

## Afterword: Political Crowds, Political China

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*[A]lthough individually they may be worse judges than those who have special knowledge—as a body they are as good or better.*

—Aristotle, *Politics* (in Bull 2005: 31)

Varied as they are in the topics they treat, the essays collected here all respond, though in different ways, to the question of the dis/appearance of political crowds in contemporary China. By exploring different settings and media, as a whole they raise, directly or indirectly, many compelling issues for our understanding of modern political crowds and their relevance to Chinese people's experience. These papers are especially revealing when read against the accumulated scholarship on crowd studies in the West since the late nineteenth century.

The historical scope of the essays ranges from the early Maoist era to market reform, postsocialist China. Roy Chan discusses two literary works by the woman writer Zong Pu, one published in 1957 and the other in 1978. Hongmei Yu reads changes in official ideological reorientation in the post-Tiananmen era by examining three “main melody” films of the 1990s. Louis Ho's essay on Yue Minjun's paintings and sculptures covers the artist from the late 1980s into the new century, but in his interpretation

he shares a focused interest with Chan and Yu in China's revolutionary and socialist experiences before the late 1970s and their artistic representations thereafter. The essays by Jason McGrath, Chun Chun Ting, and Sarah Dauncey, by contrast, deal with the early twenty-first century, in particular global mass production and consumption, contemporary developmentalism, and the Internet, respectively. The essays demonstrate that the end of the Cold War has had its impact on China, at least in terms of altering China's relation with its Maoist past and ushering in a new period when China is steadily integrating into today's capitalist globalization process.

Thematically, several issues crossing the time line are at stake. Sometimes the authors examine them from almost diametrically opposing perspectives. In relation to the socialist revolutionary past, Yu's paper points our attention to questions of political legitimacy, historical agency, and ordinary people's agency in sociopolitical life. Ho, too, implicitly raises concerns about political legitimacy and the deprivation of ordinary people's political agency. Compared to Yu, McGrath is more explicit about the question of historical agency, or the driving force in history, especially when it manifests itself in representations of multitudes acting in unison. He links such representations to the global capitalist mass production and consumption of our times. Chan's essay focuses on the tensions between the collective and its members' private individuality, as well as the transformational power of collective bonds among individual members. This tension and the issue of collective bonds are further explored by both Dauncey and Ting. In Chan and Dauncey's essays, "crowds" can be equated with the "collective" or the "public," and their discussions focus on identity issues for both the collective and the constituent individual. Ting's essay, on the other hand, provides a solid case study of politicized crowds physically gathering together. She carefully unravels multiple layers of the protests she describes, demonstrating convincingly how and why political crowds confront us with issues crucial to our times. Before returning to this point, I first take a closer look at some of the main issues surrounding the idea

of “political crowds” as formulated in the West and in China, and their connection to the contributions in this issue.

### **Origins of “Crowd” Studies**

Although crowds have long existed in human history, the term “crowd” did not enter the scholarly world as a concept or an analytical category until the late nineteenth century. The particular historical experience of rapid sociopolitical and economic transformations during this period is important in understanding the rise of “crowd” as a concept and a category, though the term has developed multiple meanings and analytical significances partly because of institutionalized higher learning and its disciplinary divisions.

Talking about modern “political crowds” immediately conjures up the events (and their representations) of the French Revolution in 1789, arguably the prototype of this sort of assemblage, when congregations of agitated masses profoundly altered the premises of the state and physically attacked its symbols in Paris. Although at the time, the British thinker Edmund Burke condemned these crowds as rioting “mobs,” the Parisians uprooted what they believed to be the minority rule of an absolute monarchy and replaced it with a model of popular sovereignty in the name of “the people.” Subsequent revolutionary political crowds in Paris, especially in 1848 and 1871, expanded “the people’s” demands for political representation into demands for constant active participation in local and national politics, supplemented by progressive programs seeking social justice for all against the monopolizing power of the political and economic elite. These revolutionary crowds, however, did not always win the day. The Communards of 1871 were violently suppressed. From 1880 on, annual Bastille Day festivals celebrating the Third Republic’s representational popular sovereignty and national unity sanitized the unruly revolutionary mass of 1789. Over the nineteenth century, disoriented masses from across the ideological spectrum looked for charismatic leaders, attacked corrupt

politicians of the parliament, longed for nationalistic pride, and stubbornly revived socialism. Such political events and developments made “crowds” visible in new ways, and partly underlay the growing interest in studying them during the late nineteenth century (Jonsson 2006: 72; Ginneken 1992: 149–171).

Apart from the political realm, growing awareness of crowds also came from socioeconomic transformations brought about by the Industrial Revolution in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Improved technology increased agricultural productivity and changed how food was traded and supplied (Thompson 1991: 185–258). Stimulated trade and industrialization saw population and urbanization increase rapidly in England, France, and many other countries. Between 1789 and 1888, “European society underwent some of the most radical transformations of its entire history. The population more than doubled, urbanization more than tripled, and the major capitals more than quadrupled in size” (Ginneken 1992: 3). Accompanying these changes were ever more frequent large urban crowds (often numbering in the tens of thousands) of different natures and purposes—including the many food riots in various English towns in the eighteenth century (Harrison 1988: 4–5). The social pressure resulting from these crowds gradually forced ruling elites to recognize problems such as urban food security during poor harvests or deteriorating working conditions for industrial labor. As labor movements to unionize for both political and economic rights grew, often militantly, in countries such as England, Germany, and the United States, elites responded in different ways: in England the ban on unionizing was lifted in the 1830s, and “organized riots” or labor strikes became tacitly distinguished from the “unexpected” urban disturbances of the 1780s to the 1850s.

Through different paths, Britain and France arrived at the same decision to neutralize “crowds” in the discursive sphere. In other words, we can perhaps take another look at the relationship between the emergence and effects of specific historical crowds under different socioeconomic and

political conditions and the categories and modes of analysis that emerged to define, describe, and, indeed, neutralize them in the discursive sphere. The French Revolution itself was accompanied by a fascination with applying scientific methods to explaining social life: counting and numbering were part of the argument for popular sovereignty against monarchy, and physiological anthropology tried to figure out the characteristics of the average citizen (Jonsson 2006: 49–51). In the nineteenth century, newly rationalized forms of government administration facilitated collection of social data, with the imperialist rivalry in grabbing colonies globally adding extra data from afar. Both contributed to the emergence of studies of crowd behavior based on racially or socially hierarchical premises. Modern “crowds” have since continued to be defined in a compartmentalized fashion on the basis of such earlier forms of neutralization (e.g., illegal immigrants or war refugees in our own time).

Some of the earliest works on “crowds” came from the fields of psychology, pathology, criminology, and anthropology in France and Italy (Ginneken 1992). Three of the most representative works were published in the 1890s. Of these, *Psychologie des foules* (The crowd), by Gustave Le Bon, was an instant best-seller, although plagiarism disputes ensued immediately after its publication in 1895 (Ginneken 1992: 119–125). Le Bon’s (2001: 8) announcement that “the age we are about to enter will in truth be the *Era of Crowds*” came at a time when modern sociology was just taking shape at the dawn of the twentieth century. Indeed, as the new century came into view, “crowds” appeared poised to become a key category in the new field. But, although the era of crowds it might certainly be, the twentieth century was also to be the era of contending ideologies: socialism, communism, anarchism, nationalism, pacifism, fascism—the political ideas and forces behind (or leading) gathering crowds became further clarified, or, rather, divisive to their respective followers, compared to the previous century. Mass political movements could not be easily explained away by psychology, though Le Bon’s follow-up best-seller on the psychology of

socialism tried to do so (Ginneken 1992: 130–187).

In the twentieth century, narrowly defined units of physically congregated crowds seemed but one aspect of the overall phenomenon of the great masses of modern times. Standardized mass production of consumer goods, including goods produced by the culture industry, heightened the awareness of “mass society” (Adorno/Horkheimer 1944), and numerous civil and national struggles around the world, especially after World War II, demonstrated considerable alliance between mass mobilization and progressive values. Correspondingly, terms for categorizing large gatherings shifted from “crowds” to “mass(es)” and “collective” in the fields of psychology, anthropology, and sociology. Concerned scholars also worked to identify sociopolitical contexts of crowd occurrences and to uncover political significances concealed by terms such as “crowd” or “riot.” Marxist historian E. P. Thompson, for example, argued against dismissive accounts of the eighteenth century “food riots” in England. His careful study of specific cases convincingly returned “historical agency” to the “rioting” masses (1991: 185–258). In sociology, collective behavior and social movements became an established and standard research area. To date, the most outstanding sociological study of the 1989 Tiananmen protest movement is categorized precisely within this subfield (Zhao 2001).

In the post–Cold War period, the study of political crowds has taken on still newer approaches. Although previously dominated by Cold War rhetoric, the socialist experiments of the twentieth century are now being reexamined through left-leaning discourses of feminism, identity studies, cultural studies, and, above all, concerns about “the public” and individual rights vis-à-vis collective claims. Concurrent with this new scholarship is the fact that the crowds themselves are changing. Recent waves of international mass protests such as the Occupy movement, or the antiwar demonstrations a few years earlier, have occurred without a unified leadership and without aiming directly at the seizure of state power.<sup>1</sup> Meanwhile, the Internet and social networking platforms have engendered different forms of mass

<sup>1</sup> It is important to note, of course, the existence of contemporary mass protests that have aimed at and played a decisive role in changing the legitimacy of the state—for example, in the former Socialist bloc countries and more recently in the revolts in the Arab world. The latter’s basic demands have been for popular sovereignty, with various contemporary twists. These movements and demands have questioned whether studies of modern Western history have exhausted the meaning of popular sovereignty.

mobilization and political gathering in recent years, attracting reflections on the changing characteristics of the public in national or global politics. Although Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's 2004 work, *Multitude*, responds directly to these trends, it may also not be pure coincidence that the number of published titles of academic research using the term "populism" has increased dramatically, from a total of 557 in the 1980s to 2801 in the decade of the 2000s.<sup>2</sup>

### **The Crowd—Sovereignty, Agency, Rights, Benefits, and Justice**

The intrinsic connection between the modern idea of political crowds and the French Revolution brings together several overlapping concepts. With its primary reference to popular sovereignty, the connection points at once to the "people," the "collective," a "public," to what Jean-Jacques Rousseau called the "general will," and to the individual citizens who make up the physical or virtual crowd (Schnapp/Tiewes 2006: x–xi; Jonsson 2006: 49–51). Indeed, what is the relationship between individual citizens and the collective citizenry in terms of popular sovereignty? How do we evaluate the effect of individuals coming together as a crowd for collective actions?

From the start, the connection between political crowds and popular sovereignty was recognized not only by their advocates but by their opponents as well. One year after the French Revolution, Burke attacked the revolutionary crowds for undermining the "natural" social setting of the king, the obedient subject, and the church: "In the monastic institutions, in my opinion, was found a great power for the mechanism of politic benevolence," he writes (2005: 443–444). By "politic benevolence" he means "public interests" that need to be judged by prudence and guarded by justice with respect to private property. For Burke, the crowds of the French Revolution crushed old authorities physically and symbolically, opening the gates of high power to lowly people, who sidelined wisdom for rival follies to wage vulgar wars that led to disorder and violence (443–444). In other words, Burke considered popular sovereignty to be a euphemism

<sup>2</sup> See D'Eramo 2013: 15. D'Eramo interprets the increase in connection to a corresponding rise in titles on "populism and fascism," arguing that the phenomenon represents a negative view of political crowds (15–21). However, although his study shows that titles on "populism and fascism" remained less than 10 percent of titles containing the term "populism" decade by decade from the 1920s on, I believe the situation is more complex than his conclusion. For instance, positive views of political crowds remain strong in cases involving democracy movements in non-Western countries.

for mob actions toppling good political order—political crowds, yes, but in a completely negative light.

A century later, Gustave Le Bon broadened the subject of “political crowds” to include not only those who congregated in the streets or in parliamentary chambers, but also consensus-forming groups with no visible agglomeration, such as an entire nation. For him, the French Revolution was a juncture when “[t]he divine right of the masses is about to replace the divine right of kings . . . and that for a while the philosophy of number seems the only philosophy of history” (2001: 10). But this phenomenon was lamentable for Le Bon because “civilisations as yet have only been created and directed by a small intellectual aristocracy, never by crowds. When the structure of a civilisation is rotten, it is always the masses that bring about its downfall” (2001: 9–10). Le Bon finds reassurance, though, in the notion that history “always turns in the same circle.” The situation where “the populace is sovereign, and the tide of barbarism mounts,” would, he hoped, be temporary. If the parliamentary assemblies could effectively resist the demands of the popular class against the upper class, and act on behalf of “philosophers, thinkers, writers, artists, and learned men—in a word, for all those who form the cream of a civilisation,” the French “race” could hope for a rebirth (115–120). In short, although Le Bon recognized the advent of popular sovereignty through mass movements and bestowed on the crowd *historical* agency, albeit based on a cyclic view of history, he nonetheless deprived the crowd of any *political* agency. In 1902, he extended his argument by proposing that the masses be put through a vigorous nationalistic education by the cultural elite in order to facilitate France’s revival (Ginneken 1992: 171–180).

Le Bon’s best-selling titles were published in the exact decade when the Dreyfus Affair rocked French sociopolitical and intellectual circles. Unlike Le Bon, the sociologist Gabriel Tarde participated in the protests and turned his observations of the Affair into a study on the formation of public opinion in the age of the mass printing press. Defining his “public”



based on consensus-forming groups, Tarde issued an explicit challenge in 1901: "I therefore cannot agree with that vigorous writer, Dr. Le Bon, that our era is the 'era of crowds.' It is the era of the public or of publics, and that is an entirely different thing" (in Ginneken 1992: 190). The "crowd," for Tarde, must be recognized as having political agency in the form of "public opinion."

National difference matters in regard to crowd studies, as the particularities of the English and French cases reveal. E. P. Thompson grants historical agency to English "food rioters" of the eighteenth century, but only in the form of "moral agency" for their actions in "political space"; he declines to recognize that they had sufficient "political consciousness" (1991: 185–189; 258–351). The historical agency here designates the moral economy's role in instigating progressive measures. In the rising labor movements leading into the 1830s, instead of "popular sovereignty," the moral rights of "free-born Englishmen" and the vision of society acting through a representative government provided the anchor for social reform movements (Thompson 1980: 77–101). The English Jacobins "sought, by education and agitation, to transform 'the mob' (in Paine's words) from 'followers of the *camp*' to followers of 'the *standard* of liberty'" (100). The right to political organization, freedom of the press, freedom of public meeting, and the right to vote and represent were key to the English working class's collective identity (672; 711–832); they were to guarantee one's liberty and were not the result of a social contract, as seemed to be the case in France. These examples show how the questions of popular sovereignty and the political agency of the crowd—either through direct political representation or through the idea of a social contract—have been central to crowd studies in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Fast-forwarding to the twenty-first century, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, taking into account the "banality of evil" (Hannah Arendt's term) of fascist followers and mass manipulation by Communist regimes, declare a categorical "no" to the concept of "sovereignty" and argue for a "yes"

<sup>3</sup> Repeated mass protests in Greece, Italy, Spain, and in Ireland, from 2009 to 2013, delayed implementation of but did not fundamentally alter the austerity programs forced on them by political decision-making bodies, which were often external to the respective national governments but almost always under the influence of financial capital.

to crowd-multitude politics in seeking global betterment (2004: 328–257). The empirical feebleness of this position can be seen in the repeated mass protests in southern European countries since the 2008 financial crisis.<sup>3</sup> In contrast to Hardt and Negri, Surowiecki's (2004: 259–271) account in defense of democracy on the basis of a social contract argues for the empirical possibility of popular sovereignty. Theoretically, the separation of "popular" and "sovereignty" entrusts social movement to the "invisible hand" in sociopolitical matters, an issue that Malcolm Bull has criticized in the work of Hardt and Negri. Bull (2004: 19–39), too, supports Rousseau's idea of a social contract that makes popular sovereignty possible. In fact, popular participation is key to defining legitimate sovereignty in our times. The latest experiment comes from Finland: "Citizen initiatives have been enshrined in the Finnish constitution since March 2012—if an initiative receives more than 20,000 signatures, then the Parliament is obliged to discuss and vote on the initiative" (The Finnish Institute in London). The practice is named, appropriately, "crowdsourcing legislation." Bull (2005:19–39) argues that a people-based social contract ought to rule; its unity, larger than the individuals and their private interests put together, stands for public benefit as well as social justice. The key to making such a design work for the social good probably lies, however, in maintaining a lively civil society with vigorous political debate.

### **Political "Crowds" in China**

Although just a cursory outline of the place of "crowds" in political debates in the West over the past two centuries, the preceding discussion can help us understand how China's experience during the same period, especially the twentieth century, shares many features with the West in regard to "crowds" and, more specifically, to "political crowds." China has also been on a trajectory of steady integration into a world dictated by global conflict, antagonization, alliance, and domination by financial capital. The key issues—indicated in the previous section's subtitle, "sovereignty,

agency, rights, benefits, and justice”—are also concerns for Chinese people, as we can see from the contributions to this special issue. These essays are a good measure for comparison and contrast in our consideration of the Chinese case.

In China, political crowds can be found easily in historical records; one of the earliest examples is the uprising led by Chen She in the third century B.C., recounted in Sima Qian's *Shiji* (Records of the Grand Historian). Crowds also appear in the deliberations of canonical political philosophical works. According to Confucius, with properly redistributed wealth and harmony, there will be neither poverty nor scarcity; and with contented repose, "there will be no rebellious upsetting." When the Dao prevails under Heaven (*tianxia you dao*, "right principles prevail in the kingdom"), "there will be no discussions among the common people" (*Analects*, "Ji shi" 1 and 2). Conversely, Mencius (Mengzi) believed that a malevolent ruler loses his prerogative status, and can be overthrown legitimately, in the name of bringing benevolence to the people (*Mengzi*, "Liang Hui Wang" II.15). Taking both sides into consideration, Xunzi says that the king is like a boat and the commoners water, which may float or topple the boat (*Xunzi*, "Wang Zhi" 5). And, from the commoners' perspective, a rebelling crowd may, and in many cases did, lay its claim to legitimacy by taking action on behalf of Heaven (*ti tian xing dao*); "It is the Way of Heaven to diminish superabundance, and to supplement deficiency," says the *Dao De Jing* (77). Within the limited space available, I risk overgeneralization to consider how these ideas from the Chinese classics might relate to the crowd theories from the West discussed earlier and how they have affected the Chinese experience of modern times.

First of all, it must be noted that when applied to the Chinese context, notions of sovereignty, agency, rights, benefit, and justice become much more flexible than they are in Western settings. There are certain logics underlying this flexibility, the most basic of which is perhaps the view of a well-ruled state being the universe's most "natural" manifestation

(*dao fa ziran*, “Dao models itself after nature”); commoners, people, or crowds are then part of this natural order. Historically, natural order always experiences peaceful periods and moments of crisis. Looking at the question of “political crowds” from the perspective of ancient Chinese thinkers, we may notice that the notions of benefit and justice are considered essential to maintaining a peaceful period and key to explaining the causes of a crisis. Moreover, it would be in the crisis moment that the notions of sovereignty, agency, and rights would be utilized as a response. In a crisis, the people will be granted the right, as well as political and historical agency, to oust an existing ruler who is perceived as incapable of bringing benefit and justice to the realm. In a crisis, the people contribute to restoring proper order and as such are associated with Heaven in granting sovereignty to a new ruling house and completing a cycle of dynastic change.

On the one hand, these views on the role of people/crowds in classical Chinese texts are not so very different from the cyclical view of history Le Bon held, except that the Chinese version bestows to the crowd in the crisis moment a strong historical agency that carries moral judgment in defining the crisis. On the other hand, during periods of peace and order, the commoners are not to engage in discussion—that is, political discussion. As such, their political rights and agency can be legitimately deprived, so long as the ruling power is fulfilling its moral duty to bring benefits to the people. That said, in the Chinese case, the concept of political agency manifested in “public opinion,” be it among the commoners or the aristocratic elite, was always an important indicator for rulers to assess the state of affairs (Saussy 2006: 249–269). Moreover, the kind of moralistic discourse underlying the judgment over legitimate rule leans heavily toward the utilitarian side, as can be seen in *The Analects* and *Dao De Jing*, just quoted. The multitude can, and will, be pacified when a ruling power can lay claim to properly redistributed wealth, harmony, and contented repose among the ruled. Such thinking leads to the formulation of “performance legitimation” (Zhao 2009). In contrast to benefit, the notion of justice is somehow enmeshed

in a social vision of material equality and retains only an ambiguous space for its own independence. When not in a crisis moment, ruling becomes “managing the crowds.” Individual rights have no voice in conventional discourses of political mechanism, sovereignty, or legitimation—neither in the dynastic institutional setting nor in its mirror image of peasant rebellion.

Is this classical political philosophy relevant to modern times in China? Mass mobilization for political causes is, as in other parts of the world, very much a modern phenomenon in China. As national salvation struggles were waged against imperialist aggression, socially progressive movements won precious gains under the banners of emancipation and liberalization. People’s movements for the rights of labor, women’s liberation, compulsory education, and so forth share some experiences with modern crowds in other countries around the world. Such a history would suggest that modern Chinese crowds enacted forms of political agency in ways that classical political texts would not fathom.

Unfortunately, the initially powerful inspirations related to individual or grassroots collective realization in the modern period were gradually overtaken, or brutally eliminated, by top-down formations of the national collective-unity. In the wake of the disruptive decade of the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), intellectuals both inside and outside the Party reflected on how the multitude of individuals could be so crudely and cruelly subsumed by a highly abstract, dictatorial collective. According to the reflections in vogue at the time, in addition to the crowd-manipulation problems common to all communist countries, the answers lay in a modern political culture that continued to be informed by the thinking and practice put forth in the ancient Chinese classics.

But this explanation may not be enough on its own. Although, for a large part of the twentieth century in China, the crowd was explicitly mobilized and led by political parties, terms such as “the people” (*guomin*, or *renmin*) or “the masses” (*qunzhong*, *dazhong*, or *minzhong*) were all heavily charged with connotations of the crowd’s political agency.

In contrast, neutralized, depoliticized terms for crowds, such as *qunti* (community/group/collective/entity) or *renqun* (crowd), have become the standard reference in the past two decades, during the post-Tiananmen, post-Cold War period. How then do we read China's modern and contemporary crowds politically? Can the concepts of the Chinese classics or those formulated in the West over the past two centuries offer ways of theorizing the political crowd in China? What other new approaches to political crowds are necessary and possible?

### **Rereading Chinese Crowds Politically**

The essays in this special issue fall precisely into the intellectual realm of those questions. Louis Ho begins his paper with a brief but lively account of the cultural, intellectual, and sociopolitical atmosphere in the 1980s. His reading of works by the avant-garde artist Yue Minjun largely depends on a parallel construction: on one side is the terracotta army of the Qin emperor, which articulates the essence of the emperor's despotic rule; on the other side, we see Yue's artworks, which, according to Ho, remind the viewer of "the centralized nature of the socialist body politic" in the PRC. What seems to be left out of this reading, however, is the rapidly growing consumer culture since the 1990s, which Ho mentions in his opening section and may be crucial in interpreting Yue's 2005 series, "The Hats," for instance. With regard to the concerns of this special issue, although Ho remarks on the tension and conflict between the individual and the multitude, neither is given agency. Any political possibility is located solely in the iconographic persona of the top ruler, whereas the ruled exist merely as indices of the sociopolitical structure.

Jason McGrath's consideration of the "crowd," too, is mainly in the assembly of repetitively produced, standardized, and identical images; specifically, these are computer-generated images (CGI) in the films and spectacles of Zhang Yimou. Unlike Ho, McGrath sees, in Zhang Yimou's CGI version of the Qin army, globalized economic production in blockbuster

filmmaking and an aesthetics of multitude that structurally dwarfs both an individual's will to rebel and an(other) individual's responsibility in the multitude's action. For McGrath, Zhang Yimou's works "suggest a more genuinely global sense of *tianxia* and the forces that in fact rule all under heaven." There is little room left for the idea of "sovereignty" in a collective sense here; nor is there much room for individual or collective agency, except in culturally defined creative images that, presumably, are also part of the global *tianxia*. As with Yue Minjun's sculpture in Ho's reading, the multitude in McGrath's reading is merely an unconscious extension of the capitalist universe. This vision shares some troubling features with the view that trusts the "invisible hand" (Hardt/Negri 2004; Bull 2005). Worse still, in Zhang Yimou's intoxication with an aesthetics of the multitude as grandeur, the overarching structure—in the film *Hero* or in the Beijing Olympics opening ceremony—is presented with no cracks of vulnerability whatsoever, ultimately inviting the multitude to surrender unconditionally to the unfathomable while canceling all potential resistance.

Roy Chan, taking a critical view of commodity exchange dominating social life, analyzes two short stories by the woman writer Zong Pu as a vehicle through which to imagine a recovery of the process of building socialism. From a position diametrically contrary to Ho's, Chan identifies socialist spatial division between individual privacy and collective struggle in one story, and a cross-generational transmission of collective identity in a shared revolutionary mission in the other. Ironically, the spatial allocation for individual privacy touched on in the first story becomes exactly what the protagonist in the second story could not attain during the Cultural Revolution. If individual privacy was ever part of "socialist institutions" in China, it certainly had a very fragile existence that did not last long. In fact, both stories have episodes with gathering crowds, including crowds that are not just violent instruments deployed by power-holders. Jiang Mei in "Red Beans" takes part in a poetry-reading rally and a protest march; likewise, Liang Xia in "A Dream on Strings" repeatedly joins protesting

crowds. Both girls experience spiritual transformation by being physically within these politically agitated crowds. Zong Pu's stories demonstrate how powerfully inspirational collective struggles with socialist references could be for people's imaginations, including when they are fighting against the power-holders of the socialist state itself.

Although both stories by Zong Pu accord strong political agency to both protagonists, the justifications for their political actions are not identical. In the story "Red Beans," which is set in the 1940s, it is ideas of social benefit and egalitarian ideals that strengthen Jiang Mei's resolve to stay in China and join the socialist struggle. In "A Dream on Strings," set in the very different context of the 1970s, Liang Xia is motivated more by the idea of justice and rights that must be conferred on emancipated and emancipating citizens of a socialist society, lest a betrayal of the collective socialist ideal happen. Both visions were important to the Chinese revolutions of the twentieth century. But over time, the former, which is solidly rooted in native political philosophy, gained the upper hand, and the latter, acquired as part of the traveling ideas of international revolutionary ferment at the turn of the twentieth century, has been under growing pressure from the PRC state.

Hongmei Yu's analysis of the "main melody" films of the 1990s takes up this shift in political discourses in the PRC. In the two historical films Yu examines, one of most significant changes in terms of ideological discourse centers on the question of historical agency. Films of similar themes made in the 1950s, Yu notes, usually bring in episodes about ordinary people to make a point that the people matter for historical progress. This is no longer the case in the 1990s, because individual heroes have now taken the place of the masses in China's mainstream historical narratives. The shift may have occurred as a response to recent political upheavals (the Tiananmen Massacre, for instance), but could also be the culmination of longer-existing factors.

In 1945, Mao Zedong extolled the people—and he meant the people



alone—for being the true force that makes world history possible.<sup>4</sup> Theoretically, the idea is at odds with the more standard Marxist view of a historical materialism primarily based in political economics. Indeed, Mao's statement here may actually be more in line with classical Chinese political philosophy, which focused political attention excessively on history. Although granting sole historical agency to the people, Mao and his comrades followed the Leninist model of keeping political agency gripped tightly in the hands of the Party—that is, the vanguard of the people's revolution. The people, or the masses, were mobilized repeatedly in various campaigns, military and political, but the mobilization was usually in a style of the crisis moment as defined in Chinese classical political texts. Efforts to channel the political agency of the people through institutional settings were never very successful in the Mao years. The failure was, in turn, partly due to the demand for collective unity and the complete submission of individual subjectivity. The representation of Mao as a radiating sun looming large and commanding over a sea of masses, an image ubiquitous during the Cultural Revolution, already suggested that the people had been discarded from the historical narrative (Saussy 2006). The result, as Yu's essay shows, is an elite-driven historiography that, in one case, carefully erases ideological conflicts between the Communists and the Nationalists in the civil war period (1946–1949) and, in another, whitewashes mass mobilization from the 1919 May Fourth movement, a turning point in China's modern political sphere.

In addition to this type of ideological erasure of the political crowd, Yu also shows us, through the third film she analyzes, how the 1960s' socialist virtue of comradesly help for the common good has been turned to a much narrower discourse of individual fulfillment. Ultimately, what is missing in the current discourse of individual fulfillment is the public dimension of social engagement. Sarah Dauncey's paper provides rich and interesting examples that enter into these issues from another angle. One particularly relevant question in her discussion is the role the Internet plays

<sup>4</sup> "Renmin, zhiyou renmin, caishi chuangzao shijie lishi de zhenzheng dongli 人民, 只有人民, 才是創造世界歷史的真正動力" (Mao Zedong 1945).

in practices of social engagement. Similar to the popular printing press in Gabriel Tarde's France of the 1890s, new technology has changed the means of social communication in contemporary China, and, as a result, the means of public-collective formation. Many of the people in Dauncey's examples make forthright social claims on the collective identity of disabled people, though not all of them would take political action to pressure the authorities. On the whole, their varied choices of participating in public life demonstrate a consciously-cast sociopolitical agency, acting on the premise of progressive values that cherish social equality, collective betterment, and individual rights.

Differing from all the others and directly tackling the question of political crowds, Chun Chun Ting's paper achieves considerable success in the best historiographic tradition of crowd studies, exemplified by E. P. Thompson. Following her narrative of the demonstrations in Hong Kong in 2006 and 2007, we soon realize that reading the gathering crowds politically was itself a continuous struggle that began at almost the very moment when crowds started to appear. It was a struggle to articulate a political significance that was not immediately apparent and did not come readily to the consciousness of even those who gathered to save the two piers slated for demolition. Hong Kong's political and economic elite, bound together through financial capital and land development projects, would rather see the crowd as politically inarticulate and often misguided by emotional outbursts. Ting's paper, then, serves as a rare defense of the crowd after the crowd itself has dispersed. Quoting those writing at the time and extending their arguments, she employs class analysis to contend that these crowds were gathered not in nostalgia for British colonial icons, but to defend their rights to public space in both physical and virtual terms.

The crowds that Ting's essay reanimates were not gathered for what Roy Chan describes, via Neil Davidson, as a type of middle class "political agitation in the service of liberty and property"; moreover, with their specifically limited goals, these Hong Kong crowds can be clearly

distinguished from the Occupy Wall Street movement that would occur a few years later. It was precisely because of the limited goals of the Hong Kong protests that a counterdemonstrator could appear within the protesting crowds, demanding the demolition of the old ferry piers the others had gathered to protect. In telling us how the artist, Leung Po-shan, interacted with the lone counterdemonstrator, Ting attempts to answer the same question that Dauncey poses—namely, how to articulate individual dissent from *within* a crowd-collective while remaining part of it. The alertness to such issues in the cases that both Dauncey and Ting examine is a sign of the political energy of the masses. There is a desire to unite for political struggles without creating the kind of monstrous structures oppressive of individual subjectivity, such as those underlying the global capitalist order mentioned by McGrath or the authoritarian regime discussed by Ho.

### **Afterword to the Afterword**

Roy Chan mentions “the countless strikes, riots, [and] work stoppages” taking place at a high frequency in contemporary China. These ought to be the proper subject for crowd studies, their suppressed political significance to be uncovered and their socioeconomic indices to be unraveled. Unfortunately, we have not seen much work done in this important area, although Dauncey and Ting have made valuable contributions in this regard. But politico-economic domination is always accompanied by ideological hegemony; this can be seen clearly from the four papers by Ho, McGrath, Chan, and Yu, which deal with representation or erasure of political crowds in discursive realms. After settling succession problems, the PRC government under the Party’s control launched an open war on political crowds in 2013, arresting Internet activists advocating new citizen movements, accusing them of the chargeable crime of “gathering crowds to disturb public order.” The government has also initiated new laws to criminalize Internet activists by quantifying how many times their online

<sup>5</sup> See, for instance, "China's Crackdown Prompts Outrage Over Boy's Arrest." *New York Times* (Sept. 23, 2013).

postings have been responded to or forwarded (retweeted) by fellow netizens.<sup>5</sup> This collection comes at the right moment, then, speaking out in various voices for political crowds. Let us hope we can make some substantial changes with our scholarly effort to bring bottom-up political crowds back to China's public space.

## Glossary

Chen She	陳涉
<i>Dao De Jing</i>	道德經
Dao fa ziran	道法自然
dazhong	大眾
guomin	國民
minzhong	民眾
qunzhong	群眾
qunti	群體
renmin	人民
renqun	人群
<i>Shiji</i>	史記
Sima Qian	司馬遷
ti tian xing dao	替天行道
tianxia	天下
tianxia you dao	天下有道

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