand all of the details of the situation better than Little Tiger, recognizing that Quan Fei has orchestrated everything, this does not represent a major breakthrough in knowledge. For the entire village already recognizes that the salt monopoly, and the entire apparatus of the town government is an oppressive and unjust force, and the villagers coin new proverbs to describe this situation. Knowing which individual

[8] In chapter four I discuss Ding Ling's 1948 novel *The Sun Shines over the Sangkang River*, which portrays a large group of peasants developing class-consciousness with the help of the Party.

set up this particular incident does not amount to consciousness-raising, but a number of factors need to change in the village and in the town. Little Tiger's choice is at least more rational than Hullo Quan's, which would have only led to Little Tiger himself being arrested. The answer seems to be in empowering the villagers while also advocating for legislative change at the national level, the latter evidenced by the fact that Lao Xiang wrote both a non-fiction article and a novella about the salt monopoly. At the same time the episode demonstrates how difficult comprehensive change in the countryside would be without the means of military force to protect it, as was the case in the Ding Xian experiment itself.

6. Postwar Rural Reconstruction

In 1943 James Yen returned to the U.S. for the first time since 1928, to take part in a Washington-based Chinese Study Group on Postwar Planning. He renewed his ties with the Institute of Pacific Relations and made new connections in hopes of promoting a third way for the postwar Chinese government that was not controlled exclusively by either the KMT or the CCP. Speaking of the several minor, alternative parties in China, he said "they are definitely developing along progressive and liberal lines and are struggling ceaselessly, though against overwhelming odds, to bring about a true modern democracy in China" (quoted in Hayford 196-197). With Richard Walsh, president of the East-West Center (and husband to Pearl S. Buck), Yen formed an American-Chinese Committee of the Mass Education Movement, with an impressive board that included several corporate executives, a congresswoman, Eleanor Roosevelt, and Henry Luce, creator of *Time* magazine and like Buck a child of missionaries to China. Buck's interviews with Yen during this time were published as the book-length *Tell the People: Talks with James Yen About the Mass Education Movement* (1944). He returned to China having secured American funding and partnerships for a new rural education campaign,

but was unable to implement them due to the civil war. Chiang Kaishek and the KMT pressed him to lead a nationalization campaign, but he was unwilling to take a government position under what he considered a purely military, top-down project. Yen later said that compared to Chiang, Mao at least had "some scholarly depth" and a command of classical Chinese literature and history.

After 1949, Yen did not settle in Taiwan lest this reflect badly on those still working on MEM projects in the mainland. Instead he moved to the Philippines and started a Philippine Rural Reconstruction Project in 1953, expanding this in 1960 to the International Institute for Rural Reconstruction (IIRR). The Institute organized local projects throughout Southeast Asia, and later expanded also into Africa and Latin America. During this period, the U.S. and China waged a propaganda war (and an actual war, in Korea) over the best path to rural modernization in the rest of Asia. To counter the Communist redistribution of land, the American model was based on financial and technological transfer to national governments, who then imposed "development" downward onto their populations. By the 1980's many social scientists had accepted that this program was a failure, and that smaller, non-governmental organizations would have to play a larger role in any future (non-communist) development process. It was this that the MEM, and then the IIRR, had been working for all along. As Mayfield, the American political scientist, wrote of his first encounter with Yen in 1977:

> Although I had twenty years experience in Third World development work, Dr. Yen's work in China fixed my imagination, forced me to rethink what I thought rural development was all about, and to acknowledge that what many of us assumed was new, innovative, and modern had in fact been considered and implemented fifty years earlier. (xv)

To a new generation of social engineers—the generation of "small is beautiful," "grassroots," and "bottom-up"—the MEM now appeared as the original NGO. It was implemented in the midst of a civil war and tried to remain independent of either side. How the Chinese civil war was sublated into the Cold War in Asia, such that agricultural modernization became a global ideological competition and James Yen's work continued to represent a Third Force, is the subject of the following chapter.

Chapter 4

Cold War Modernity and its Pessimists:

Nature, Animals, and Emptiness in Eileen Chang's *The Rice-Sprout Song*

This chapter turns from the decades before and during WWII, when the U.S. and China were allies, to the decade following the war, in which they became enemies: from a shared war against Japan to facing each other on the battlefield in Korea. I will consider the extent to which the early Cold War competition between the two was explicitly framed as the bountiful success of one's own rural modernity—a utopian end to hunger—versus the starving failure of the rival. In both literary fields, this period is often approached as the dawn of a new era, and so a firm break with the past: "post-war" or "late-twentieth century American literature" from 1945 on, with no clear end date; and "New China" or "Contemporary [*dangdai*] Chinese literature" from 1949 on, likewise with no clear end date. Yet, this tendency to see a break with the past itself partakes of these countries' modernization discourses. By attending to explicitly politicized literature, we can see that the 1950's mobilized tropes of hunger and famine that were already developed in the 1930's.

Eileen Chang's novel *The Rice-Sprout Song* (1954), written while the author was employed by the US Information Agency (USIA), is an exception to this logic. Previous scholars have shown that it challenges the political use of hunger in Maoist discourse, yet they face several contradictions in arguing its overall political position, since stylistically it does not conform to what "propaganda" is thought to look like. By approaching hunger and rural modernization as central to Cold War discourse, Chang's critique extends to question politicized modernization projects as a whole. In this light the novel takes on a larger, global importance

given that American-led development projects transformed and further integrated the world food system during this period. In examining the novel, I will also argue for a new understanding of its continuities with Chang's earlier fiction.

1. From Allies to Enemies

"Who lost China?" This was the question the American foreign policy establishment asked itself in the early 1950's when faced with a new Cold War in Asia. They asked how an ally of several decades suddenly become an enemy, and who had allowed it to happen. Approaches to this question gradually changed, and by the mid-1970's, following Nixon's trip to China and the end of the Vietnam War, the new consensus was that China "had not been America's to lose or to have in the first place and that the United States could not have changed the course of the Chinese revolution" (179). History had to happen as it did, and the Cold War in Asia was a necessary process of decolonization. Within literary and cultural studies, the critique of Orientalism, an approach that also dates from the late 1970's and originally described formal colonial structures, tends to support this understanding when applied to the U.S.-China relationship. Studies thus tend to reveal long-standing but hidden antagonisms and opposed national interests. This is one reason, incidentally, that a work like *The Rice-Sprout Song*, which is directly, transparently political and therefore leaves little to unearth in the way of submerged, representational politics, is not relevant for this scholarship.

Colleen Lye, for example, argues that the antagonisms that developed during the 1950's prove that Americans' positive representations of the Chinese Communist Party during the 1930's were incorrect and based in Orientalist fantasy (223). The most prominent and positive American representation of the Chinese Communist Party during the 1930's was Edgar Snow's *Red Star Over China* (1937), based on interviews with Mao and other party members. Lye shows

that Snow's sympathetic portrayal of Mao shares strong affinities with the protagonist of Pearl S. Buck's novel *The Good Earth*. She argues that both *The Good Earth* and *Red Star Over China* are Orientalist fantasies of the Chinese as willing colonial subjects, as nearly Americans, if not quite. American foreign policy discussions of the 1950's over "Who Lost China?" then chart the realization that these representations were wrong all along. Lye presents American and Chinese national interests as fundamentally opposed, and the question becomes why Americans could not see this during the 1930's. The answer is that these were colonial fantasies, unmasked by later political realities.

A more complicated and contingent picture emerges from recent foreign policy studies. Historian Hong Zhang suggests that "one may argue that the U.S. government had indeed 'lost China' prior to the Communist takeover, for it had lost the goodwill of an important segment of the Chinese population: politically articulate Chinese youths," who had been generally pro-American through the end of the war (179).[1] Simei Qing goes further, questioning the self-

[1] Zhang argues that the most significant single event that swayed public opinion was the rape of Beijing University student Shen Chong by U.S. Marine Corporal William Gaither Peirson on Christmas Eve, 1946. The Nationalist government tried to censor news of the trial and arrested student protesters, and so the social movement grew both in size and in anti-government with many turning to the Communist side for the first time. Simei Qing argues that the U.S. unwittingly crippled the urban Chinese economy by forcing the Nationalists to accept an unfavorable trade agreement. The Truman administration was baffled when the policy did not revitalize the Chinese economy as intended, since their goal was to win over the population not

assessments of the participants that are largely taken at face value by later commentators, that the U.S.-Chinese Cold War was an inevitable conflict between competing national interests. Qing asks whether

> instead, was the transition from allies to enemies created by the fallout from counterproductive foreign policies on both sides, the bitter fruit of repeated misjudgments of each other's intentions, or the fatal consequences of an illusion—the perceived incompatibility of national interests and principles? (2)

Qing suggests that the 1950's do not represent a new revelation of the truth of national interests, but that the antagonism itself involved a misunderstanding of the other.

Qing argues that Americans especially did not understand Chinese goals and motivations. He suggests that "to discover underlying core policy assumptions, one should not take ideological rhetoric or labels, such as liberal capitalism and Marxist socialism, at face value," as the terms meant quite different things to the two sides (4), a point I will return to in comparing their shared assumptions about modernization. In order to truly understand Cold War relations, Qing argues, historians must first understand "cultural predispositions," or moral classifications that inform public discourse, through the earlier Chinese experience of modernity that led to the positions taken after the end of World War II (5). Qing investigates early-twentieth-century political writings as a background to how Chinese understood such concepts as nationalism and internationalism, and this helps illuminate how these terms were understood differently in the two countries. Such an understanding highlights the contingent, rather than inevitable, character

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alienate them (55-57). It is striking that the cultural historian and the policy historian do not consider or even mention each other's central explanatory mechanism.

of historical developments. Most importantly, while the Truman administration did want to see a democratic China, many Chinese felt that U.S. actions instead supported the quasi-fascist Nationalist Party exclusively, as a counterweight to Soviet influence, ignoring calls for a coalition government including all the major parties. The result was to drive most liberal Chinese to support the Communists as the only viable alternative. Second, through a detailed study of recently declassified documents, he shows that during the crucial period of 1949-1950, between the founding of the P.R.C. and the outbreak of the Korean War, many possibilities remained open. For example, as late as the Spring of 1950 Truman intended to withdraw U.S. troops from Taiwan and allow Chinese unification, and indicated as much publicly, while neither country showed particular interest in Korea. It was internal national political maneuvers between Republicans and Democrats—the McCarthy hearings—that forced the administration to reverse its China policy (95-96).

One important, and utterly contingent episode that helped turn each public's opinion against the other surrounded a White Paper that the U.S. State Department published in August 1949 detailing their years of military and economic support for the Nationalists and attempts to undermine the Communists. Intended to absolve the State Department of responsibility for the Communist victory, the document instead at once incited unprecedented domestic opposition to the government's China policy, and simultaneously bolstered the Communists' case that they were fighting a war of national independence against what Mao Zedong now referred to as "the U.S. colonial government at Nanking" (Mao 1949). In a series of commentaries published by the Party's Xinhua News Agency, Mao analyzed the American strategy as attempts to capture the Chinese with the promise of food:

> The Americans have sprinkled some relief flour in Beiping [Beijing], Tianjin and Shanghai to see who will stoop to pick it up. Like Grand Duke Jiang fishing with an empty hook, those who are willing will jump at the bait. But he who swallows food handed out in contempt will get a bellyache. (1949)

The quotation uses two proverbs, both allusions to classical literature. The first refers to Jiang Ziya, an 11th century BCE general who demonstrated the importance of patience in military strategy by fishing with no bait, letting the fish come to him by their own volition. For Mao, the American flour offers nothing, but some Chinese rush to it anyway, only to be caught and eventually eaten themselves. The last line alludes to a story from the Book of Rites, (collected and organized in the 2nd century BCE) in which a poor man refuses food offered to him condescendingly, suggesting that the noble-minded would rather starve to death than be despised. Mao directs these literary allusions especially to Chinese intellectuals, "so they will come over to the side of the people and not fall into the snares set by imperialism" (Mao 1949)

But this embrace of noble hunger is not strictly metaphorical. Mao notes later in the article that famine is a real problem facing the nation, but one it will have to solve on its own. He also goes on to eulogize Zhu Ziqing, a poet and former literature professor living in poverty, who in 1948 joined a boycott of American-supplied grain in protest against the perceived American tolerance of resurgent militarism in occupied Japan. Zhu had suffered from a gastric illness, which was aggravated by his refusal to eat, and he ultimately died, exhorting his family from his deathbed never to eat American grain (Gilley, 16). The poet thus acted out the literal meaning of the story from the Book of Rites, 2100 years later. In China in the 1940's, Communist writers and political leaders presented the U.S. as an imperial power maintained by food relief, a pressing economic reality understood through classical literary allusion. This episode

demonstrates a point that has run through this dissertation but is elaborated most fully in chapter one, that in U.S.-China relations food production and distribution have been important to U.S.-China economic relations, and that their symbolic meaning has also exceeded that material relationship.

2. Food and Nature in Cold War Discourse

Historian Nick Cullather, in his recent book, *The Hungry World: America's Cold War Battle Against Poverty in Asia*, largely bears out Mao's analysis. Cullather shows that the projects and policies that would eventually be called the green revolution were essentially Cold War programs on the defensive against communist-led peasant rebellions in Asia, above all China. In 1950, the year after the Communist victory, Secretary of State Dean Acheson declared that there was "a developing Asian consciousness, a revulsion against the acceptance of misery and poverty as the normal conditions of life," and that the Chinese Communists had been able to "ride this thing into victory and into power" (quoted in Cullather, 4). Cullather shows that the projects and policies that would eventually be called the green revolution were essentially Cold War programs on the defensive against communist-led peasant rebellions in Asia, above all China. They wanted to outflank these movements by offering rural populations a higher standard of living through technological innovations rather than a change in property relations.

These new state-sponsored initiatives built on work that American academics had been doing in China before before the war, though those non-governmental projects had various aims and were not part of any national strategy teleologically leading to the green revolution. Nevertheless, some Americans had worried about the world-historical destiny of Asia's growing population and appetite since the turn of the century. Envisioning a future global order led by their own nation, American theorists such as Alfred Thayer Mahan wondered in 1900 whether

incorporating the Asian peasantry might prove too difficult for the coming world market (Cullather 3). Chapter One of this dissertation considered how the inevitability of U.S.-China demography was imagined through the aesthetics of naturalism during this period. In subsequent decades the Rockefeller Foundation and other public-private organizations funded agricultural studies and experiments in China to try to stem the problem, and these projects, such as those of Lossing Buck (discussed in Chapter Two) and James C. Yen (Chapter Three) would become important models for post-war export to the rest of Asia and beyond. The term green revolution was coined only in 1968, the year of global revolution and revolt, by William Gaud, the administrator of the US Agency for International Development (USAID), who distinguished it as neither "a violent Red Revolution like that of the Soviets," nor "a White Revolution like that of the Shah of Iran" (quoted in Rieff). It would be the ascension of technical expertise and management, and responded to a problem that was first identified with China.

In the early twentieth century, theories of demography and food production had been mechanical and fatalistic, based in the ideas of Malthus. Following the first world war and the Russian revolution, Herbert Hoover and others used food aid to Europe to try to balance food supply and demand. In this way, "they converted the Bolshevik's violent demands for peace, land, and bread into a neutral statistical language of entitlement," (23) but they saw this as a regional stopgap rather than a long-term global solution. During the Cold War, both the U.S. and China rejected the conception of an ever-increasing population and a limited food supply that had dominated in previous decades. The great innovation claimed by the U.S. was its complex mathematical modeling: "Where scientists had formerly sought to simplify problems by reducing them to one or two variables they now used analytical methods capable of handling dozens, sometimes thousands, of factors" (38). Buoyed by victory in the second world war, Americans

believed that population could now be manipulated through an equally complex strategy that did more than just boost production. Following a 1948 fact-finding mission, State Department representatives argued that "the motivations of peasants could be changed through social engineering. Education, legal rights for women, and especially 'an improvement in agricultural techniques' could produce the instrumental outlook necessary to lower the birth rate" (40). The concept of development, originally conceived of as an impersonal, world-historical force, took on what Cullather calls "a transitive meaning, as a procedure performed by one country upon another" (41). In this way, modernization became crucial to Cold War strategy. American experts now claimed to be able to predict famines in specific locations ahead of time and intervene in order to stop them.

In China, meanwhile, the Party leadership questioned ideas of global scarcity for a different reason. Citing Marx's criticisms of Malthus's methods and conclusions, they rejected any form of population control[2]. Mao especially sought to turn China's large population from a liability into a strength, believing that a sufficiently large population could never be conquered by an invading army or even by atomic weapons. Enlarging the population went hand in hand with the utopian drive to overcome false limitations on agricultural and labor productivity, as exemplified by the Great Leap Forward. Eating was a common trope also in anti-American propaganda. In casting the U.S. as the colonial aggressor in Korea, for example, it was often represented as a wolf attempting to devour the innocent Asian peoples. While the army feasted

[2] Birth control was openly advocated by certain factions during the 1956 Hundred Flowers campaign, when criticisms of Party policy were briefly allowed, before the Anti-Rightist campaign of the following year (Meisner 168).

abroad, working Americans at home did not have enough to eat: one widely-circulated propaganda poster depicted, among other evils of the capitalist system, poor American children eating out of a garbage can in an urban alley (Zhang 117). Meanwhile, as we have already seen, solving the history of cyclical Chinese famines was an explicit goal of the Party. This was pursued through both land reform and the modernization and rationalization of rural production. I will discuss the central role of food and hunger in Maoist domestic discourse in a later section, including both as a metaphor of revolution and as a target of utopian experiments. Here we can note that once something of the famine caused by the Great Leap Forward came to be known outside China in the early 1960's, the U.S. presented it as definitive proof of its agricultural superiority. Kennedy claimed agriculture to be "the weakest link in communist economies everywhere" and an administration official declared that "wherever Communism goes, hunger follows"[3] (quoted in Cullather 156, 157).

By understanding the green revolution as a Cold War phenomenon, we can see its implementation as explicitly political and how it relates to the rival Chinese system. Environmentalists have long criticized the effects of the U.S.-led green revolution, such as monocultures, corporate monopolies, and neo-colonialism, yet often think of these as mistakes or short-sidedness. We would do better to think of them as the goals of the system in countering Communist land policies in Asia, and likewise to understand the record of disastrous Chinese Communist environmental policies in the same shared Cold War context of development. The

[3] A review of Cullather's book by David Rieff in *The Nation* magazine wishfully misquotes this line as "wherever hunger goes, communism follows." The formulation appears to be original to his article.

dynamics portrayed in *The Rice-Sprout Song* give us great insight into the ideology of the developmental regime during the socialist period and particularly its idea of nature, which remains relatively undertheorized. Commentators note that the novel, first published in 1954, uncannily predicts the dynamics underlying the Great Famine of 1958-1961. This began as the purest expression of Maoist utopianism, called the Great Leap Forward, when the whole country was mobilized to work day and night to drastically increase production. Among many other counterproductive schemes crops were planted too close together in defiance of natural limits. The combination of these practices, a prolonged drought, the sudden loss of Soviet aid, and an overzealous government collection of grain led to the worst famine in China's history, in which between 10 and 30 million people died.

In criticizing these policies it goes without saying that we should not imagine them as the reversal of a traditional harmony. Historian Judith Shapiro reminds us that ecological destruction is not particularly modern:

> China's efforts to reshape lands and waters, open up forests, and feed a growing population extend into prerecorded time. A pattern of 'exhausting the earth' through deforestation, erosion, siltation, desertification, land reclamations, habitat loss, and human-caused extinctions has been noted for centuries" (7)

Thus the tendency to see the twentieth century as a firm break with tradition is misguided. Even the top-down ecological transformations most associated with state socialism have their precedent in imperial times, including "state-sponsored resettlements and waterworks projects, extensive and excessive construction of dikes for land reclamation, political campaigns to change agricultural practices, and environmentally destructive land conversions in response to population shifts" (7). These practices, then, appear throughout Chinese history during periods

when a strong central state can effect them, resilient throughout such otherwise diverse regimes as the imperial dynasties, the Mao period of high socialism, and the Reform period from the 1980s to the present.

Still, Maoist discourse gave this management a forcefulness and zeal that was unprecedented in imperial times. Historians have argued that the Chinese revolution differs from its Russian precursor due to its fundamental militarism. For twenty years before coming to power, the Communist organization existed less as a political party than as an army perpetually at war.[4] The Long March and the Yen'an period not only shaped the revolutionaries themselves, but became the guiding mythology for later generations as well. The revolution was a struggle, a war against the human enemies of Japanese colonialism, Euro-American imperialism, traditional feudalism, comprador capitalism, and Soviet revisionism, but it was also a war against less anthropomorphic enemies such as hunger and, Shapiro suggests, nature itself. In the war against nature, as against the other enemies, the goal was nothing short of total victory. Shapiro sums up different historical attitudes toward nature through three set phrases:

> Traditional China is associated with *Tian Ren Heyi* (Harmony between the Heavens and Humankind); this core apothegm yielded in the Mao era to *Ren Ding Sheng Tian* (Man Must Conquer Nature). In reform-era China, both have been largely supplanted by the popular saying, *Yiqie Xiang Qian Kan* (Look Toward

[4] For extended comparisons of how this fact was instrumental in the differences between how the Chinese and Soviets implemented state communism, see Meisner's *Mao's China and After* and, more recently, Perry Anderson's "Two Revolutions."

> Money in Everything), as commercialization and the market have become predominant. (10)

Shapiro's analysis is helpful in understanding the connection between Party environmental policies and Maoist philosophy as a whole, and allows us to appreciate the importance of metaphor in developing and fostering the attitude of "conquest" toward nature.

For Shapiro notes that the preeminent statement of Maoist voluntarism was in his multiple retellings of a parable, "The Foolish Old Man who Removed the Mountains" [*Yugong Yi Shan*]. In the parable, an old man in northern China lives in a house facing south, where his view is obstructed by two mountains. The foolish man decides to level the mountains, and begins to carry the rock away bucket by bucket. When he is laughed at by a neighbor, the old man replies that his family will multiply generation after generation, and eventually the work of all of them will clear away the mountains. As interpreted by Mao in a 1945 speech, the story illustrates that if people work together and believe in their cause, they can overcome any obstacle, even the seemingly unimaginable. The keys are shifting the imagination to collective effort, focusing on long term gains over short-term hardships, and, relatedly, minimizing one's individual mortality in favor of the continuity of the nation. However, the mobilizing power of this text during the Great Leap Forward (1958-1961) and the Cultural Revolution shows certain interpretative shifts. The 1945 speech authorizes a particular metaphorical interpretation of the two mountains: "Today, two big mountains lie like a dead weight on the Chinese people. One is imperialism, the other is feudalism. The Chinese Communist Party has long made up its mind to dig them up" (Mao 1945). At this point, Mao does not want to move actual mountains; fifteen years later, however, the metaphor has been lost and *Yugong Yi Shan* involves carrying actual rocks in actual buckets as the people are exhorted to transform mountains into terraced farmland. Not just

mountains, but every conceivable natural phenomenon was targeted for transformation into farmland, including damming rivers, reclaiming land from lakes by filling them with mud, cultivating wastelands and deserts, and even cutting through layers of ice to plant crops on frozen mountain peaks. One way to read this shift in the old man's target is as the literalization of a metaphor, the utopian impulse to take one's dreams for reality.

But another way to interpret the change is as a shift in the meaning of nature. In the earlier period, the obstacles facing the party were human forces, imperialism and feudalism. But by the mid-1950's, both of these have been overcome: officially, feudalism has been abolished through land reform, and imperialism has been checked by fighting the mighty U.S. to a standstill in Korea. The main focus by this point is on increasing production, on extracting a larger surplus from the rural population in the interest of national industrialization. I would argue that it is because the party-state had been organized and trained as an army that it approached agriculture as a military campaign. The enemy rising up before them was nature itself, the vast expanses of water and barren land that refused to produce crops. Such land could be defeated, beaten into productive submission, through belief and hard work, by the hand of the people. This also explains why the immense number of deaths during the great famine resulted in only the mildest restraint of Mao and his group. If all of China constituted an army engaged in a war against nature, then 30 million casualties out of a 660 million-person army is not a significant loss. The Great Leap was one battle in an ongoing war—after losing this battle the general had some of his power temporarily removed, but there was no reason to surrender the war.

While the U.S. and Chinese goals in land policy in Asia were very different, they share the sense of the post-WWII era as a continuation of the wartime mentality developed over the previous years. The U.S. believed it could reshape populations and food systems on a global

scale, while China believed revolutionary subjectivity could remake the objective world. At the most basic level, what they share is a faith in development. As Arif Dirlik observed in 1991:

> an unwavering commitment to modernism (a unilinear view of history and its material basis in industrial and technological progress), which is characteristic of mainstream Marxism and most certainly of existing socialist states, makes for a blindness to contemporary questions related to ecology, community, and alienation, which may no longer be blamed simply on capitalism, but are products of a modern culture of which Marxism partakes. (9)

From this perspective, capitalism and state socialism are but two variations of an enforced technological progress, both of which rely on extracting surplus value from the countryside for urban capital projects. It is this deep commitment to the Enlightenment ideals of technological and ideological progress that Eileen Chang challenges in her American-Chinese political novel *The Rice-Sprout Song*.

3. Reading *The Rice-Sprout Song* Through Chang's Early Fiction

Eileen Chang wrote *The Rice Sprout Song* while working for the United States Information Agency (USIA), and it depicts the failure of the Communist land reform movement, culminating in famine and a peasant revolt against the local Party office. The USIA[5] was the overarching organization that coordinated ideological warfare for the US from 1953 to the end of the Cold War. "Information" was chosen as a more neutral term than "propaganda," which the

[5] The USIA was also sometimes referred to as the US Information Service (USIS) when speaking of its international programs. This is distinct from the original organization with that name established by Roosevelt to popularize the New Deal (Cull 11).

public associated with Nazi Germany. The concept of strategic information included both mass media broadcasts and U.S. investment in international education begun earlier in the century.[6] Following the war information was being disseminated by various redundant and competing government agencies that were reorganized multiple times during the Truman administration (Cull 80). Eisenhower inaugurated the USIA on August 1, 1953 to unify these various programs, including the Voice of America radio and television broadcasts, in line with broader National Security Council. The Hong Kong office that recruited Eileen Chang when she arrived in the territory had already been operating before this reorganization. Following the success of its Radio Free Europe program, the CIA had launched Radio Free Asia aimed at China in 1951, but ended the program in 1953 as there were too few radios among the Chinese public to receive it (59). Moreover, cultural work, such as the translations Chang worked on, was particularly important in Asia due to a lack of the embedded agents and local underground network operative in Eastern Europe (So 726).

Despite the author's importance in literary history, Chang's novel is not widely read, as it presents several contradictions for literary critics. The largest contradiction is language, since this is the basic organizing principle of literary studies. Chang is one of the most highly-regarded twentieth century Chinese writers, but the novel was written in English in British Hong Kong for an American audience. She had grown up in Shanghai, studying English from a very young age, and planned to attend college in England. Unable to travel to Europe due to the war, she settled for colonial Hong Kong, where her first published works were in English. With the Japanese

[6] I consider early-twentieth-century educational networks between the U.S. and China in more detail in chapter two.

occupation she was forced to return to Shanghai, where she began publishing in Chinese and became an overnight sensation at the age of 21. The Communist victory placed her in a difficult political position and she fled back to Hong Kong in 1952. There she worked as a translator for the USIA and wrote two novels, including *The Rice-Sprout Song*. While Chang herself immediately translated it into Chinese, it still fits awkwardly into either Chinese or Sinophone literary studies. At the same time, although the novel was written for an American audience, and she soon moved to the US and lived there for the final forty years of her life, still it is not often considered American literature. Because she was already a major writer in China, she fits awkwardly into the category of Asian American literary studies, which has historically focused on Anglophone writings by second- and third-generation Americans highlighting ethnic identity. *The Rice-Sprout Song* has in this way fallen into the same gap as *The Good Earth* in the American academy: read by both Chinese and American literary publics but neglected by both scholarly fields. Both authors lived their later lives in the U.S. (and never again visited either China or Taiwan), but continued to write exclusively about Asia.[7] Of course the comparison only goes so far, as although both wrote for a popular audience their literary reputations are poles apart. Furthermore, in the last decade Asian American Studies has expanded to include first-generation, transnational, and non-Anglophone writers, and Chang has begun to be considered in this light.

[7] In fact Buck did publish three novels set in the U.S., but under a pseudonym. The Pearl S. Buck brand was reserved for Asian content. Chang returned often to British Hong Kong and during the 1960's wrote a series of screenplays for successful film comedies produced there.

While the production of *The Rice-Sprout Song* muddles disciplinary fields, its content furthermore troubles the standard view of the author herself. Readers of the 1940's Chinese-language fiction that made her famous have always seen her as a much-needed alternative to the politicization that dominated twentieth century Chinese literature. From the 1910's through the 1980's, literary debate and discussion was dominated by the questions of "national salvation" and "constructing New China": H.T. Hsia dubbed this inescapable tendency "the obsession with China." Ironically, the one "respite" from national politics in literature was during the Japanese occupation of Shanghai, when political writing was suppressed and the previous generation of authors fled to the Nationalist capital at Chongqing or the Communist base at Yen'an.[8] Returning to Shanghai in 1942, Chang wrote about urban life in modern China, especially women's experience, in a direct and unsentimental way, with a style that is carefully crafted but accessible to a wide audience. This is why it could flourish in occupied Shanghai, and also why she was in a difficult position once the Communists came to power in 1949. Shu-mei Shih argues that her popular style, drawing on older conventions, did fit with a call at the time to popularize Chinese literature in all forms as a show of national solidarity: "Against such a backdrop, Zhang's stories would not have seemed an anomaly, even though in content they seem to have nothing to do with national salvation" (381). Nevertheless her writing was banned on the mainland, but was rediscovered and celebrated in Taiwan in the 1960's and eventually also in the PRC in the 1980's

[8] This is not to say that no one wrote about anything else, but it remained the cultural dominant. Important exceptions included the modernists who published experimental poetics in Shanghai during the 1930's—but most of these writers also had prior political commitments and could not publish during the occupation, and in certain cases were even executed (Shih, 379-380).

once cultural restrictions were loosened. Thus the very existence of *The Rice-Sprout Song*—a propagandistic work engaging the central national concerns of Communist fiction, peasant life and land reform—seems to unravel the basic identity of Eileen Chang as the urban, apolitical, minor writer par excellence.

Here I will argue instead for the continuities between *The Rice-Sprout Song* and Chang's 1940's Chinese-language fiction. One motivation for doing so might be to establish that some of the subtlety of the earlier work persists in the later work, but this point has already been made by David Der-Wei Wang, Xiaojue Wang, Richard So, and others.[9] Instead I want to show that the thematic concerns of the later novel—the delusory nature of ideology, contrasted with the lived bodily experience of hunger—are already explored in the earlier fiction, namely in the short story "Sealed Off" (1943). What links these two works is that they both show the minutia of people's day-to-day lives under terrifying, life-threatening circumstances. Critics see *The Rice-Sprout Song* as a departure for Chang because they associate her early work with middle-class urban life, but this neglects the fact that she was a wartime writer. In connecting these two works, I continue this chapter's larger argument that the late 1940's do not mark a firm cultural break, but that important themes continue even as they are transformed in new contexts.

"Sealed Off" takes place on a Shanghai tram when a Japanese air raid stops traffic on the street. As the sidewalks empty of pedestrians seeking shelter, the passengers remain on the tram. A man and a woman strike up a romance that exists for this moment in time, but then suddenly

[9] Xiaojue Wang in particular argues that a subtler understanding of her career shows it to be a series of multiple unstable identities, and her signature forms are in fact translation and rewriting across genres (295).

ends when the air raid is over and they go back to their real lives. Lu Zongzhen, a businessman, only begins flirting with Wu Cuiyuan because he sees a hated relative on the tram and thinks this will keep him from approaching. As he keeps talking, however, he becomes genuinely attracted, pours out his heart, and ultimately proposes that she become his second wife. Wu Cuiyuan, an English professor, likewise looks down on Zongzhen, but for that very reason warms to him. In the first place it would annoy her parents, and in the second, even as a professor she gets no respect in society as a woman and will have to settle for a drab and conventional married life. Zongzhen seems just the drab and conventional man for the job, and she becomes wrapped up to the point of tears when she worries he does not really love her.

When the air raid is over, and the tram starts up again, what appeared as reality begins to be known as a construction in the mind. Passing a foreign couple on the street, "Cuiyuan's eyes saw them and they lived, lived for that one moment. The tram clanked onward, and one by one they died away" (250). They are phenomena that arise in her experience and pass away without self-essence, like the relationship she has just experienced: "He had gone. To her, it was as if he were already dead… If he telephoned her… [her voice] would be filled with emotion for him, a man who had died and come back to life again" (250). Zongzhen returns to his seat on the other side of the tram, the passing fantasy over. Cuiyuan is frustrated, and the narrator closes by saying that "everything that had happened while the city was sealed off was a nonoccurance. The whole city of Shanghai had dozed off and dreamed an unreasonable dream" (251). This is an impossible situation. Yet the story does not contrast this dream to the clarity of everyday real life. On the contrary, we get the sense that characters' lives are made up of a succession of such events and situations. They play out like a series of dreams occurring one after the other during a single night. Chang is not exposing the truth of how Zongzhen does not really love Cuiyuan, but rather

the psychological processes whereby both become caught up in the imaginary affair, and how these miscommunications are the norm of personal interactions. This, I will argue, is how Chang represents the miscommunications and in the village in *The Rice-Sprout Song*, as well as how Communist ideology itself circulates and is taken up by individual villagers. The crucial point is that, unlike Pearl S. Buck or the trend of leftist writers considered in chapter two, she portrays the difficulties of peasant consciousness as more or less the same as the difficulties of urban middle class consciousness in her earlier writing. All of these characters—man and woman, urban and rural, Party and peasant—live out compelling stories in their minds and internalize social fantasies.

Furthermore, Chang was already beginning to explore the theme of hunger in "Sealed Off," specifically the relationship between and it is possible to take the later novel as a fuller elaboration of this view. In the story, Zongzhen worries that they might be stuck on the tram through the dinner hour, but luckily he is carrying steamed buns, bundled in newspaper, home to his wife. He notices that a bun has stuck to the paper:

> the ink had transferred to the bun, and the writing was in reverse, as in a mirror. He pored over the words till he could make them out: 'Obituaries… Positions Wanted… Stock Market Developments… Now Playing…'—all normal, useful expressions, though funny, somehow, seen on a bun. Eating, it seems, is serious business; it turns everything else, by way of contrast, into a joke. (239)

Seen through the lens of hunger and food, the everyday concerns of work, finance, entertainment, and even others' deaths, appear as a mirror world. And yet its empty status as a joke does not make the text any less compelling for people. On the contrary, there is a voracious appetite for this surface of written words to keep up the pretenses of daily life: they are

distractions from the truth of the air raid, that death could arrive at any moment. While Zongzhen reads his "bun-print," as the narrator calls it,

> People who had newspapers read newspapers; those who didn't have newspapers read receipts, or rules and regulations, or business cards. People who were stuck without a single scrap of printed matter read shop signs along the street. They simply had to fill this terrifying emptiness—otherwise, their brains might start working. (239)

Emptiness in the face of death is the true condition of life, from which the proliferation of writing in the city serves as a distraction. Compared with the underlying reality of hunger, the seemingly important news of the world is faint and illusory. Yet people go on consuming as much text as they can, even shop signs on the street if there is nothing else, to distract themselves from the emptiness and fragility of life.

This contrast between text as fantasy, as libidinal investment, and the bodily experience of hunger, will be taken up in much more depth in *The Rice-Sprout Song*. Because the novel portrays a disaster, it will also be helpful to keep in mind that Chang had future calamities on her mind often in Shanghai, even. In a preface she wrote in 1947 for a collection of her short stories, she remarked that she wanted to enjoy her success at a young age, since there was little time.

> Even if I could wait, the age itself is in a hurry—already collapsing, with a greater collapse to come. One day our civilization, regardless of whether it is refined or pretentious, will all become the past. If the word I use most is "desolate," that is because the background to my thoughts includes this disconcerting menace. (my translation)

These lines are quoted often by critics, and sometimes taken as a kind of motto for Chang's aesthetics of desolation. What I want to point out is her sense of history, how profoundly she rejects a narrative of history as progress, in favor of decadence. Written as World War II transitioned to the Chinese Civil War, which would in turn expand to the Cold War throughout Asia, these are the words of the writer who predicted the Great Famine. She views her world from the perspective of it having already ended, which perhaps resonates with our era, where the same modernization projects have finally brought about climate change on a global scale. I believe that this sense of impending civilizational collapse is helpful in understanding *The Rice-Sprout Song* as an ecological text, rather than as embracing one side of the Cold War against the other.

4. *The Rice Sprout Song* and the Legacy of Propaganda Literature

The Rice Sprout Song is set in a small village in South China in the early 1950's. The protagonist, Moon Scent, has been working as a maid in Shanghai for three years, but, having heard that the recent land reform movement has increased the wealth of peasant families, she is finally returning to the village. When she arrives, however, she finds that harvests have not been good, and everyone is subsisting on rice gruel. Yet no one will admit how bad things are, for fear of being overheard and reported to the local cadres for not showing the proper revolutionary optimism. Adding insult to injury, the villagers must repeatedly rehearse a "folk dance," the titular rice-sprout song, that the cadres have introduced to them. The practical Moon Scent tries to protect the family's store of rice and the money she has brought back from the city, but her husband, Gold Root, often wants to honor social customs by eating better meals on certain occasions, and giving gifts to his recently-married sister. Scarcity ultimately forces the villagers

to choose between the competing interests of self-preservation, family and social expectations, and government taxes.

While the peasants now own their own pieces of land, and so rents have been abolished, these have been replaced by a single tax collected by the local government. Comrade Wong, the local cadre, comes from a peasant family and sees through the ruses that the villagers use to try to avoid the tax. Meanwhile an urban intellectual, Ku, comes to the village to find inspiring material for a film script he is writing about the countryside after the revolution. Finding famine instead, he eventually invents a story about constructing a dam on the local river, which would serve no purpose in reality. As the winter drags on, Wong forces the villagers to contribute to a New Year fund for families with soldiers in the army. On the day the materials are collected, a riot breaks out as villagers try to reclaim their grain from the government storehouse. Several villagers are shot, including Gold Root, and Wong declares that the riot was the work of counterrevolutionary agitators. The next morning, after Gold Root dies of his injuries, Moon Scent sets fire to the storehouse, destroying the grain, and herself dies in the fire. Ku incorporates the fire as the climax to his film: he makes it the work of a former landlord collaborating with the Nationalists, though in the film only a couple bags of rice actually catch fire before the People's army heroically saves the rest. The novel ends ironically with the villagers lethargically performing the folk dance near Moon Scent's unmarked grave.

Critics have focused much of their efforts on debating whether the novel is political propaganda or not, both in terms of historical investigation into the USIA's role in its production, and in interpretive work analyzing its political alignment. Perry Link points out that in the 1960's and 1970's, when not much detail was known in the U.S. about conditions in Mao's China, many

academics were sympathetic to the regime and therefore skeptical of Chang's novel.[10] In English-language China Studies, it is still taken for granted that *The Rice-Sprout Song* was "commissioned" by the USIA, but most scholars who do read it argue that it transcends propaganda, or otherwise should not be thought of as propaganda. In the more active Chinese-language "Eileen Chang studies" [*zhang ailing xue*], however, this point is hotly contested. Roland Soong, the executor of Chang's estate, using her papers argues that the three people in the best position to know whether it was solicited by the USIA—Chang herself; McCarthy, her handler at the USIA; and Stephen Soong, the head of the translation department where she worked and later her close friend—all give the same account, that Chang worked on it in secret and only presented it to the other two when a full draft was complete (Soong, "Eileen Chang"). Indeed she maintained that she had already worked out the main ideas before even leaving China. This is in contrast to a reported conversation where she complained about having taken over what became *Naked Earth* as a work-in-progress begun by another author, and that she was unable to change major elements of the plot.[11] Rather than Chang's genius exceeding the "constraints" of her position at the USIA, from this perspective it appears that she saw the agency as a good fit for her work, and correctly identified McCarthy, who arranged her deal with

[10] "In graduate school I did not take Chang's *Naked Earth*… and its sister novel, *The Rice-Sprout Song* […] very seriously. People said the works had an anti-Communist bias. How silly." Link, "Mao's China".

[11] A mistaken reference to this conversation appears to be the origin of the idea that both novels were commissioned (Soong, "Mistake").

Scribners, as a good contact for breaking into the American book market.[12] In trying to defend Chang's work from Cold War influence, critics belie a bias that good art must not be politically motivated.

The novel takes propaganda as a central theme. Moon Scent has only left Shanghai because her employers kept telling her how great things were in the countryside, but it turns out they wanted her to quit because they were constrained from firing her under the new labor laws. The character of Ku introduces more complexity into the question of propaganda, for in one sense he is the villain, and most symptomatic of what is wrong with the current regime. Faced with the reality of famine, he schemes on how to cover it up, and this makes him the true enemy of the villagers. He cannot even put up with the conditions under which they live, but makes trips to town to buy food which he eats in his room in secret while the others go hungry. In fact he understands that he fits the stereotype of the urban intellectual who cannot adapt to the rough, pure life of the countryside. More than just a source of embarrassment for him, this is a serious political liability. In Mao's highly influential 1942 *Talks on Art and Literature*, urban writers are tainted by the history of colonialism and capitalism in Shanghai's treaty ports, and their only option in the new society is to remake themselves in the image of the peasants. Ku knows that other urban writers have bragged of gaining weight on similar trips to the countryside, demonstrating their fitness for rural life. Thus he worries that even returning to the city thinner

[12] Because the American publisher took much longer to bring out their books than the Hong Kong publisher, the Chinese translation actually appeared in print first, in 1954 (Soong, "Mistake"). This is apparently why *The Rice-Sprout Song* is variously dated as 1954 or 1955 in different secondary works.

than when he left will be interpreted as a failure to partake in the revolutionary energy, a charge that could be disastrous for himself and his family. Even his secretive eating has both a physical and a political motivation. In a second sense, then, Ku is another victim of the regime. His propagandistic script is only a more elaborate version of the lies about the good harvest that the villagers repeat to each other for fear of being overheard. No less than the peasants', his own and his family's welfare depend on his appearing revolutionary rather than counterrevolutionary. He performs the role of revolutionary writer just as they perform the roles of liberated, powerful peasants.

Many elements of the plot are themselves adaptations and reimaginings of Communist propaganda works, both literary and journalistic. She wrote in the afterword to the Chinese edition that the novel's dramatic conclusion was inspired by two Communist propaganda works in particular. The first was the published report of a cadre confessing to his failures during the land reform movement, which led to a riot by the peasants in his village. The second was a film portraying Nationalist spies who burn down a barn to sabotage land reform efforts (Wang, "Introduction" xxii), similar to the film Ku ends up writing. Chang reimagines what might have actually happened in these cases. In one sense she undoes Ku's work, but in another sense she is simply passing the same plot structure back and forth between left and right. Xiaojue Wang writes that in Hong Kong during this period there was considerable and surprising overlap between intellectuals who supported and opposed the PRC: "Some writers worked for both camps and were friends in their personal lives" (264). While this speaks to the looseness of these writers' political commitments, it also helps us see their work as a single body of writing produced in a particular time and place. This is in addition to the general similarity between the two Cold War antagonists in their commitments to nationalism and modernization.

The novel introduces its theme of the interchangeability between progressive political ideologies already in the first chapter, at Gold Root's sister's wedding. While trying to impress the cadre who is in attendance, Big Aunt

> mixed up kunch'antang, communists, with Kêmingtang, revolutionists, which only meant the early revolutionaries who had overthrown the Manchu dynasty back when Big Aunt was a young girl. So she persisted in referring to the Communists as Kêmingtang, and sometimes even as Kuomintang, Nationalists… But it was a pardonable mistake at her age, and on the whole she impressed Comrade Fei as being a remarkably progressive old woman. (15)

The Nationalists are the allies of the U.S., and so are the side that Chang is supposedly writing for. Chang suggests the underlying unity of the three groups, for while confusing the three names is humorous, the Communists and Nationalists did both develop out of the revolutionists of the previous generation. Moreover Comrade Fei is not bothered by this, since what matters in governing the peasants is that they are "progressive," as he puts it, supportive of the modernizing force shared by all three. Chang presents anti-communist characters even more ambiguously in the follow-up *Naked Earth*, and for this reason it could not even pass censorship to be published in Taiwan, let alone carry a successful propaganda message. Chang expressed frustration that the only authors granted credibility were former socialists who had become disillusioned with the regime (X. Wang 262).

On this point I have to disagree with Richard So's recent argument that the novel is ultimately about the successful spread of knowledge about the famine. Interested to develop a theory of literature as information warfare, So devotes much of his essay to the fascinating figure of Wilbur Schramm, former professor of English who helped found the Iowa writers' workshop

and later worked for the USIA, promoting literature as a weapon against international communism. Turning to *The Rice Sprout Song* as a "case study," he argues that it represents a new mode of information warfare in the form of literature. This is a curious claim, on two levels. First, Chinese literature had been straightforwardly used for developing and disseminating political positions for at least four decades—as alluded to above, apolitical literature was the exception, at least among "serious" writers. It was rather the USIA's statistical methods, its use of *nonfiction*, that was new, supplementing the longstanding instrumentalization of fiction. This is a corollary to my argument in the opening section of this chapter, that the U.S. promoted technical development in agricultural methods as a rational, scientific, evidence-based alternative to the supposedly romantic and ideological communist plan for reforming property relations.

Second, So rightly notes that characters are not able to communicate with each other effectively: they are often guarded in what they will say to each other, and often also misunderstand each other. He argues, however, that they ultimately overcome this block and come to political consciousness, and moreover that this is what is Chang's innovation: "The text carefully describes the process by which the peasants are denied information about the famine. Their slow realization builds to a panic that culminates in the novel's climax: the peasants' revolt against the state" (740). What So describes here is actually the plot structure of the typical Chinese political novel, as I will discuss below, and if anything is innovative about *The Rice-Sprout Song* it is the way that it resists such a plot of realization and enlightenment. So goes on to argue that Chang had always been interested in the spread of information, citing an essay from her collection *Written on Water* that features a radio and a phonograph. Thus he concludes:

> The novel itself acts as a media device to supplement the limits of USIA information strategies. Chang wrote *The Rice Sprout Song* to capture and encode

> "famine" as a lived, affective reality rather than a mere statistic. The lesson of 1940s Shanghai was that any medium, even a novel, could be used both to embody and to convey information. (740)

In other words, it was Chang's wartime, apolitical literature that developed the paradigm of information warfare and not, say, the hundreds of committed political writers that preceded her. My view of the novel, and of Cold War ideological warfare, is exactly the opposite: just as the U.S. interest in preventing Asian famine was a defensive measure against the spread of communism, so its information warfare was an attempt to learn from and catch up with the communist propaganda that had been honed over several decades.

Chang uses many tropes of leftist famine narratives and land reform fiction, placing the party in the role of the landlords squeezing the peasants, but at the same time subverts these conventions themselves. The novel departs from this tradition above all by not depicting the coming-to-consciousness of the peasants. In Chinese political fiction the revolt would be the climax and centerpiece of the narrative. Ding Ling's early short story "Water" (1931), for example, depicts just such a group of famine-struck villagers who rally to storm the grain stores protected by the rich and powerful. In *The Rice-Sprout Song*, however, Chang does not even narrate the revolt. It is only described off-stage: first it is related by two characters who witnessed it and have run home to tell their families. Then we see the inside of the party headquarters, where Wong and Ku lament what has happened. Miscommunication and duplicity endure to the end, as Moon Scent's in-laws refuse to help her by pretending not to understand her. Setting fire to the barn is likewise not depicted: the novel cuts from Moon Scent in the forest at night wondering what to do, to the next morning when soldiers are mobilizing the villagers to put out a fire. We never see anyone formulating subversive plans, but instead everyone is just

trying to get by. The protagonist's rebellion is an individual plan and ultimately a spiteful, anti-social action, as she destroys grain in the middle of a famine. Chang is careful to depict no true villains and no true heroes, populating the countryside only with what Chinese Socialist Realism suspiciously termed "middle characters." Chang does not believe that the problem in the countryside is a lack of information, and this point is fundamental to understanding her view of peasant consciousness, modernization, and ideology.

Now, let us contrast Chang's relationship model with that found in land reform fiction, the genre and subject matter that the author engages in *The Rice-Sprout Song*. In order to depict a failed land reform campaign in *The Rice-Sprout Song*, Chang reveals this genre as a kind of inter-subjective fantasy or ideology in the sense of an imaginary resolution to a material problem. I have already introduced how peasant characters develop higher consciousness in Ding Ling's early story "Water," a text I will return to again in a later section, but Ding Ling also wrote the most celebrated land reform novel; *The Sun Shines over the Sangkang River* (1948), which describes the early struggle for land reform in a small village, was required reading for urban cadres before they travelled to the villages to foment land reform in 1949-1950, and later won the Stalin Prize for literature in 1951. The central drama of the novel is whether the villagers and cadres will come together and identify the true obstacle, an exploitative landowner, before the impending harvest. Literary critic Yi-tsi Mei Feuerwerker notes analogies between land reform fiction and the detective plot, and I would argue that many elements of also resemble a romance, a romance between the party and the peasants. Though they both have good intentions, over the course of the novel both have to change somewhat to make their relationship work. After several false starts, misunderstandings, and miscommunications, the two finally see past their narrow differences and come together. Innumerable scenes early in the novel play out like

this: “While Vineyard Li was wondering whether to speak out or not, Freckles Li walked off,” and everyone feels alienated and misunderstood (95). The turning point is a crucial scene when the young cadre Yumin opens his heart (about his love for the masses, that is) to Yang, a young woman from the village, as they stroll through the orchard in full bloom. Scenes toward the end of the novel include more lines like this, where another cadre chides a villager good-naturedly: “Why didn’t you say this before? You hear such important things and don’t tell us” (227). All’s well that ends well: everything comes to light and the villagers and cadres take down the landowner together in perfect harmony.

Whereas Ding Ling’s *The Sun Shines Over the Sangkang River* is structured like a romance plot, where the Party woos the peasants, Chang’s typical view of romance itself is either of a one-way or a mutual delusion. If we extend the Communists’ hegemonic, gendered imagination of class politics to the relationship in “Sealed Off,” then Zongzhen plays the role of the Party, and Cuiyuan that of the peasants. The Party only starts wooing the peasants as a way to ward off the hated relative, the Nationalists, their adversary in the civil war. The flirting is forced at first, but as the fantasy crystalizes the Party gradually becomes convinced of their own rhetoric. Yes, why not take the peasants as a second wife? It would be scandalous in terms of both Marxist-Leninism and traditional Chinese society, but then the first wife, the workers, are never there for him and don’t understand him anyway. On the peasant side it appears perfectly ridiculous that the Party has approached them like this, but then again the marriage (land reform) is a good opportunity to settle old scores in the village. One revolutionary party is as good as another, (and one character, as we will see, constantly mixes up the two warring parties) but still the peasants get caught up in the beautiful picture of the future that the Communists paint, and become bitter when they do not follow through on these promises. This is something like

Chang's view of land reform. Whereas *The Sun Shines on the Sangkang River* ends with a budding romance between a male cadre and female peasant, *The Rice-Sprout Song* begins with Gold Root's sister's wedding to a family from a different village, the family that eventually leaves Gold Root and Moon Scent to die in the mountains rather than take them in as fugitives. But the larger point is that no characters actually understand each other's motivations clearly, least of all Gold Root and Moon Scent themselves. Only once Moon Scent finds Gold Root's jacket neatly folded on the riverbank does she realize that he has committed suicide and must have done it so as a way to help her by not slowing her down with his injury. The revolution has been "a nonoccurance," and likewise the "counterrevolutionary" revolt, as the other characters continue on with their lives.

5. Nature, Hunger, and Animals in *The Rice-Sprout Song*

The Rice-Sprout Song is a key text for this dissertation not for its suspicions of development and progress in general but because of its focus on famine and food distribution. The prominent scholar and critic Hu Shi was one of the first to praise *The Rice Sprout Song*, which Chang had sent him in manuscript form, calling it an important meditation on the subject of hunger. His famous letter, which appears at the opening of the Taiwanese edition of the novel, makes no reference to politics, instead praising the stark writing style and suggesting that she retitle the work simply "hunger." Among later scholars, David Der-Wei Wang provides the most important contribution to understanding the novel by showing that it works as a critique of a Maoist discourse that politicizes hunger. Scholarship on hunger in modern Chinese literature, which I will outline shortly, introduces a critical perspective on hunger and eating as metaphors, yet does not go far enough, in my view, in exploring the relationship between these metaphors of hunger and the actual conditions of food distribution and scarcity. Certainly literary scholars do

not want to reduce literature to a straightforward reflection of "real" (material) life, yet there is at times a danger in going to the other extreme of not seeing their interconnections. I have referred in the introduction to Eric Hayot's critique of representation of China in the Western (and Chinese) imagination as the land of famine, scarcity, and lack, and so on. Nevertheless, in this chapter I am exploring the relationship between representations, including literary ones, and modernization plans for the countryside. This has been a central argument of the dissertation, that the literary representations of hunger supplemented and at times even guided practical projects and material reorganization in the countryside. This is why I believe The split between the country and the city is a distribution of power across both literature and administrative policies, including those related to agriculture and the movement of populations, and so literary representations should be included in a larger environmental history of developing twentieth century food systems.

To give a brief overview of the literary historical background to *The Rice-Sprout Song*, I will follow Gang Yue's division of tropes of eating in modern Chinese literature into three periods. In the May 4th era (broadly the 1910's-1920's), the most important alimentary trope is cannibalism, which stands for the dehumanizing madness of traditional Chinese culture, especially in the political impasses of the early twentieth century. In the Socialist era, including literature by Communist writers before 1949, hunger becomes the dominant trope, as a "revolutionary hunger" that is both physical and spiritual in its utopian desire. In the period following 1989 and the suppression of the urban social movements of the 1980's, writers returned to cannibalism to signal both the brutality of the present and their affinity to May 4th writers. Yue notes that this three-stage history of the metaphorics of eating is a mainstream, male discourse, as Chinese women writers largely avoided both the cannibal and revolutionary-hunger

tropes. He speculates that this might be due to two factors: in the first place, criticism of Confucian family roles, and the gendered division of labor, was at the center of critiques of tradition, such that "liberation begins with steps to free women from the shackles of domestic labor" (9). At the same time, the trope of cannibalism satirizes the classical tradition of high food culture, which was a male dominated space removed from everyday food preparation.

Yue does address three texts by women authors that take up the theme of eating, though in a different way than the male tradition. These writers "are more concerned about the libidinal economy of the body when they write about eating. Most intriguing is that, unlike their male counterparts, they do not evoke the image of the mother or the return to the 'oral stage,'" (9). This is of course not the case for Chinese-American writers, and Yue includes, as a counterpoint to his main narrative, a chapter on the importance of food for ethnic identity in this body of writing. He mentions *The Rice Sprout Song* in passing, saying it was one of a few texts by woman writers that thematized eating but nevertheless were "omitted because they do not quite fit the framework of this study and merit separate treatment" (8). He does not elaborate on why, but the point is that he cannot locate it within any of his three classifications: neither the dominant history of cannibalism, revolutionary-hunger, cannibalism; nor the small number of women writers who take up eating and the body; nor Chinese-American authors focused on family and ethnicity. It is an exception to the exception, and we might add Chang's treatment of eating to the list of ways she does not fit well within the expectations of Chinese or Chinese-American literature.

David Der-Wei Wang draws on Yue's schema to analyze the representation of hunger in *The Rice Sprout Song* as a direct contrast to the revolutionary-hunger discourse. By straightforwardly placing the protagonist, Moon Scent in a genealogy of "hungry women"

characters in modern Chinese literature, Wang brackets the questions of Chang's ambiguous national status that dominate more recent criticism of the novel. Moon Scent refuses to be drawn up by Maoist discourse, and the book returns the focus to physical hunger, exposing the farcical, ideological role of the discourse of revolutionary hunger:

> At a time when most male and female Chinese writers were eager to exchange individual subjectivities for a collective, national subjectivity, Chang's own brand of "selfish" and "feminine" mannerisms stood out as a genuinely defiant gesture. As *The Rice-Sprout Song* develops, it is Yue-xiang [Moon Scent] who sees through the myth of spiritual food and dares to cross political guidelines in pursuit of her family's livelihood. ("Three Hungry Women," 63)

Wang argues that in Maoist discourse, hunger is transformed from a lack to an excess, a libidinal desire for communism. *The Rice-Sprout Song* brings hunger back down to earth as a mundane experience that puts readers face to face with their fragile embodied condition.

We can expand Wang's insight by appreciating that one of the central ways that the novel connects hunger to embodiment is through the representation of animals, which further expands the scope of Chang's exploration of hunger. When animals appear in *The Rice-Sprout Song*, it is nearly always to emphasize the fragility of human bodies, as animals. In this way Chang is opening the question of humans' relationship to nature as a whole and presenting life as impermanent and fleeting. For example, in an early scene where Gold Root has come to find work in Shanghai, and, having failed, before leaving visits Moon Scent at the upper-class house where she works. Their awkward interaction while surveilled by her employer is juxtaposed to a hen tied up in a bag, which "clucked with apprehension" as it became more aware that things would not go well for it (25). For both the hen and the couple there is no way out of their

impending deaths. In another scene, after food has become scarce, human and animal are conjoined by their chronic hunger: "A yellow dog looking for nonexistent scraps under the table burrowed under Gold Root's chair. The fluffy tail waved at Gold Root's rear exactly as if it were Gold Root's tail" (59). Human and animal share the same the same body here because they share the same embodied condition.

This is different from humans being "reduced" to animals, as if in a disruption of the proper order, which was the underlying logic of the "cannibalism" phase of national salvation literature. To illustrate this, we can see perhaps a transitional case straddling the cannibalism phase and the more optimistic hungry-revolution phase in Ding Ling's famine narrative "Water," (1931), hailed by Communists at the time as an aesthetic breakthrough in representing a collective subject.[13] In the story villagers displaced by a flood travel to a nearby town for refuge, but the townspeople will not open the gate, leaving them to starve. After several days growing ever weaker with hunger, someone identified only as "a half-naked man," begins to incite the rest of them: "Stop dreaming, there is no one coming to rescue us. Here, to live is to live a pig's life; to die is to die a pig's death" (207). Here the animal metaphor marks what is intolerable. If they are massacred by the townspeople then it will only count as the slaughter of pigs—and thus be meaningless because pigs' deaths are meaningless. The animalistic comparisons are presented as an imposition onto properly non-animalist people, which works because the animal is seen as a degraded, lower form of the human. The half-naked man's argument is that the villagers are in

[13] An English translation of the first few pages of this story, (*Shui*), was published in 1940 with the title "Flood," probably as a reference to Zola's novella *The Flood*. I use the more literal translation of the title, "Water," and all translations from the text are my own.

a fallen state: they could be human, but the flood and those to blame for it in town have reduced them to a sub-human state, the status of animals. Listening to the orator, another villager takes up the call to defend the hierarchy: "Our flesh is hard, and our heart is human, and we could never eat live people!" (207). They will be human, and they separate themselves from pigs by the simple fact that they will kill pigs for food, but not each other. The original agitator continues, "Eat live people? What's so strange about it? …Aren't we being eaten by people right now?" (207). The story fits Gao Yue's argument that, cannibalism was a central organizing metaphor for Chinese nationalism during the early decades of the twentieth century. We can add that this metaphor depends on an implied hierarchy of humans and the rest of the natural world that continues through the socialist period after 1949.

In *The Rice Sprout Song*, by contrast, animal connections are not metaphorical and not used for dehumanization, but instead reflections on the fact of mortality shared by all embodied beings. A long scene involving the slaughter of a pig provides a useful contrast to the "pig's death" from the earlier story. As the Spring Festival approaches, the party cadre orders each household to provide one pig, or the equivalent in cash, to be given to those families with a son in the army. The family of Big Uncle and Big Aunt have a pig, which they must reluctantly slaughter. Their sorrow in losing the pig is described as curiously in excess of losing a source food. When they finally do come to kill and prepare the pig, it is described in this way: "Finally, all the hairs were removed except for a patch on the head. Made to sprawl over the side of the tub, face downward, the pig now looked alarmingly human, the plump white form bald except for this black patch at the back of the head" (127). The anthropomorphism of the pig shows that there is something wrong with this slaughter, or perhaps that the family is being slaughtered along with it. Here we have again the trope of representing injustice by putting humans and

animals on the same level. Yet it is unlike the metaphors in "Water". First of all, the villagers are not reduced to animals—it is one of the strengths of the book that every character retains his or her dignity and humanity throughout the ordeals, even the cadres, the ostensible villains—but instead the pig is placed on the same level as the humans.

More than this, the connection between the family and the pig here is deeply personal. After the slaughter, Big Uncle walks through the pigsty in sadness: "'I will never rear a pig again,'" he said aloud. 'You have said that before,' said the old woman. Seeing that he made no remark to that, she added with a cruel insistence, 'That was what you said the other time'" (128). The other time, it turns out, was during the war, when Japanese soldiers raided their house, looking for anything that they could eat, recruit, or rape. Animals and humans were both being hunted by the soldiers, and both needed to hide. While the son and his wife hid in a haystack, the family's pig was dressed up in human clothes, and laid in bed as a sick old woman. Only the daughter-in-law escaped alive—the son was discovered in the hay, and the pig was found out because it was wearing the wrong shoes. The pig is shown to be one of the family, laying sick in bed so that it won't have to go to war. Thus, when the second pig is taken from them and slaughtered again, it reactivates the trauma of that earlier day, when they lost their son. It is not just that it reminds them of the earlier episode, it is that it is being repeated, one of their own is being taken from them again. We can see that commenting on the pig's human-like hair is not actually an anthropomorphism working on the old metaphor of cannibalism, but rather it is the loss, the death, that matters to them more than the eating. Animals thus demonstrate hunger as a condition that persists between different regimes, that to live is always "to live a pig's life," in Ding Ling's terms. The two pigs are both lost to the army, demonstrating the continuities

between the Communists and the Japanese, who were of course also trying to modernize and rationalize life and production through force on the mainland, including in agriculture.

The novel challenges not only the specific metaphor of the hungry revolution, but also the more widespread view of humans as separate from a nature that they hope to dominate. When the cadre calls for each family to slaughter a pig, such pigs are seen as a form of wealth, and this is emphasized by the fact that families without a pig can provide an equivalent sum of money. When the novel zooms in to consider an individual family's relationship with their pig, however, there is no sense that the pig is an object or a container of wealth. Told in great detail over many pages, the pig appears as a part of the family that is being taken from them like their son was earlier. Scenes such as this one do not unmask official symbolism so much as they explore how it feels to be forced to slaughter one's pig—and it feels is like domination by an occupying army, which the family knows from experience. This echoes the Party dictum that "Man must conquer nature" discussed at the beginning of the chapter.

Far from representing the peasants as duped by the Party, *The Rice-Sprout Song* shows how the whole village participates in the socialist fantasy when Moon Scent first arrives home. She comments that there hasn't been enough rain this year, but her family quickly assures her that it's perfect, as if by compulsion:

> She could not understand the way they rushed to the defense of the weather as if it was their own son. She had been brought up in the tradition of pessimism… [in which] the country people never opened their mouths but to complain about the weather and crops, even among themselves. It had become second nature. And now they were loudly praising this year's crops. To her unaccustomed ears it sounded foolish and immodest, in shocking bad taste. (32-3)

For a regime that claims total power hand-in-hand with total knowledge, one that claims to be able to overcome any and all obstacles, human or non-human, the mere existance of an obstacle can only be proof of a dramatic failure. All discourse, from literary works down to private conversations must show "the bright side," as Mao put it, the knowable, controllable side. There can be no suggestion of any force uncontrollable by the party, even in nature, and so in place of a dialectic, the world is written as a single, unidirectional force. The party takes on a level of total power comparable only to gods. But unlike the gods, who at least could be kept at a distance, the party identifies itself with them, claims them within its own family. Thus they have to defend the weather "as if it was their own son," because the party claims both the villagers and the natural environment as in their charge, as their dependents. Rather than the people relying on nature through the gods as their elders, now nature relies on the party as its master.

Chang gives a more specific instance of a development project in the writer Ku's film script. Faced with the party's utter failure to make good on their promise in the countryside, to deliver the peasants from famine, Ku hits on a solution for his film script: build a dam. As Wong, the village cadre, explains to him with amazement, the river in the village never overflows, so there is no need for a dam. No physical need, maybe, but building the dam will solve a spiritual problem for the country. The cultural board has decided that human enemies are not to be emphasized, as they have already been defeated. Supernatural enemies, the superstitions of peasant consciousness, have likewise officially been relegated to the dustbin of history to make way for the cheerful, optimistic peasants of the future. Hearing Ku's plan to celebrate this unneeded dam, cadre Wong

> opened his mouth to laugh and checked himself just in time. But a great flock of ducks suddenly burst into sight and floated downstream incredibly fast, cackling

> madly with an elderly glee. It was as if, through a brilliant feat of ventriloquism, his laughter was transplanted and borne swiftly downstream. It left him and Ku both somewhat out of countenance. (93)

Wong has to hold his tongue, but the birds are sure to mock this state instrumentalization of nature.

What Chang does with the dam in the novel is brilliant, for it appears to the characters as a solution in the realm of ideology. It is a purely narrative problem—the writer needs a script that will conform to particular conventions—and the dam is a purely narrative solution. It hits all the elements of the correct political line and avoids all proscribed topics. But, even being ideological, i.e. an imaginary solution, it will be implemented by the actual regime in fact. Chang identifies the coming logic of the Great Leap Forward, when the only actions consistent with Mao's politics will be radical changes to social and environmental structures. Cadres, like Wong, will be able to open their mouths but must check themselves before speaking, but only the birds are allowed to laugh at such absurdities. This is another place where animals stand for a clear-eyed reality against the dreams and posturings of the humans.

While at the broadest level the It is an early, or prescient example of a later USIA strategy to connect communism to hunger and famine. At the same time, it does not line up perfectly, as USIA information warfare would typically present a group of resistors in much more heroic and purposeful terms, rather than destroying the people's grain out of revenge. Chang's criticism of Communist food policy is not the same as the USIA's, for Chang focuses on equality of distribution, following the tropes and values of leftist famine literature itself. As we have seen, however, the Agency was interested to shift focus from the communist concern with distribution and reframe food availability as an issue of production and modernization. Thus they launched a

series of internationally-successful slogans aimed at re-signifying key communist terms, rendering "peace," (as in "land, peace, bread"), into "Atoms for Peace," and "the people," (as in "the people's republic"), into "People's Capitalism" (90, 104). In one stroke the Atoms for Peace campaign tied the various industrial uses of nuclear technology to a dawning, futuristic "atomic age" under U.S. leadership, and by implication, also asserting U.S. superiority in the nuclear arms race itself. A key sector promoted by this campaign was "atomic agriculture," which used radiation to spur mutations, and hence new crop strains, among other applications (see Oatsvall, Neil. "Atomic Agriculture"). The USIA produced the film *The Atom and Agriculture* to spread the good news (106). Chang does not portray Chinese production techniques as in need of modernization, as both Lossing Buck and the Communist Party did, nor as basically adequate, as had Pearl S. Buck and the organic farming movement (see chapter two). Chang is simply uninterested in the topic, as cultivation never appears in *The Rice-Sprout Song*.

Already in the early 1950's, Theodore Adorno pointed out that the socialist focus on productivity, and even its more utopian version as a liberated creative impulse, was a form of capitalist logic.[14] In *Minimal Moralia*, published in 1951, four years before *The Rice-Sprout Song*, he contrasts the needs of physical hunger with a leftist mania for production grounded in a certain view of nature:

[14] This connection was later born out in the so-called "creative economy" as an appropriation of the 1960's counterculture, or in the close connection between Burning Man and Silicon Valley, etc. It has also been noted that many Red Guard leaders of the Cultural Revolution became successful entrepreneurs in the 1980's.

> To the question of the goal of an emancipated society, one receives answers such as the fulfillment of human possibilities or the richness of life… [Yet] Tenderness would be solely what is most crude: *that no-one should starve any longer*. Anything else would apply, to a condition which ought to be determined by human needs, a human behavior which is formed on the model of production as its own purpose… The idea of unfettered doing, of uninterrupted creating, of chubby-cheeked *insatiability* [Unersättlichkeit], of freedom as intense activity, feeds on the bourgeois concept of nature, which from time immemorial has served to proclaim social violence as irrevocable, as a piece of healthy eternity. The naively mandated unambiguity of the tendency of development towards the raising of production is itself a piece of that bourgeois nature, which permits development only in one direction, because, integrated into the totality, ruled by quantification, it is hostile to the qualitative difference. (English n.p., German 207, emphasis added)

Though not looking at China specifically, Adorno identifies a similar movement from satisfying hunger to a positive insatiability or voraciousness for creative activity in Western developmental thinking. The Great Leap Forward is perhaps the most spectacular example of the leftist mania for activity and productivity that he describes here, an activity so compulsive that it does not solve hunger but only intensifies it. More broadly, the drive for development includes the growth of GDP and the development of technology as an end in itself. The bourgeois concept of nature is a primordial drive for accumulation and self-expression supposedly shared by all living things, which naturalizes violence as competition and the world as resources to be transformed and exploited. *The Rice-Sprout Song* does not present the compulsion for activity that would be seen

in the Great Leap Forward, but it does depict the Party's focus on production as a general enrichment of the nation rather than for actually feeding its people.

6. Chang's Aesthetics of Emptiness

By not reproducing the political use of hunger, Chang resists both the Communist hungry revolution discourse and the larger modernizing drive for improvement and production of which it is a part. While better management of the harvest in the novel would of course be an improvement, the emphasis is not on how an optimized food system would overcome hunger but instead on hunger as an inescapable, existential condition. This is why she declines to show a heroic revolt. Xiaojue Wang makes a similar point when she writes, "Chang's political novel is not so much about politics as it is about the most essential parts of humanity: the land and human life, food, illness, and death" (266). In my reading, she achieves this is by drawing the reader's attention away from the human domain of politics to the wider view of the natural and supernatural world that surrounds it.

The novel contains many references to religion and the supernatural, the most extended of which relates directly to how we are meant to understand Moon Scent's rebellion. When her body is found, it is in a seated position, and stands out red against the ruins. Everyone there, and especially Big Aunt, are awed by its resemblance to temple images of Buddhist Arahants, those practitioners who have reached enlightenment: "It was very odd and would seem to speak of divine origins in Gold Root's wife—for the body was that of a woman and she knew that it was she. This Moon Scent must have been at least a gifted monk in her last life" (176). Her divine image seems to validate her actions against the Party, both for the villagers and for the reader, as a righteous martyr. At the same time, the Arahant is an ambiguous comparison. Mahayana Buddhism, as practiced in China and elsewhere, proposes a different ideal, the Bodhisattva, who

delays his or her own enlightenment for many lifetimes until able to liberate all beings, and so the Arahant is seen as an inspiring figure but also somewhat selfish. Moon Scent's setting fire to the granary is likewise an impressive but ultimately selfish action, as compared with the Bodhisattva-like role of revolutionaries in liberating the entire society in leftist literature. Any symbolic heroism that attaches to Moon Scent is further undercut at the end of the novel. When Big Aunt's grandson immediately grows sick, she believes that Moon Scent's spirit is seeking revenge against her. In order to propitiate the spirit, Big Aunt sets out to Moon Scent's grave to burn offerings. When Big Aunt finds the unmarked place where Moon Scent was buried, she is taken aback: "'That couldn't be the earth showing through the snow, could it? No snow on her grave!' Her knees went weak with awe" (178). Then it is true—her power over natural elements, the snow, shows that Moon Scent was divine, and so the novel celebrates her as a hero.

This penultimate scene alludes to the ending of Lu Xun's "Medicine," (a story that incidentally also involves cannibalism), where the mother of a female martyr visits her grave. The mother finds new sprouts on the grave, validating her daughter's actions and signaling that she will be vindicated in the future. Lu Xun later wrote that he saw no literary merit in this uplifting ending. He said that he had tacked it onto the story, however incongruously, so as not to "infect" with his pessimism idealistic young people fighting for social change.[15] Chang is less worried:

> [Big Aunt] wiped her eyes and saw that the heaving yellow patch was a pack of wild dogs fighting over the grave. They must have burrowed into the ground and pawed it open…Big Aunt muttered as she moved away, flooded with relief. 'She

[15] "Preface" to the collection *A Call to Arms*.

> certainly can't do anybody any harm,' she thought, 'if she can't even protect her own bones.' (178-9)

The snow sign was preliminary, while the dog sign leaves no doubt. If animals, and lowly dogs at that, can have their way with this corpse, there is no higher power in sympathy with it. Big Aunt's relief is the reader's letdown: there is no bright side, there will be no justice. As we saw earlier, the novel draws on certain tropes from 1930's famine literature, but withdrawing the key hope of rebellion makes all the difference, offering no hint of future resolution. It will not even allow for an ambiguous (super)natural sign of moral authority, as in "Medicine." Whereas Lu Xun was worried about spreading his pessimism, which he considered something personal, Chang calls on "the tradition of pessimism" that Moon Scent has already identified as, until very recently, the religious attitude of the entire village toward jealous gods.

To my knowledge, the only critic to comment on the frequent references to religion in *The Rice-Sprout Song* is C.T. Hsia, in his 1961 essay that first recognized Chang within the canon of modern Chinese literature and declared the novel an instant classic. Hsia emphasizes in his reading of the novel the effect of unreality that Communism stages, through the novel's many references to both traditional theater and religious belief. In many scenes, real objects or events appear before the characters' eyes as if out of a play or an opera, or else as the work of gods or ghosts. Even the intellectual cadre at one point imagines that he is playing a part in a ghost story, the only script that can contain the shocking scenes before him, of Communists shooting starving villagers come to collect their grain. Discussing a scene where two old peasants fear that the sound of the wind is the ghosts of Moon Scent and Gold Root, Hsia comments, "The supernatural machinery is no mere device for enhancing terror. Miss Chang uses it primarily as a portion of the ancient and timeless China, readily comprehensible to the imagination of the

peasants, for effective contrast and comparison with the inhuman world of Communism" (Hsia 425). The assumption in this sentence as throughout Hsia's discussion of the novel is that the inhuman view of the world is intended in contrast to a properly human view. The peasants must be wrong to see the world in supernatural terms, as a proper modern view is humanist. For Hsia, Chinese Communism's claim to total power over nature, for example, is a regression to a premodern form of total power.

In my view, Chang is not rejecting a religious worldview in principle, but a very specific tendency. In fact, these many scenes where events appear to characters as out of a dream or a play are not so different from Cuiyuan's phantasmagoric experiences of the Shanghai streets as she passes them on the tram in "Sealed Off": "Cuiyuan's eyes saw them and they lived, lived for that one moment. The tram clanked onward, and one by one they died away" (250). The characters' attention drifts back and forth between the real and the unreal, until the closing lines, "Everything that had happened while the city was sealed off was a nonoccurance. The whole city of Shanghai had dozed off and dreamed an unreasonable dream" (251). It is like the ending of a fantasy story, but applied to a story of psychological realism. Again, the story does not imply that this is a particular mistake due to the fear of the air raid—instead, the terrifying situation provides a dramatic example of how the world is experienced generally. In both stories, there is a sense of unreality to daily life under the threat of death, and in both people generally try to distract themselves from its inevitability, like the passengers reading receipts or street signs, anything to take their minds off of reality.

By raising natural and supernatural signs of redemption, only to replace them with a pack of starving dogs, Chang rejects instead the instrumentalization of religious thought, that is the bending of the supernatural toward political ends. In support of this claim I refer to a wide-

ranging essay she wrote in 1944 titled "The Religion of the Chinese." In discussing the role of missionary Christianity in China, she wrote that it had made a large impact on Chinese society, above all on political and social reformers. Never content to change material conditions, these reformers inevitably focused on spiritual reform in transforming Chinese culture itself. This is certainly the direction that the Communist Party would take once in power, and Chang attributes this tendency to the legacy of Christianity. Nevertheless, she argued, Christianity itself would never succeed with the majority of the population because its vision of heaven is too far removed from human life, unlike the traditional Chinese view of the world after death as more-or-less the same as worldly life. Her portraits of syncretic Chinese heaven and hell emphasize how down-to-earth they are, with kings, servants, concubines, and everything else from mundane life.

One paragraph is worth quoting in full as it links the idea of progress, or the lack of progress, to aesthetics. Note that she is not speaking of peasants as an anthropological other but on the contrary of the educated class to which she and her readers belong:

> Educated Chinese believe people just get by year after year, not heading anywhere in particular, and humanity continues on age after age, not heading anywhere either. Then what meaning is there in life? Whether it has meaning or not, we're alive. How we pass our time doesn't really matter—but living a little better brings more happiness, so for the sake of our own enjoyment we end up behaving well anyway. Beyond that one takes care not to fill in all the blanks [*kongbai*], making sure not to blunder in and disturb the white fog of mysterious possibility. One must rather stop thought before it goes too far, suspend it completely, like the severe blank space left at the top of traditional Chinese paintings. This blank space is indispensable—without it the painting's balance is

> lost. Whether in art or in life, the rarest talent is knowing when to stop. Chinese people's greatest source of pride is this form of restrained beauty. (my translation)

The passage begins by denying historical teleology, and suggests that this cancels any sense of meaning for life through historical goals. Rather than a continuous analytical investigation of the nature of reality, "the rarest talent" is the ability to interrupt conceptual proliferation and the knowledge of at what point to do so. Finally, the way to illustrate this process is through art, and moreover, this is what she considers the finest artistic mode. If her aesthetic model is a painting with a large blank space at the top, consider the last sentence of *The Rice-Sprout Song*, depicting the dance procession: "The gongs and cymbals went on beating loudly, 'Chong, chong! Chi chong chi! Chong, chong! Chi chong chi!' But under the immense open sky the sound was muffled and strangely faint" (182). For the closing shot, the novel pans up away from the action to show the blank space above.

The final element of "Sealed Off" that resonates with *The Rice-Sprout Song* is then its sense of space and the environment. The tram is an image of movement and modernity but it is static, while the city streets which should be bustling with people and noise are empty. We have already seen that the last line of the novel evokes Chang's descriptions of traditional landscape painting, which left the upper portion of the paper blank. In "Sealed Off" the upper portion, above the city, is the domain of the unseen bomber planes. It is to avoid looking at this empty space, which is the space of death, that the passengers compulsively read mundane text: "People who were stuck without a single scrap of printed matter read shop signs along the street. They simply had to fill this terrifying emptiness—otherwise, their brains might start working" (239). As the author, however, Chang shows the restraint that she calls the pride of Chinese aesthetics, not filling this space with a cathartic and politically-committed representation of explosions or

dead bodies. *The Rice-Sprout Song* extends her static, empty sense of the city out into the countryside, which fits even more seamlessly with traditional landscape painting. In the pages leading up to the end there are phrases like "Her heart was curiously light and blank, an empty thing suspended in mid-air" (143), "It felt awful to be cushioned all round with the infinite softness of empty air" (151), and "the silence of the padded universe" (178). The opening scene of the novel takes place before an outhouse, and when someone throws a bucket of feces over a stone wall it is described as "somehow shocking, like pouring slops off the end of the world" (2). Not just a particular city, but the entire world is fragile and suspended in empty space.

The empty space surrounding the characters, the essay tells us, is linked to a religious predisposition not to explain all of the workings of heaven and earth. Emptiness, moreover, is a central concept of Mahayana Buddhism, referring to how the objects of experience, including physical objects, mental concepts, even oneself, are impermanent and without any self-essence. In the present context we can contrast Socialist Realism's mission to represent the social totality with Chang's own aesthetics of blank space. The Communists' idea of connecting to local, traditional culture is to force the peasants to master and perform a folk dance they have never seen before. Chang's connection is a traditional aesthetic sense of the environment as empty and ungraspable. She also breaks with the modern use of dramatic irony to represent the peasants as moral but simple-minded, and Ku remarks that they are much less naïve than he had been led to believe. This is part of her focus on miscommunication, deception, and fantasy, portraying the peasants with the same complex psychological realism as the urban characters of her earlier stories.

7. Conclusion

This chapter has argued that during the Cold War the U.S. and China presented competing models of rural modernization. In their propaganda, each represented their own system as bountiful, and accused the other of being the source of famine. *The Rice-Sprout Song*, written while the author worked for the US Information Agency, is a helpful text for understanding these dynamics because it explores both the common tropes and the lived experience of hunger and famine, but without subscribing to a sense of modernization. Indeed it suggests that the zeal of modernization can exacerbate the problem, and the truth of this idea was born out only a few years later with the Great Leap Forward which became the Great Famine. In contrast, Chang proposes an aesthetic of restraint that leaves space blank and unoccupied. In the essay quoted above from the same period, Adorno similarly wrote of the political domain that "Perhaps the true society would become bored with development, and would out of freedom leave possibilities unused, instead of storming alien stars under a confused compulsion." *The Rice-Sprout Song* is a political novel that points away from the political domain and toward human beings as fragile creatures not separate from nature, and its engagement with the overlap between humans, animals, and the sacred, has much to offer for future environmental literary studies.

Conclusion

This dissertation has addressed an unexamined history of literary and academic exchange between the United States and China that shaped agricultural modernization in both countries, a project that speaks to the concerns of American Studies, Chinese Studies, ecocriticism, and critical food studies. The project is bilingual and cross-cultural, analyzing fiction and nonfiction writing together with agricultural surveys and policy documents, showing that writers in the U.S. and in China have articulated linked visions of the problems in the countryside in elaborating a moral case for rural transformation. While transpacific studies have sometimes evoked circulation across the ocean and into the treaty ports, "rural transnationalism" brings into view the transformation of the inland continents themselves through agricultural development—and the multiple articulations of national identity in reference to the other. While the term semi-colonialism was used to understand the situation of China in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, I hope to have shown that it can inform our understanding of the evolving relationship with the U.S. In this way I have presented the 1949 Communist revolution as a "semi-decolonial" revolution aimed, as Mao stated explicitly, at achieving independence from the U.S. The Cold War competition would then appear as a further semi-colonial struggle, with a focus on competition for the future of greater Asian agriculture. The economic rise of China in the past decades, and renewed trade wars with the U.S., might likewise be understood more fully in the context of the former's ongoing interest to break free of the control of the latter.

Further research should be conducted to bring this historical narrative of the literary uses of food and famine up to the present. The fourth chapter looked at *The Rice-Sprout Song* (1955) as an elaboration, before the fact, of the logic of denial that would underlie the Great Famine

(1958-1961), and so the next body of literature to examine would naturally be representations of the famine itself. Due to the historical and representational complexities involved, analyzing these materials would likely require a slightly different method. This is because the famine was so well-censored that detailed accounts only began to be published decades later. Thus most of the writing on the subject is based on either memoirs, interviews, or archival research, such as Yang Jisheng's *Tombstone* (2008, translation 2012) and, increasingly, historical fiction such as Yan Lianke's *Four Books* (2011, translation 2015). A good resource for literary writing in English translation is the journal *Renditions* No. 68 (Autumn 2007), which collects both exuberant short stories and poetry written during the Great Leap Forward and somber fiction written decades later exposing the tragedy.

In addition to the Great Famine, an expanded study of food discourse in the U.S.-China relationship should address the return of food exports, and the controversies over genetically modified organisms, overconsumption, and environmental concerns. Lester R. Brown's *Who Will Feed China? Wake-Up Call for a Small Planet* (1995) is in a sense a nonfictional updating of the concerns of Frank Norris's *The Octopus* (1901). In both, the specter of Chinese famine necessitates increased U.S. agricultural yields, but Brown furthermore advises developing 14 million hectares of land that the U.S. had uncharitably left to waste as conservation reserves, the legacy of twentieth century environmental politics (138). In broad terms, the discourse of global food security as a whole revolves around the polarity of China as the typical example of overpopulation and rapid development, and the U.S. as the industrial exporter undercutting and destroying domestic food production around the world. At the same time we also read the opposite story, in which China is the workshop of the world and Americans are addicted to consumption through debt-spending. In this narrative, the rural Chinese population are said to

save too much, and must learn to consume more to save global capitalism (or, from the left, they must learn to be revolutionaries again, and save international socialism). In both narratives, the U.S.-China relationship is synonymous with overconsumption.

The analysis of contemporary understandings of U.S.-China food discourse could thus inform a larger study of environmental relations between the two countries that would also examine pollution emanating from the workshop of the world. Responding to a panel at the 2017 ASLE conference, Chia-ju Chang critiqued Chai Jing's documentary *Under the Dome* for neglecting this connection. In laying all the blame for China's air pollution at the feet of Chinese government officials, the documentary side-steps the issue that these factories only exist to serve Western consumers, an omission that ensures these consumers would support the documentary itself. On the other hand, Jennifer Baichwal's documentary *Manufactured Landscapes* ostensibly links pollution in China to consumption in the rest of the world, yet to my mind its aesthetics of the sublime and celebration of the foreign artist Ed Burtynsky simply present China as dazzling, huge, and impossibly polluted. Scholars could better attend to other texts that better map the environmental relations between the U.S. and China more productively, in the manner of those Rob Nixon examines in *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*.

Finally, the argument here has been that we take more seriously the role of imagining the other in creating a sense of place. American Studies has shown great attention to this in the way that the European sensibility was grafted onto the new continent. It is for this that people in a desert climate pour scarce water onto the dry ground trying to imitate English lawns. Yet psychic investments and identifications need not follow such linear causality; in the case of the U.S. and China, each has formed and reformed a view of the landscape, consumption and modernization of the other in response to changing conditions. We can expand this to think more generally

about how a sense of "one's own" place is informed by imagined other places and imagined other peoples. I have tried to show that the imagination of China and Chinese farmers has long informed Americans' pastoral sense of themselves. Scholars will no doubt continue to investigate how imaginary and material connections to other peoples have likewise structured and restructured understandings of various environments.

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