

Introduction

Revolutionary Transformations in 1950s China

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The history of the People's Republic of China as a field of study has changed beyond recognition over the last quarter-century. Once covered primarily by political scientists and the occasional sociologist, PRC history now is a recognized area of study in the West, with its own e-journals, Facebook groups, and hires in history departments. A generation of superb historians and their graduate students also have emerged, albeit more cautiously, in the PRC itself. Both Chinese and foreign scholars have produced what has amounted to a remarkable explosion of work in the last two decades, much of it in Chinese, some of it in English or German. The combination of increasingly accessible Chinese archives and individuals within China increasingly willing to speak openly about the post-1949 period created a research environment in which it was not long before thoughtfully edited volumes ensued that confounded old understandings and shed new light on specific periods of PRC history.¹ We now have a wide range of monographs and edited volumes that provide new insights into the history of post-1949 China. Since full books invariably take somewhat longer than edited volumes, it wasn't until the early 2010s that a series of monographs on the broad sweep of post-1949 history emerged. Some of the most notable authors of these works include Yang Kuisong, Shen Zhihua, and Zhang Jishun, all of whom offer new insights into such topics as the establishment of the key institutions of the PRC, the implementation of campaigns carried out in the early 1950s, and the urban history of Shanghai.² Felix Wemheuer's new

¹ Early works included Jeremy Brown and Paul Pickowicz, eds., *Dilemmas of Victory: The Early Years of the PRC* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007); Julia C. Strauss, *The History of the PRC 1949–1976* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Joseph Esherick, Paul Pickowicz, and Andrew Walder, *The Chinese Cultural Revolution as History* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006); somewhat later works are Kimberly Ens Manning and Felix Wemheuer, *Eating Bitterness: New Perspectives on China's Great Leap Forward and Famine* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2012).

² Yang Kuisong, ed., *Zhonghua renmin gongheguo jiangou shi yanjiu* (A Study of the History of the Establishment of the PRC), vol. 1 (Nanchang: Jiangxi renmin chubanshe, 2009); Shen Zhihua, *Chuzai shizilukou de xuanze: 1956–1957 nian de Zhongguo* (Decision at the Crossroads: China in 1956–1957) (Guangzhou: Guangdong renmin chubanshe, 2013);

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social history of China focuses on questions of class, gender, ethnicity, and the urban–rural divide, thus analyzing the experiences of a range of social groups under Communist rule – workers, peasants, local cadres, intellectuals, “ethnic minorities,” the old elites, men and women – between 1949 and 1976. Yang Kuisong’s most recent work has a similarly broad sweep that draws on the dramatic social transformations at all levels after the establishment of the PRC in 1949.³

Some of this turn to PRC history revises the conventional received wisdom: work on land reform suggests that it was not nearly as popular or demanded from below as the standard histories suggest.⁴ Daniel Leese’s study provides new insights into the question of how the state has dealt with the injustices of the Mao era between 1976 and 1986.⁵ After a first monograph on the Republican period, Ralph Thaxton built on his access in one village in north China to produce two more incredibly detailed studies that delve into the specifics of how local power holders acquired and maintained their status, how ordinary villagers survived the appalling conditions after the Great Leap Forward, and how they negotiated the assorted depredations of officials thereafter.⁶ Jie Li provides new insights into societal activities which contest the official narratives by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) on Maoist China.⁷ Unofficial histories published in Chinese and translated into English, such as *Tombstone*, have viscerally brought to light the suffering engendered by the mass starvation

Zhang Jishun, *Yuanqu de dushi: 1950 niandai de Shanghai* (A City Displayed: Shanghai in the 1950s) (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2015).

³ Felix Wemheuer, *A Social History of Maoist China: Conflict and Change, 1949–1976* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2019); Yang Kuisong, *Eight Outcasts: Social and Political Marginalization in China under Mao* (Oakland: University of California Press), 2020.

⁴ Luo Pinghan, *Tudi gaige yundongshi* (A History of the Land Reform Movement) (Fuzhou: Fujian renmin chubanshe, 2005); Wang Youming, *Geming yu xiangcun: Jiefang qu tudi gaige yanjiu: 1941–1948. Yi Shandong Liinan xian wei ge’an* (Revolution and the Countryside: Land Reform in Liberated Areas, 1941–1948. A Case Study on Liinan County, Shandong) (Shanghai: Shanghai shehui kexueyuan chubanshe, 2006); Yu Liu, “Why Did It Go So High? Political Mobilization and Agricultural Collectivization in China,” *China Quarterly* 187 (2006): 732–742; Brian De Mare, *Land Wars: The Story of China’s Agrarian Revolution* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2019).

⁵ Daniel Leese, *Maos langer Schatten: Chinas Umgang mit der Vergangenheit* (Mao’s Long Shadow: China’s Association with the Past) (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2021). See also Daniel Leese and Puck Engman, eds., *Victims, Perpetrators, and the Role of Law in Maoist China: A Case Study Approach* (Berlin: DeGruyter Oldenbourg, 2018).

⁶ Ralph Thaxton, *Catastrophe and Contention in Rural China: Mao’s Great Leap Forward Famine and the Origins of Righteous Resistance in Da Fo Village* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); and Ralph Thaxton, *Force and Contention in Contemporary China: Memory and Resistance in the Long Shadow of the Catastrophic Past* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

⁷ Jie Li, *Utopian Ruins: A Memorial Museum of the Mao Era* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2020).

after the Great Leap Forward.⁸ And the Cultural Revolution period has given rise to an entire cottage industry of publication, including memoirs, edited volumes, microhistories, and monographs.⁹

The openness of China in the 2000s and early 2010s also made it possible to engage in telling the story of PRC history from the bottom up. Access to archives, the ability to interview, and the ready availability of materials in flea markets have all contributed to a wave of articles, edited volumes, and monographs of microhistories geared to in-depth analyses of the variety of different local realities and personal fates.¹⁰ Access to individuals willing and able to tell their stories has opened up a whole new level of historical texture and immediacy: Felix Wemheuer's and Wang Ning's studies, for example, draw from personal memories of witnesses and other grassroots' sources such as labor farm archives.¹¹ There are also journals published in China – with and without official publication licenses – with articles based on the oral histories of those who were variably implementers of and witnesses to the great policies unleashed over the course of the Mao years.¹²

⁸ Yang Jisheng, *Tombstone: The Great Chinese Famine, 1958–1962* (London: Penguin Books, 2013).

⁹ Liu Ping, *Wo de Zhongguo meng* (My Chinese Dream) (Beijing: Zhongguo yanshi chubanshe, 2014); Esherick, Pickowicz, and Walder, *The Chinese Cultural Revolution as History*; Roderick MacFarquhar and Michael Schoenhals, *Mao's Last Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006); Hu Ping, *Mao Zedong weishenme hui fadong Wenhua dageming?* (Why Did Mao Zedong Launch the Cultural Revolution?) (Taipei: Yunchen wenhua, 2016); Andrew Walder, *Fractured Rebellion: The Beijing Red Guard Movement* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012); and Andrew Walder, *Agents of disorder: inside China's Cultural Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2019).

¹⁰ Jeremy Brown and Paul G. Pickowicz, eds., *Dilemmas of Victory: The Early Years of the PRC* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010); Dong Guoqiang and Andrew G. Walder, "Factions in a Bureaucratic System: The Origins of Cultural Revolution Conflict in Nanjing," *China Journal* 65 (2011): 1–25; Jeremy Brown and Matthew Johnson, eds., *Maoism at the Grassroots: Everyday Life in China's Era of High Socialism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015); Andrew G. Walder, *Agents of Disorder: Inside China's Cultural Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2019); Yang Jisheng, *The World Turned Upside Down: A History of the Chinese Cultural Revolution* (New York: MacMillan Publishers, 2021).

¹¹ Felix Wemheuer, *Steinmüden: Ländliche Erinnerungen und staatliche Vergangenheitsbewältigung der "Großen Sprung"-Hungersnot in der chinesische Provinz Henan* (Stone Noodles: Rural and Official Memories of the Great Leap Famine in the Chinese Province Henan) (Vienna: Peter Lang, 2007); Manning and Wemheuer, *Eating Bitterness. Wang Ning, Banished to the Great Northern Wilderness: Political Exile and Re-education in Mao's China* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2017).

¹² Before 2016 the history magazine *Yanhuang Chunqiu* contained countless critical articles about the campaigns of the 1950s and the Cultural Revolution; the magazine *Bashan Yeyu* (Night Rains on Mount Ba), about the Anti-Rightist Campaign (1957–1958), was published by former rightists and their relatives. See <http://prchistory.org/night-rains-on-mount-ba>.

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With this wealth of new sources and different perspectives, scholars have also begun to integrate PRC history with other historical subfields in two distinct ways. First, historians whose early work was on the Republican period in such distinct areas as gender history and environmental history have definitively crossed the historical divide of 1949 and extended their work into the post-1949 era.¹³ Second, the collapse of the Marxist–Leninist regimes of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, in combination with a generation of distance from the politics and personalities of the pre-1989 period, has led to an outpouring of work in English and Chinese on Cold War history, reconsideration of the wider global socialist order of which China was a part, and comparative and transnational work on East Asia as a region.¹⁴

Our volume makes two contributions to the field of PRC studies. First, it provides a more nuanced consideration of the foundational decade of the PRC by integrating two aspects that are usually considered separately: the relatively “happy” 1949–1956 period and the relatively “unhappy” period of 1957 and after; second, it considers the different scales at which history was articulated, from the systems level of bipolarism to the most local articulations of how individuals functioned within socialism.

With such a broad range of work already done on PRC history, it is surprising that until now there has been no overall consideration of the 1950s as the foundational decade of the PRC. The decade of the 1950s reveals, in all its contradictions, the ways in which the young PRC

¹³ See Gail Hershatter, *The Gender of Memory: Rural Women and China’s Collective Past* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), which is based on some eighty oral histories of rural women in Shaanxi; Micah Muscalino, “‘Water Has Aroused the Girls’ Hearts’: Gendering Water and Soil Conservation in 1950s China,” *Past & Present* (forthcoming 2021); and Micah Muscaliano, “The Contradictions of Conservation: Fighting Erosion in Mao-Era China, 1953–66,” *Environmental History*, April 2020: 237–62.

¹⁴ Odd Arne Westad, *Cold War and Revolution: Soviet–American Rivalry and the Origins of Chinese Civil War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993); Masuda Hajimu, *Cold War Crucible: The Korean Conflict and the Postwar World* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2015); Shen Zhihua and Xia Yafeng, *A Misunderstood Friendship: Mao Zedong, Kim Il-sung, and Sino-North Korean Relations, 1949–1976* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018); Zhihua Shen and Yafeng Xia, *Mao and the Sino-Soviet Partnership 1945–1959: A New History* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2015); Zhihua Shen and Danhui Li, *After Learning to One Side: China and Its Allies in the Cold War* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011); Lorenz M. Luethi, *Cold Wars: Asia, the Middle East, Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020); Harry Verhoeven, ed., *Marx and Lenin in Africa and Asia: Socialism(s) and Socialist Legacies*, special issue of *Third World Quarterly* 42, no. 3 (2021); Kristen Looney, *Mobilizing for Development: The Modernization of Rural East Asia* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2020); and Sheena Chestnut Greitens, *Dictators and Their Secret Police: Coercive Institutions and State Violence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

was a period of revolutionary transformations that were replete simultaneously with progressive enthusiasm and hope and with cruelty and waste. The progressivism and the cruelty both were inherent to the fundamental processes of revolutionary transformations, and were in clear evidence from the beginning, even as the ways in which we assess that mix continue to be debated today. The 1950s were indeed a foundational *and* a “swing” decade that began with optimism and ended in mass starvation. Attention needs to be paid to both the foundation and the swing. Insofar as the PRC still has a master history, it agrees on the importance of the early to mid-1950s as a positive period of high legitimacy and significant regime accomplishment. In this reckoning, the young PRC was enormously successful both externally and internally between 1949 and 1956. Externally, it fought the world’s then only superpower to a standstill in Korea, decisively reversing a century of military weakness and international humiliation. It also enjoyed high prestige in the developing world and was an important diplomatic presence both in Bandung for the inauguration of the nonaligned movement and in Geneva for the Geneva Accords of 1954. Domestically it tackled long-standing social problems (prostitution, opium addiction, mass unemployment), stabilized the economy by bringing hyperinflation under control, implemented such key revolutionary programs as land reform and the New Marriage Law, established the basic institutions of socialism (the planned economy, the work unit, the unified purchase and sale of grain), and managed to collectivize agriculture and nationalize urban enterprises without the violent resistance that had been so characteristic of collectivization in the Soviet Union. These processes of revolutionary transformation, and their putative successes, are inextricably linked with a wider narrative of how revolutionary China, and its people, rightfully “stood up” with socialism under the leadership of the CCP. Official histories do acknowledge that, after 1956, things went pear-shaped: starting with the Anti-Rightist campaign of 1957, worsening with the Great Leap Forward, and ultimately culminating in the ten years of chaos of the Cultural Revolution.¹⁵ But there is little in the literature, particularly in the official literature, that integrates the “enthusiastic” early to mid-1950s with the “deeply tragic” post-1956 period of escalating tensions with the Soviet Union, domestic witch hunts, out-of-control campaigns, utopianism gone wrong, and mass starvation after the Great Leap Forward.

¹⁵ “Resolution on Certain Questions in the History of Our Party since the Founding of the People’s Republic of China,” June 27, 1981, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, trans. *Beijing Review* 24, no. 27 (July 6, 1981): 10–39, at <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/121344>.

Because most of the studies published on the 1950s only look at one period (the early years of the People's Republic or the later catastrophes such as the Great Leap Forward), one campaign, one locale, or one sector, there is a disconnect that runs through much of the literature that this volume seeks to rectify. Most of our chapters, even if they focus only on one period, locale, or sector, demonstrate how deeply connected the happier early 1950s were with the unhappier late 1950s.

What emerges is not simply a China, dominated by the CCP or its great leaders, but diversity on all levels and scales in how socialism was enacted and experienced. But this does not mean that we can forgo the CCP entirely. Mao's and the Party's vision of the world and their goals continued to set the conditions and agenda of the 1950s. Whereas Mao and his party were once seen as great (as, for instance, in Li Rui's portrait of the young Mao) for their ability to muster power in the service of truth, the leadership of the CCP in this volume comes across as a distant, tragic hero forced by circumstances to place power ahead of truth. Ambitious and uncompromising, for the quarter-century before 1949 the CCP had fought from a position of disadvantage and uncertainty and won pre-eminence by taking enormous chances. For better, and also for worse, this *Weltanschauung* continued to shape choices throughout the foundational 1950s.

We also highlight the ways in which the unevenness of Party control led to discrepancies all across China, resulting in differences between different scales, from region to region and between the center and the locale. The lofty-sounding rhetoric of the "Resist America/Aid Korea" campaign may well have engendered mass rallies in urban China, but it did not resonate with the peasants in the north China countryside when it came to the recruitment of village youths to serve in the military. Basic expectations were often broken: Korean War POWs (prisoners of war) went home by routes of contingency, to circumstances beyond promises or logic. "Model woman worker" status did not guarantee any of the honored individuals a career of correctness with the people. Meanwhile, local cadres had agendas and priorities of their own. Local people deployed Party-sanctioned quasi-religious rhetoric in fights over economic gains. Provincial cadres overseeing coal projects bent world news to promote work unit objectives through the publication of leaflets. A growing number of people – from a multitude of subject positions inscribed by the Party – learned to play their parts in a master script that was expressly designed to privilege some over others.

When we turn to a global scale, it is clear that the new government faced equally daunting challenges such as a Western trade embargo and international isolation. In principle, the government articulated that it

would rather perish than accept a position of subjugation. At the same time, the CCP demonstrated impressive skills and foresight with regard to the exploitation of USA–USSR strategic conflicts for China’s own gains. It seemed, for instance, to come out on top of a Korean War in which its soldiers were sacrificed in “human-wave” tactics, and in Bandung it gained respect by claiming to represent the Third World. But in practice, the new government was also frequently not experienced enough to effectively handle international affairs. PRC foreign policies, personally directed by Mao, appeared to be improvised and reactive. China’s international thinking fused elements of national interest and socialist brotherhood. On matters of territoriality or nationality, it continued to retain residues of Qing imperial assumptions about the relationships between the suzerain and tributary states. For instance, in Xinjiang or Tibet, the CCP continued without hesitation the nationalist policies of previous governments and without mercy enforced Chinese rule over non-Han Chinese ethnic groups.

China in the 1950s was an embattled country fighting for Mao’s vision of socialism, but this vision was replete with cross-cutting imperatives and irreconcilable internal tensions. Coastal cities in general – and Shanghai in particular – were understood as sites of corruption to be extirpated even as they were admired and needed for their high level of industrialization and economic productivity. The CCP both needed an extensive government bureaucracy to implement revolutionary programs and establish a planned economy, and deeply mistrusted all forms of hierarchical authority. The government implemented campaigns such as the Three Antis, the Four Cleanups, and the Cultural Revolution for the rectification and continued revolutionary purity of the CCP, but insisted that this be done through maintaining “close links to the people.” “The people” were imagined to be naturally revolutionary. Many urbanites indeed were, but there were also many groups that were hesitant or defiant. According to the Party, these “elements” needed to be either educated or, *pour encourager les autres*, made an example of and repressed. The 1950s, in short, was a decade of many challenges and much uncertainty. The PRC was able, by and large, to stabilize its control as a new regime. The CCP leadership continued, however, to see enemies and agents of subversion everywhere. The government was eager, by 1956, to declare the triumph of socialism in China, and, by its own lights, it had good reason to do so. But the very methods that led to its successes also sowed the seeds of larger, and eventually catastrophic, consequences. Powerful as the Central Committee of the CCP had become, power at the top, did not protect the center from the systemic falsification of information (thanks to the socialization of the cadres through rectification campaigns)

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coming up from the bottom. And, more prosaically, the government's drive to establish control led either to the abandonment of its earlier principles or to the imposition of standard categories, which then led to profound suffering and waste.

Many of our chapters detail ways in which the government's mania for uniform classification and direct control led to policies that diverged sharply from its own revolutionary rhetoric on such themes as gender equality and self-reliance (Murray and Serrano, Jing), that dispersed the long-term unemployed and the undesirable from big cities on the specious ground that they were really peasants (Ruan), or that imposed ill-conceived class categories on people in order to implement a land reform that was, contrary to regime proclamations, not particularly popular or desired from below (Strauss). Others point to the sheer difficulty of implementing the ideals of the revolution in the face of either technical realities (Belogurova) or the messily unreconstructed former cultural elites that the regime wanted to reform (Zhang). Here some of the smaller details in these chapters are especially telling. Belogurova illustrates how, even at the height of Sino-Soviet technical co-operation in the early to mid-1950s, Chinese technicians were reluctant to hand over the survey information on coal deposits that could have helped Soviet technicians devise the most appropriate technology transfer. Zhang draws out the frustration of the committed Party cadre at the rapidity with which the CCP's cultural establishment not only was willing to accommodate and absorb decidedly non-revolutionary, if not outright decadent, pre-1949 film stars, but also stored up a world of trouble for exactly those stars when the campaigns of the later 1950s blew up. The unhappy late 1950s did not emerge suddenly out of nowhere; the very elements that gave rise to them were in evidence from very early in the history of the PRC. But unless one were of a bad class (e.g., landlords or local bullies), or were otherwise marginalized (female revolutionary fighters far away from Beijing, the urban unemployed), the sharper edges of the revolution were kept in check, only appearing in full force once the visible enemies (landlords, Guomindang holdovers, capitalists, and unreliable intellectuals) had been vanquished and the key institutions of socialism fully established.

The picture of the PRC in the 1950s that emerges from our volume is thus one of unfulfilled promises and departures from the ideals of socialism at the micro level: from the local cadres who didn't ensure clean toilets to the tough female revolutionaries in Hainan who, once the revolution was won, were told to go home and bear children, to the elite swimmer who, having bought into the opportunity and promise of a career in New China, ended up quietly retiring to the Netherlands. In

one way or another, all of our chapters illustrate in ways large and small that Chinese socialism under Mao didn't quite work out the way things were supposed to. Perhaps this isn't surprising. China's scale, its poverty, and its recent history of civil war and foreign invasion laid down conditions that any government would have struggled with. But in addition to these structural challenges, the goal of establishing a revolutionary state and implementing revolutionary programs aimed at nothing less than the total transformation of society according to Marxist–Leninist principles was bound to run up against additional difficulties: how to determine friend from enemy, how to balance the need for a developed bureaucracy to manage a planned economy with the revolutionary impetus for continued close links to the people, and how to maintain revolutionary élan once the usual suspects had been rounded up and dispatched after 1953. It is clear that the leadership of the CCP deserved a fair share of the blame for how things unfolded in the later 1950s and after. But it is far from certain that the Party's foibles (and its inability to control a larger domestic and international context) prove that socialism was doomed to fail in China – or that socialism was not the correct path to follow. Certainly, there were many within the CCP who were deeply committed to implementing what they understood to be socialism, and there were many more, likely the vast majority of the population of the PRC, who went along with these principles either because they were themselves convinced, because socialism gave them opportunities to rise in their careers or make claims on the state, or, more prosaically, because they had no choice in the matter.

Beyond the internal complexities of the 1950s, there was the larger issue of space in which the revolution was implemented. History – for the PRC as for anywhere – simultaneously plays out at different scales. Depending on sources, the research question, and personal bent, researchers tend to focus on very different slices of spatial reality. International theorists focus on international systems, those interested in state formation focus on the level of the central nation-state, those concerned with the emergence of social movements focus on the municipality or locality, those working on rural history or peasant resistance focus on the sub-county or village, and so on. Most of the historiography on the history of the PRC privileges the notion of China as a sovereign nation-state, and even many of the local studies we have revolve around central–local issues – either how central-government directives were implemented or deflected by local governments, or how individuals in particular localities experienced and adapted to the impact of those directives. Clearly, trends and events occurring at particular spatial scales reverberated well beyond their immediate domain. Most obviously, the rising tensions in Korea were both a cause and a consequence of

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deepening Cold War in a bipolar world and had a dramatic impact on China's central government (what it could reasonably expect to push through in terms of land reform and anti-counterrevolutionary campaigns), and on a range of local governments, from those who were net suppliers of soldiers (e.g., Yunnan) to those who were net recipients of Korean War veterans (e.g., villages in north China).¹⁶ But at present, there is still vanishingly little that integrates the different spatial levels in which the revolutionary PRC operated in its first decade.

For these reasons, we explicitly cover different scales of revolutionary transformation, from the most systemic of the macro to the smallest of the micro. Our first scale encompasses the global and the transnational. The bipolar global system so accurately sketched out by Weigelin-Schwiedrzik encompassed not only triangles and balancing but also China's participation in two forms of transnationalism: the socialist ecumenical and the regional. The socialist world of the 1950s was a transnational system characterized by a commitment to principles of world socialism and fraternal assistance (Belogurova on coal, Shuman on transnational sport, and Johnson on transnational film in the East Asian and Southeast Asian region). But Shuman and Johnson's chapters on sport and film also highlight how China interacted at two different transnational levels simultaneously: in a wider socialist ecumene, with an "inner" geography of sinophone and ethnic closeness in a quite different regional system.

Our next scale engages directly with the problems faced by the centralizing party-state as it attempted to grapple with a very significant problem of domestic governance: how to revolutionize society when its cadres were spread thin over a vast area inherited from a large agrarian empire. Although the subject matter is very different for each, Strauss on shifting modalities of bureaucracy and campaign, Murray on the central party-state's insistence that women fighters in Hainan cede their positions to cadres sent down from the center, and Ruan on urban government bureaucratic classification of people it wanted to offload as "peasants" all point to the larger problem of the difficulty of governing a territory that was large, diverse, and resource-short. One shortcut was through posting

¹⁶ Jeremy Brown, "From Resisting Communists to Resisting America: Civil War and Korean War in Southwest China, 1950–51," in Jeremy Brown and Paul Pickowicz, eds., *Dilemmas of Victory: The Early Years of the People's Republic of China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 105–129; Thaxton, *Catastrophe and Contention in Rural China*; Ralph Thaxton, *Salt of the Earth: The Political Origins of Peasant Protest and Communist Revolution in China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); David Cheng Chan, *The Hijacked War: The Story of Chinese POWs in the Korean War* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2020); Covell F. Meyskens, *Mao's Third Front: The Militarization of Cold War China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020).