

## Revolutionary Transformations

Using firsthand material from Chinese archives that are no longer open to researchers, and bringing together a leading team of international scholars, this volume is a major contribution to the study of the People's Republic of China. Calling into question existing narratives on the foundational decade of the PRC, these essays present a nuanced consideration of China in the 1950s by integrating two periods that are often considered separately: the relatively “happy” years 1949–1956 and the relatively “unhappy” years from 1957 onwards. Exploring the challenges faced in constructing socialism, the transnational context, and early modes of PRC governance, the contributors highlight the ways in which China was shaped by diversity on all levels and scales in how socialism was enacted and experienced. These essays clearly demonstrate how the unevenness of Party control created discrepancies and variations between different regions and between the center and the locale.

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Frontmatter  
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# Revolutionary Transformations

## *The People's Republic of China in the 1950s*

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The last decade has witnessed an explosion of work on China in the 1950s, prompting many to begin to rethink the history of that decade. In order to carry the conversation further, Anja and Klaus brought together more than twenty colleagues from China, Europe, and the USA to call into question existing narratives on the foundational decade of the PRC. To this end, the Volkswagen Foundation generously supported two workshops entitled “Rethinking 1950s China: New Materials, New Challenges, New Approaches” in Berlin in August 2017 and Hannover in October 2018. We were overwhelmed by the abundance of new ideas and approaches, much of which was based on archival material collected in the 2000s and early 2010s, when it was still possible to get access to Chinese archives. The volume that has emerged from these meetings is truly a collective project based on the exchanges, debates, and perspectives of all our participants. We would like to take this opportunity to thank our participants, Felix Boecking, Feng Xiaocai, Fabio Lanza, Daniel Leese, Liu Jianping, Liu Yajuan, Liu Yanwen, Lu Tian, Nicolas Schillinger, Glenn Tiffert, Stig Thøgersen, Martin Wagner, Felix Wemheuer, Xiao Yanzhong, Xu Xilin, Yang Kuisong, and Zhou Shuxian.

As editors, our most difficult task was in bringing all these new research approaches together: how to tell the story of 1950s China? After intensive and fruitful discussions, at meetings at UCLA and in La Quinta in October 2019, we decided that we wanted to tell the story of 1950s China by integrating aspects that are usually considered separately: (1) the relatively “happy” 1949–1956 period and the relatively “unhappy” period of 1957 and after, and (2) 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.

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