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by

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**BEYOND REPAIR: STATE-SOCIETY RELATIONS IN THE AFTERMATH
OF THE 2008 WENCHUAN EARTHQUAKE**

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Dedication

For Phillip and Faustina

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Christian Phillip Sorace, PhD

The University of Texas at Austin, 2014

Supervisor: Robert Moser

Co-supervisor: William Hurst

My dissertation offers insight into the political epistemology of the Chinese Communist Party and state on the basis of their activities during the post-2008 Wenchuan earthquake reconstruction. By “political epistemology,” I mean how the Party thinks about the nature of politics, including but not limited to the role of the state in the economy. An important facet of this approach is taking seriously the CCP’s distinctive manner of thinking, writing, and talking about politics that is too often dismissed as empty jargon that means little in post-Mao China.

I show how a Maoist conception of politics remains at the bedrock of how the CCP understands its own political identity and actions. Certainly, many of the salient features of Maoism have been discarded, such as the emphasis on class struggle, continuous revolution, and the role of the masses in political movements. Despite these trends toward de-politicization and technocracy, the Party’s confidence in the rationality of its planning apparatus and in its ability to mobilize politically to achieve the ends of

market construction and biopolitical social transformation constitutes what I call *Maoist neo-developmentalism*.

Each of my empirical case chapters examines a localized combination of post-disaster reconstruction with a national strategy for long-term, “great leap” development. Thus, each chapter traces how the Party’s plans to capitalize the countryside - by way of urbanization, tourism, and ecology – have become stuck in transitional processes. The spectacular market transitions and transformations envisioned by Party leaders became cycles of state investment in local economies that only function by virtue of continued state involvement. The Party’s massive expenditures of maintaining the appearance of success, however, generated local resentment at perceived waste, indifference, and corruption. Each case chapter shows evidence not so much of social resistance to the state (although of course that happened, too) but an intimate negotiation between state and society of high expectations, mutual recriminations, and frustrations. I argue that these “perforations” deep within the tissue of the state-society relationship only make sense when viewed from the context of a Maoist social contract in which the Party’s legitimacy depends on its perceived ability to serve the people.

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Introduction: Ambitions

The year 2008 was a period of successive crises for the Chinese government. As China was preparing for the Beijing Olympics in August, the crown jewel of state power and legitimacy, the 2008 global financial crisis was undermining China's export-led economic model by depressing demand for Chinese goods. During deep winter, severe snow storms were responsible for at least 129 deaths; on March 14th, Tibetan rioters in Lhasa smashed, set fire to and looted businesses owned by Han Chinese;¹ on April 28th a train crashed in Shandong Province killing 72 passengers; weeks later on May 12th, the Great Wenchuan Earthquake 汶川特大地震 devastated a large area of northeastern Sichuan and surrounding provinces, with an estimated death toll of 69,227 people and 17,923 people missing.

Party leaders were palpably worried that these events would be associated in the public imagination as a crisis of political legitimacy.² One internal Party journal argued

¹ Sichuan's Aba 阿坝 Prefecture, which includes Wenchuan County and numerous other disaster localities, is home to a sizable Tibetan population. On April 30, 2008, Wenchuan County Party Secretary Wang Bin 王斌 reported in a speech that "After the '3.14' Lhasa incident, parts of Aba successively experienced smashing, looting, and arson. Although Wenchuan has not yet experienced this, we must increase stability maintenance operations." The Party was extremely worried about diffusion of Tibetan unrest throughout Sichuan, Gansu, and Qinghai provinces. Wang Bin, "Zai quanxian yi jidu jingji xingshi fenxi huishang de jianghua" (Speech at Conference for Wenchuan County's First Quarter Economy Analysis), Di 6 qi, zong di 35 qi (April 30, 2008). Interesting to note is how discussion of stability maintenance occurs in a speech devoted to political economy. An important claim of this dissertation is that our academic sub-genres do not map onto the way the Party views topics relationally.

² "The long-held Confucian view, which dates back to the Chinese Classics, that disasters were Heaven's way of warning the ruler that he had offended Heaven by failing to act as a benevolent father and mother of the people, and should change course or risk losing the mandate to rule." The Party rejects the mandate of heaven (*tianming* 天明) as *superstition* but was clearly worried that the people have not stopped believing in it. Kathryn Jean Edgerton-Tarpley, "From 'Nourish

that such a constellation of disasters makes it “very easy for public opinion to develop among the people that it is an inauspicious year” (*liu nian bu li* 流年不利).³ The article warned that “conspiracies to interfere (*ganrao* 干扰的图谋) with the Beijing Olympics”⁴ could result in a cascade effect of mass incidences threatening Party legitimacy.

The reconstruction of post-earthquake Sichuan provided the Party and state with an opportunity to address two of the above-mentioned challenges concurrently. A munificent display of care for the disaster masses would help restore the Party’s shaken credibility and socialist legitimacy; the reconstruction also gave the Party an opportunity to accelerate national-level experiments for reforming China’s withering rural economy and expand domestic consumption. The Party was soberly clear that the post-Sichuan earthquake reconstruction was no ‘ordinary’ post-disaster context, but a window into the mechanisms of China’s political economic system and state-society relations. The reconstruction was a test of the state’s plans for macro-economic transformations, ability to guide resources and develop markets, management of social contradictions, and tactics for transforming rural residents into grateful, urban consumers. The state’s perspective is aptly summarized in an internal publication:

Ultimately, [the reconstruction] will be used to evaluate the sustainability of China’s current political, economic and social system; it will be used to verify and measure the governing capacity of the Communist Party and the leadership ability of the social elite. The process of post-disaster reconstruction is like a prism, reflecting both the superior advantages and profound abuses of China’s current political system... Everyone expects the earthquake area to become a model

the People’ to ‘Sacrifice for the Nation’ Changing Responses to Disaster in Late Imperial and Modern China,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* (2014), p. 5. Also see, Elizabeth J. Perry, *Challenging the Mandate of Heaven: Social Protest and State Power in China* (New York, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2001).

³ Zhongguo shekeyuan xinwen yu chuanbo yanjiusuo (The Chinese Academy of Social Sciences News and Broadcast Research Institute), “Jiji zuo hao kangzhen jiuzai yuqing yindao gongzuo” (Actively Engage in Anti-Earthquake Disaster Relief Public Sentiment Guidance Work), *Lingdao Canyue* (Leadership Reference) Vol. 15, No. 456 (May 25, 2008), pp. 12-14. Internal publication.

⁴ Ibid., p. 12.

example for the future of China's economic, social, cultural, political and ecological construction.⁵

Taking its cue from the Party's view of the post-earthquake reconstruction as a prism of China's political system and a model example of future development, what can we learn from the reconstruction about the Party's approach to political economy and its strategies for governing society?

The main argument of this dissertation is that the Party relies on a Maoist understanding of politics and economic development to accomplish the objectives of market construction and social management. The Party's Maoist political epistemology shaped its strategy of *combining* and *accelerating* economic development and post-disaster reconstruction. The goal of completing the reconstruction and transforming the Sichuan countryside in under two years was achieved – but at the costs of failing to engineer long-term, sustainable economic growth and a deterioration of state-society relations. This dissertation offers a new methodology for interpreting the Party's political discourse in order to explain, “how it is that while China has quite strong state capacity, the state is unable to overcome its crisis of legitimacy?”⁶

LISTEN TO THE PARTY!

During my eighteen months of fieldwork from January 2012-August 2013 in over five municipalities, seven county-level seats, six townships, and seven villages affected by Sichuan's 2008 earthquake,⁷ I conducted ethnographic observations, open-ended

⁵ Su Dongbo, “Zhan zai guojia yu shehui chongjian de gaodushang yong gaige kaifang siwei zhidao zaihou chongjian” (From a Birds-eye Perspective on State and Society Reconstruction: Using Reform and Opening Thinking to Guide Post-Disaster Reconstruction), *Gaige neican jueceban* (Reform Decision Making) vol. 19 (2008), p. 23. Internal Publication.

⁶ Wang Hui, “Contradiction, Systemic Crisis and Direction for Change – An interview with Wang Hui,” *China Left Review*, No. 5 (2012), at <http://chinaleftreview.org/?p=830>

⁷ My research sites include: Chengdu 成都 Municipality, Dujiangyan 都江堰 Municipality, Mianyang 绵阳 Municipality, Wenchuan 汶川 County Seat, Yingxiu 映秀 Township, A'Er

interviews with over one hundred villagers, government officials, NGO leaders, and scholars, and read of over one thousand pages of internal Party reports. Analyzing official propaganda, critical internal reports, and interview transcripts, it struck me that our political science vocabulary inadequately captures the complexities and nuances of the CCP's understanding of politics, its responsibility to society, assessment of its ability to engineer economic development, faith in its capacity to perform miracles, and anxiety over its own shortcomings and negative internal tendencies.⁸ This does not mean that I discard all traditional categories – but they must be re-contextualized, rendered more capacious, and exposed to different political understandings.⁹

Given the academic reflex to empathize with society against the state (and an even more deeply engrained penchant to distrust the propaganda of authoritarian states),¹⁰ to

阿尔 Village, Caopo 草坡 Township, Jinbo 金波 Village, Qingchuan 青川 County Seat, Hongguan 红光 Township, Mianzhu 绵竹 Municipality, Hanwang 汉王 Township, Qingping 清平 Township, Beichuan 北川 County, Shuixiu 水秀 Village, Mao 茂 County Seat, Taiping 太平 Township, Lianghekou 两河口 Village, Niushikou Village, Li 理 County, An 安 County, Xiaoba 小坝 Township, Pi 郫 County, and finally Qinghai 青海 Province, Yushu 玉树 (where an earthquake occurred on April 14, 2010).

⁸ Elizabeth Perry's thought-provoking question from twenty years ago remains salient today. "One wonders whether more subtle - and perhaps less Eurocentric conceptual distinctions - are not required to make sense of this complex reform process." Elizabeth J. Perry, "Trends in the Study of Chinese Politics," *The China Quarterly*, No. 139 (September 1994), p. 706. An inspiration for this study is also Vivienne Shue's "social intertexture" approach. Vivienne Shue, *The Reach of the State: Sketches of the Chinese Body Politic* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990).

⁹ I am *not* proposing that China is foreign to our political science concepts, only that we should not prematurely believe that "China is more familiar than it is." Kevin O'Brien, "Studying Chinese Politics in an Age of Specialization," *Journal of Contemporary China*, 20/71 (2011), p. 541. Studying China should not be a "dark zone" for comparative political science, but rather, a generative opportunity thinking about politics comparatively. The term "dark zone" comes from Richard Snyder, "Beyond Electoral Authoritarianism: The Spectrum of Nondemocratic Regimes," in Andreas Schedler, ed., *Electoral Authoritarianism: The Dynamics of Unfree Competition* (Boulder, Co: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2006), p. 294.

¹⁰ The pervasive attitude of dismissal toward the discourses of authoritarian states is encapsulated by Robert Dahl's statement that, "Even the most repressive dictatorships usually pay some lip service to the legitimate right of the people to participate in the government."

say that the Communist Party should not be taken seriously as a reliable guide to understanding the reconstruction is a facile conclusion. “It has now become a ‘habit of the heart’ among China scholars to reject Maoism and its successor ideologies (Deng Xiaoping Theory, the ‘Three Represents’ and the ‘harmonious society’) as blatant lies that merely serve to coat the CCP’s rule in a thin veneer of legitimacy, rather than as serious attempts to define socialism or the CCP’s vision.”¹¹ My theoretical framework and methodological approach argues (perhaps somewhat counter-intuitively) that studying Communist Party discourse is the best way to understand the reconstruction. I clearly do not mean that we must accept its idealized self-representations at face value. But the Communist Party’s self-understanding contains the tools to explain the political processes and dynamics that caused state-society relations to deteriorate.

How does one access the collective self-understanding of the world’s largest political party with an estimated membership of 82.606 million members, slightly larger than the entire German population?¹² The CCP publishes volumes of self-reflexive theoretical inquiry, planning documents, transcripts of leadership speeches, internal bureaucratic work reports, research reports on empirical problems and strategies for handling them, in addition to propaganda for external consumption. These documents reveal different dimensions of the CCP’s self-understanding and need to be sorted selectively and read strategically based on research objectives. Planning documents are wonderful guides for accessing the Party’s vision for social and economic transformation and occasionally contain passages that hint at challenges to their viability; research and

Robert Dahl, *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1972), p. 5.

¹¹ Frank N. Pieke, *The Good Communist: Elite Training and State Building in Today’s China* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press 2009), p. 4

¹² The Communist Party of China, China Information and Sources, at <http://www.chinatoday.com/org/cpc/>

work reports from Party schools, think tanks, and leadership small groups internally circulated within the organization (*neibu ziliao* 内部资料) are excellent sources of the Party's critical self-diagnosis that reveal what the Party is worrying about, ranging from negative internal tendencies (often referred to as 'pathologies' *bing* 病) in need of reform, economic obstacles, and social instability. Even propaganda should not be dismissed as vacuous rhetoric; in Mandarin, the term translated as propaganda (*xuanchuan* 宣传) has a positive connotation of moral and pedagogical dissemination.¹³ Propaganda's value lies in its staging of the Party's desired self-representation. Party leaders typically analyze how their actions positively or negatively affect the "Party image" (*dang xingxiang* 党形象).¹⁴

In light of the increasingly available textual sources and archives in China,¹⁵ there is no practical reason, as there might have been in the past, inhibiting western scholars from engaging in critical discursive analyses. Precisely because the Chinese Communist Party produces an "outpouring of written material,"¹⁶ China is an optimal case for the application of interpretive methodology.

¹³ As Mary Ann O'Donnell helpfully points out, the term 'propaganda' is a problematic translation of the Chinese 宣传: "*Xuanchuan* is frequently mistranslated as propaganda, which smuggles in the Western cosmological value of keeping the aesthetic separate from other social spheres. In contrast, *xuanchuan* has positive connotations, indexing the high moral value of disseminating political and cultural representations." Mary Ann O'Donnell, "Attracting the World's Attention: The Cultural Supplement in Shenzhen Municipality," *positions: east asia cultures critique*, Vol. 14 (spring 2006), p. 78.

¹⁴ Xi Jinping. "Lingdao ganbu rerenzhengzhen xuexie, laolaoshishi zuoren, ganganjingjing ganshi" (Leading Cadres Must Earnestly Study, Honestly Behave with Integrity, and Cleanly Work), *Zhonggong zhongyang dangxiao baogao xuan* (*Central Party School Selected Reports*), Vol. 8 (2008). Internal publication.

¹⁵ Allen Carlson, Mary E. Gallagher, and Melanie Manion, "Introduction," in Allen Carlson, Mary E. Gallagher, Kenneth Lieberthal, and Melanie Manion, eds., *Contemporary Chinese Politics: New Sources, Methods, and Field Strategies* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 2-4.

¹⁶ Franz Schurmann, *Ideology and Organization in Communist China* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1968), p. 20.

In addition, Communist stylistics readily lends itself to semiotic analysis. Paying attention to questions of style, rhetoric, tropes, metaphors, and references are not secondary aesthetic exercises – but crucial points of entry into the Party’s epistemology. The Party’s distinctive and relatively homogenous discursive style allows for the identification of recurrent themes, logics, and anxieties. Despite the monolithic façade presented in propaganda, however, the Party does not speak in one voice.¹⁷ It is necessary to be attentive to how internal Party debates, divisions, and contradictions appear within Party discourse.

A benefit of my interpretive approach is that it connects “topical specialization” to “larger questions about how the political system operates.”¹⁸ My research is thus simultaneously about the mechanisms, processes and outcomes of the post-Wenchuan earthquake reconstruction and about the epistemologies, strategies, and governance techniques of the regime.

My methodology extends the comparative politics literature on “discursive institutionalism” to authoritarian contexts. At the forefront of this ideational turn is Vivien Schmidt’s excellent work on the influence of discourse on political economy and welfare reform in liberal democratic states.¹⁹ Schmidt divides understanding into three different levels of generality: policies, programs, and the worldview underlying them. The first level is the specific policies proposed by political actors. The second level is the programmatic ideas shaping policy formulation.

¹⁷ Shue, *The Reach of the State*, p. 17.

¹⁸ O’Brien, “Studying Chinese Politics,” p. 535.

¹⁹ Vivien A. Schmidt, “Putting the Political Back into Political Economy by Bringing the State Back in Yet Again,” *World Politics* Vol. 61, No. 3 (July 2009), 516-546; Schmidt, “Does Discourse Matter in the Politics of Welfare State Adjustment,” *Comparative Political Studies*, Vol. 35, No. 2 (March 2002), 168-193.

These programmatic ideas are at a more basic level than the policy ideas because they define the problems to be solved by such policies; the issues to be considered; the goals to be achieved; the norms, methods and instruments to be applied; and the ideals that frame the more immediate policy ideas to solve any given problem.

The third level is the “worldviews that undergird the policies and programs with organizing ideas, values, and principles of knowledge and society.”²⁰ This level is similar to Foucault’s description of governmental rationalities as “grids for the perception and evaluation of things.”²¹ Andreas Glaeser compellingly summarizes the advantages of this approach. “To analyze the success and failure of politics, it is indispensable to study how politicians imagine the social world, how they understand its operations, and how they therefore understand their possibilities of intervention.”²²

Political understandings delimit the options available for political actors in a given situation. They not only explain the underlying logics, diagnoses, and prescriptions for governing, but also provide an invaluable critical tool for studying policy outcomes. Political projects often fail as a result of incongruence between understandings and reality²³

²⁰ Vivien A. Schmidt, “Discursive Institutionalism: The Explanatory Power of Ideas and Discourse,” *Annual Review of Political Science*, 11 (2008), p. 306.

²¹ Michel Foucault, “Questions of Method,” in G. Burchell, C. Gordon and P. Miller, eds., *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 81-82.

²² Andreas Glaeser, *Political Epistemics: The Secret Police, the Opposition, and the End of East German Socialism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 52.

²³ This was essentially the point of James Scott’s influential book *Seeing like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*. Perhaps not coincidentally, four unrelated political science professors in Sichuan Province suggested to me that the post-Wenchuan earthquake is a textbook example of Scott’s argument (it is also interesting to note that the Chinese translator of Scott’s book wrote a commentary that stressed the indispensability of local knowledge and grassroots participation for the reconstruction to succeed). Wang Xiaoyi, “Duiyu jinxing Wenchuan dizhen zaiqu shehui wangluo huifu chongjian yu pinggu wenti de jianyi,” (Regarding implementing social network restoration and reconstruction in the post-Wenchuan earthquake disaster areas: evaluation of problems and suggestions), *Zhongguo shehuixue wang* (*China Sociology Web*), (July 25, 2008) at http://e-sociology.cass.cn/pub/shxw/shgz/shgz47/t20080725_17900.htm

Political understandings therefore can be self-defeating and “actually undermine power rather than further it.”²⁴

For example, after the 2010 earthquake in Qinghai 青海 Province, Yushu 玉树 whose population is predominantly Tibetan, the Party curtailed the initially influential role of monks in the relief effort and assumed single-handed control over the reconstruction process, relegating monks to the status of passive onlookers. From the perspective of improving state-society relations in sensitive minority areas, it would have made sense to increase the monks’ role and influence over the reconstruction process. In tandem with the monks, local residents would have had the ability to shape the reconstruction according to their own religious, cultural, and social needs. According to the Party’s epistemology, however, any rival organization with significant societal influence is viewed as an existential threat. Allowing NGOs a predominant role in post-disaster reconstruction, let alone Buddhist monks, was not a possibility on the very basis of the Party’s understanding of how power functions. The state’s self-representation as a benevolent Father bestowing on Tibetans the gift of improved and modern homes precluded any arrangement that would share and dilute its (imagined) moral centrality. These political and moral understandings led to the undesirable outcome of a disaffected local Tibetan population upset because their new homes are not conducive for their religious and communal practices.²⁵

²⁴ Glaeser, *Political Epistemics*, p. 52.

²⁵ The housing design failed to include a large living room, which is culturally important for hosting extended family gatherings. Also, no space was allotted for the construction of a temple in the front yard. According to a political science professor who researched the local situation, “The people were not consulted and the Tibetan traditions were not understood. The scale and design of the reconstructed homes led to huge complaints and were rejected by the local Tibetans, who did not want to live in them.” Phone interview with professor from G University, November 2012.

During the post-2008 Wenchuan earthquake reconstruction, the Party's Maoist strategies and modes of governance were tasked with objectives beyond their capacity to accomplish them. The Party's goal of combining "great leap development" and post-earthquake reconstruction followed a pattern ironically condemned by Mao of Party leaders who "strain to realize in the present an ideal which can only be realized in the future. They alienate themselves from the current practice of the majority of the people and from the realities of the day, and show themselves adventurist in their actions."²⁶

CHAPTER OUTLINE

Chapter 1 establishes the concept of Maoist neo-developmentalism as the basis of the Party's political understanding in order to explain why the Party selected certain post-earthquake reconstruction plans and implementation strategies and passed over others. In doing so, it also draws attention to the fallibilities of the Party's self-understanding that crimp its ability to realize its objectives. To preview my argument, fetishization of rationality and political power render the Party overly confident in its ability to organize and coordinate market and non-market factors. The Party planned for the reconstruction as if the economy corresponded to a jigsaw puzzle whose pieces only needed to put into the right place – without taking account of the possibility that some pieces were missing, misshapen, or resistant to being moved.

Chapter 2 connects the Party's neo-Maoist epistemology to the central government's comprehensive plans for the post-Wenchuan earthquake reconstruction. The architecture of the reconstruction plan required the dialectical resolution of a series of contradictions. It was designed on explicit assumptions that accelerated speed and

²⁶ Mao Zedong, "On Practice: On the Relation Between Knowledge and Practice, Between Knowing and Doing," (July 1937) trans. public at https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-1/mswv1_16.htm

construction quality would be organically combined through a disciplined and vigilant Party apparatus; transfers of capital and technological expertise from affluent provinces would become the basis for local self-sustaining economies; and, central top-down planning would be attuned to local need through grassroots participation. I demonstrate how the negative outcomes of the post-earthquake reconstruction can be plotted precisely at the fracture points where these assumptions break down.

Chapter 3 focuses on the Dujiangyan 都江堰 Municipality's "urban-rural integration" (*chengxiang yitihua* 城乡一体化) plan. The strategy was to urbanize peasants in Dujiangyan's surrounding villages, provide them with non-agricultural employment and higher incomes, and lease the land to modernized agricultural enterprises. When sufficient industrialization, employment opportunity, and investment in agriculture did not materialize as planned, newly urbanized residents found themselves pinched between higher living costs and lack of income.²⁷ This did not create new urban consumers, but rather, an idle, surplus population ironically more dependent on the state than they were as peasants before the earthquake. This chapter demonstrates how state-society interactions take place in everyday spaces contoured by political economy.²⁸

Chapter 4 is a study of Yingxiu 映秀 Township, the earthquake epicenter. Yingxiu was reconstructed both as a showcase of state capacity and as a tourist destination. The state's desire to present a positive image and create an "earthquake

²⁷ For a discussion of the national scope of this phenomenon, see: Lynette H. Ong, "State-Led Urbanization in China: Skyscrapers, Land Revenue and "Concentrated Villages," *The China Quarterly* Vol. 217 (March 2014), pp. 162-179.

²⁸ "Everyday politics occurs where people live and work and involves people embracing, adjusting to, or contesting norms and rules regarding authority over, production of, or allocation of resources." Benedict J. Tria Kerkvliet, *The Power of Everyday Politics: How Vietnamese Peasants Transformed National Policy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005), p. 22.

tourist brand”²⁹ resulted in a situation in which local residents barely make ends meet. Relying on tourism as a form of economic salvation was common throughout the earthquake zone, even in areas where the tourist attraction remains far from evident. This chapter explains the state-society rift as a disagreement over how reconstruction funds were spent. Local residents accused the state of wasting resources on “face projects” (*mianzi gongcheng* 面子工程) that did not benefit their lives. This chapter explores the contradictions of what I call the political aesthetics of development.

Chapter 5 introduces a relatively new concept in the CCP’s political vocabulary. “Ecological civilization” (*shengtai wenming* 生态文明) is the most intriguing and promising model because it offers a new metric of development apart from growth. Among the most remote and impoverished counties in the earthquake zone, Qingchuan 青川 County designed a reconstruction plan that would capitalize on environmental protection, forest conservation, and green modes of production. This chapter demonstrates the continued salience of ideological thought work (*sixiang gongzuo* 思想工作) as the catalyst for economic transformation. In doing so, it also calls to attention the tremendous obstacles for recasting not only production practices but also the very definition of economic development.

²⁹ “Yingxiu zhaokai chongjian yantaohui” (Yingxiu Convenes Reconstruction Discussion Session) Wenchuan County Government Website (May 25, 2009) at http://www.wenchuan.gov.cn/p/st_news_items_i_x634089993846730000/ (last accessed August 2013).

Chapter 1: Reading Mao on the Ruins of the Wenchuan Earthquake

My central theoretical argument is that the Party's epistemology remains tethered to a Maoist cognitive framework that believes politics can engineer and accelerate economic outcomes and social transformations. The fact that it is attempting to construct production capacities, markets, and consumption habits does not make it any less planned or political. I trace how these understandings informed the specific approaches, policy decisions, and political economic objectives of the post-earthquake reconstruction, as well as the weaknesses and limits of Maoist neo-developmentalism.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Maoism is assumed to be irrelevant to studies of China's explosive economic growth and market economy. Even less fashionable than the claim that it is imperative to take seriously current Party discourse is the claim that Mao's writings offer an interpretive key to contemporary Chinese politics.

The CCP's official verdict on its own history is that Deng Xiaoping led China from the turbulence of the Mao era into a miraculous period of rational and state-led economic growth. Anything that hints of Maoism (that is not benignly reverential) is brutally repressed. Before Bo Xilai 薄熙来 was arrested in 2012, his Maoist populism put Party leaders on edge, prompting a veiled reference to him by then-Prime Minister Wen Jiabao 温家宝, warning against dangerous tendencies that threatened to return China to the Cultural Revolution.³⁰ As recently as May 2014, the pro-Maoist website

³⁰ John Garnaut, "The Revenge of Wen Jiabao," *Foreign Policy*, March 29, 2012, at http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2012/03/29/the_revenge_of_wen_jiabao

“The East is Red” was shuttered by censors for “ideological problems.”³¹ The Party’s desire to distance itself from Maoism can be explained by political necessity after 1978. The Cultural Revolution pushed Maoism as a philosophy of continuous class struggle into a terminal crisis point that virtually exhausted the political capital of the Party and demoralized society. If the Party was to maintain legitimate authority, a new direction and sense of stability were needed. This accounts for the Party’s self-representation.

The majority of western scholarship on China is also based on the assumption of an epochal rupture. Roderick MacFarquhar firmly describes the Party’s “effective jettisoning of Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought as an explanation of the world and a guide to action.”³² Alice Miller expands on this point arguing that the Party has been continually “moving away from the radical, dysfunctional ideology of Mao.”³³ The titles of popular publications like Phillip Pan’s book *Out of Mao’s Shadow: The Struggle for the Soul of a New China*³⁴ and scholarly texts like Richard Baum’s *Burying Mao*³⁵ capture the common sense of the present moment as utterly different from the Maoist past.

Two influential accounts of the Chinese state were developed around the underlying belief in a firm historical divide between the Mao and post-Mao eras: Yang

³¹ Wen Jian, “China Shuttters Maoist Website Citing ‘Ideological’ Problems,” translated by Luisetta Mudie, *Radio Free Asia*, May 9, 2014, at <http://www.rfa.org/english/news/china/maoist-05092014110854.html>

³² Roderick MacFarquhar, “Introduction,” in Roderick MacFarquhar, ed., *The Politics of China: Sixty Years of the People’s Republic of China*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2011 edition), p. 4.

³³ Alice Miller, “Dilemmas of globalization and governance,” in Roderick MacFarquhar, ed., *The Politics of China: Sixty Years of the People’s Republic of China*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2011 edition), p. 528.

³⁴ Philip P. Pan, *Out of Mao’s Shadow: The Struggle for the Soul of a New China* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2009 reprint).

³⁵ Richard Baum, *Burying Mao: Chinese Politics in the Age of Deng Xiaoping* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996).

Dali's "regulatory state"³⁶ and Jean Oi's "local corporatist state."³⁷ Despite substantial differences between them, both accounts reject Maoist epistemology as a force in the present. For this reason, their explanatory power is inadequate for explaining the political dynamics of the post-Sichuan earthquake reconstruction, and other contemporary trends in Chinese political economy, such as rapid urban construction, infrastructural investment, and mega-projects.

According to Yang Dali, "the Chinese leadership has been in a marathon quest for institutional development, rationalizing existing institutions and building new ones to cope with the unruliness of markets and bring about a regulative economic order."³⁸ Nothing it seems could be farther from a Maoist revolutionary Party than this description. Indeed, Yang argues that during the reform era, there has been a "tectonic shift in the way the Chinese government conducts itself."³⁹

Yang explains the creation of the regulatory state as a convergence of three factors: "the changing economic conditions; the importance of leadership and the rhythm of domestic politics; and the role of crises as catalyzing events for politicians to adapt to certain reforms."⁴⁰ Consequently, the 2008 Sichuan earthquake is a perfect test for Yang's theory. The changing economic conditions of the global financial crisis required an expansion of domestic demand; the Hu-Wen leadership expressed desire to use the earthquake as a model example of "service oriented government;"⁴¹ and, finally, the

³⁶ Dali L. Yang, *Remaking the Chinese Leviathan: Market Transitions and the Politics of Governance in China* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004).

³⁷ Jean Oi. "The Role of the Local State in China's Transitional Economy," *The China Quarterly* Vol. 144 (1995), pp. 1132-1149.

³⁸ Yang, *Remaking the Chinese Leviathan*, p. 1.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

earthquake itself was explicitly described by Party leaders as an opportunity for re-making the Chinese state and economy. If Yang's theory is correct, the Sichuan earthquake should have been a "midwife of reform."⁴²

The problem is that none of these objectives were achieved. Instead of the "rationalization of the administrative state"⁴³ the state assumed full control and responsibility for the reconstruction process expanding its power over both society and the economy. According to the internal publication *Reform Decision-Making*, "The earthquake reconstruction contains the possibility of a concealed tendency: the unlimited expansion of the scope of state power to represent public authority and control the allocation of resources."⁴⁴ The political imperative of turning Sichuan into a showcase of state power trumped promises of institutional reform and, in certain cases, even considerations of economic feasibility.

Vague guidelines to "improve government transparency"⁴⁵ were undermined by a Maoist political culture of secrecy and control. For the Party, the more crucial need to "control public opinion"⁴⁶ in a post-emergency setting destroyed the conditions that could have potentially created institutional mechanisms of democratic supervision and transparent governance. A member of a government taskforce for supervision of budgetary allocation during the reconstruction period cynically explained, "The guideline to be transparent is under-specified. For instance, if I tell you something general like I ate

⁴² Dali L. Yang, "State Capacity on the Rebound," *Journal of Democracy* Vol. 14(1), pp. 43-50.

⁴³ Yang, *Remaking the Chinese Leviathan*, p. 2.

⁴⁴ Wu Jingshi, "Sichuan dizhen hou chongjian zhanlüe de jianyi" (Post-Sichuan Earthquake Reconstruction Strategy and Suggestions) *Gaige neican jueceban* (Reform Decision Making), di 19 qi (2008), p. 27.

⁴⁵ Yang, *Remaking the Chinese Leviathan*, p. 23.

⁴⁶ CASS, "Actively Engage in Anti-Earthquake Disaster Relief Public Sentiment Guidance Work."

breakfast this morning, I have fulfilled my transparency requirement. I do not have to tell you what I ate, where I ate, or how much it cost.”⁴⁷ This way the *appearance* of transparency is be maintained without revealing anything.⁴⁸

A further problem the regulatory state’s “need to build new institutions more suited to the markets”⁴⁹ is that such a need arises only when there are functioning markets available for regulation. The regulatory state model’s insufficiencies are exposed when it is transplanted into rural China where the problem is how can the state capitalize fixed rural assets, construct rural markets, and integrate them regionally. During the post-earthquake reconstruction, the state’s desire to rationalize its own functioning and involvement in the economy was in contradiction with the necessity for the political engineering of markets.

Finally, Yang’s regulatory state is built on the argument in his first book *Calamity and Reform in China* that the Great Leap Forward (GLF) shattered the cognitive foundations of the Maoist paradigm.⁵⁰ There, Yang argues that the trauma of the GLF invalidated and destroyed the Party’s belief in Mao’s conviction that political will and mass mobilization could propel development beyond objective limitations. On the

⁴⁷ Interview, Chengdu, 2013.

⁴⁸ This is an extension of Margaret Pearson’s argument that: “While impressive changes during the past decade have given the agencies that regulate China’s strategic industries the initial *appearance* of independent regulation, the actual *function* of an independent regulatory structure is far from established.” Margaret M. Pearson, “The Business of Governing Business in China: Institutions and Norms of the Emerging Regulatory State,” *World Politics*, Vol. 57, No. 2 (2005), p. 297.

⁴⁹ Yang, *Remaking the Chinese Leviathan*, p. 33.

⁵⁰ According to Yang, the GLF “served to shake profoundly the cognitive foundations of the old paradigm ... and became a powerful impetus for institutional change.” Dali L. Yang, *Calamity and Reform in China: State, Rural Society, and Institutional Change Since the Great Leap Famine*, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), p. 242.

wreckage of Maoist political idealism, the post-Mao era of reform akin to “crossing the river, while groping for stones”⁵¹ was born.

Contrary to the erasure of Maoist epistemology suggested by the regulatory state model, post-earthquake planning documents, economic development strategies, leadership speeches, and Party rhetoric reveal a revitalized faith in the Party’s ability to imprint its political will on economic development.

Jean Oi’s conceptual framework of the “developmental party-state” is organized around a binary opposition between Maoist politics and ideology on one side and economic, corporate behavior on the other. The only shared feature between the Mao and post-Mao state is its “impressive organizational apparatus.”⁵² Oi’s argument depends on the assumption that the state apparatus is a *neutral* instrument that can be adapted to serve different ends.⁵³ Its neutrality allows her to explain its conversion from political/ideological ends to a corporate/economic ends by hitching its star to rapid economic development in a market context.

While offering valuable insights into a particular moment and segment of the reform era, Oi’s theory contains several questionable assumptions and claims. First, Oi establishes her analysis on the basis of Chalmers Johnson’s binary distinction between the *ideological planning* of the Communist system and the *rational planning* of the capitalist developmental state.⁵⁴ In light of how the CCP dialectically synthesizes political, economic, ideological, and organizational concerns, this binary either/or structure does

⁵¹ Deng Xiaoping’s famous metaphor for reform.

⁵² Oi, “The Role of the Local State,” p. 1133.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 1134.

⁵⁴ Ibid.; Chalmers Johnson, *MITI and the Japanese Miracle: The Growth of Industrial Policy, 1925-1975* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1982).

not map onto Chinese reality. For the Party, politics and economy are not treated as separate or antithetical categories.

A second problem is Oi's highly stylized and abstract definition of incentives as mutually exclusive. There are *either* political incentives *or* economic/corporatist incentives. According to Oi, "Maoism ideologically distorted incentives when it devalued expertise not accompanied by political loyalty."⁵⁵ Oi implicitly rehashes the nostrum that there are positive economic incentives, which are *distorted* by negative political ideological incentives (i.e., once the gunk of ideology is cleaned out of the state machinery, it can resume its proper task of economic development).

This juxtaposition of incentives is the foundation of her argument. When the institutional incentives shifted from displaying proper ideological attitudes to promoting economic growth, the behavior and identity of officials also changed from political zealots to entrepreneurs. "What has changed is not necessarily the personnel, but the incentives that are embedded in the institutions that shape the actions of officials."⁵⁶ Oi emphasizes the comprehensive extent of this change by describing local state officials as "fully-fledged *economic* actors"⁵⁷ and analogously compares them to the "chief executive officers" of a corporation.⁵⁸

This definition of incentives is both theoretically and empirically unsatisfying. Theoretically, it cannot adequately account for the "complicated, variegated and fluid patterns" of Chinese politics.⁵⁹ It relies on a thin definition of incentives that are not

⁵⁵ Oi, "The Role of the Local State," p. 1134.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 1136.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 1137.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 1132.

⁵⁹ See Kurt Weyland, "Limitations of Rational-Choice Institutionalism in the Study of Latin American Politics," *Studies in Comparative International Development*, Vol. 37 (Spring 2002), pp. 57-85.

mediated by political beliefs, historically formed grids of perception, social stability concerns, and the impact of crises on political judgment and decision-making. Empirically, Oi's account is unable to explain phenomena, such as the political incentives to pursue the *appearance* of growth that does not produce substantive economic value – behaviors that would not be acceptable in a corporate environment. During the post-earthquake reconstruction, Party leaders had political incentives to demonstrate the state's benevolence via massive and potentially wasteful economic expenditures, regardless of their ultimate economic outcomes. At the time of writing, Party Chairman Xi Jinping's campaign to eradicate Party officials' luxury spending habits is an obvious example of the ideological taking priority over economic incentives – in fact, many economic analysts have argued that Xi's anti-corruption drive is hurting the economy.⁶⁰

This leads to the next problem, which is Oi's normative assumption that political/ideological incentives are harmful obstacles preventing positive incentives for economic growth. Even the CCP has started to seriously rethink the desirability of GDP growth not connected to equitable political and social ends.⁶¹ *The social unrest caused by acting like a corporation is far too costly to political legitimacy.* Secondly, the implication that capitalist planning is somehow more 'rational' than communist ideology is a facile comparison. Even if 20th century high modernist communist planning has been historically discredited, that does not by default prove that capitalist economic development is rational. The advantage of my concept of Maoist neo-developmentalism is that it captures the ambiguities, irrationalities, and contradictions of state capitalism.

⁶⁰ Sophia Yan, "China's anti-corruption drive eats into growth," *CNN Money* (January 30, 2014) at <http://money.cnn.com/2014/01/28/news/economy/china-anti-corruption/>

⁶¹ See Wang Shaoguang, "The Great Transformation: The Double Movement in China," *boundary 2* Vol. 35, No. 2 (2008), pp. 15-47; Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001).

Evidence from the post-earthquake reconstruction, detailed in my empirical chapters, offers numerous examples of elaborate plans and exorbitant expenditures in the pursuit of economic development that fell precipitously short of their intended objectives.

Finally, a perhaps subtler problem is Oi's treatment of the state apparatus as a *neutral* instrumentality that can be applied to either political or economic goals. "Ideology and the goals of state intervention, *not an inherent failing in the policy instruments*, undermined the capacity of the Maoist state to foster economic development."⁶² Leaving aside the controversial assertion that the Maoist state did not foster economic development, Oi's argument, wrongly I suggest, abstracts policy instruments from the political context in which they were created. The CCP's policy instruments and modes of governance were developed as part of a Maoist epistemology and designed to serve specific purposes within that framework. This does not mean that they cannot be adapted to serve other purposes but that they carry a conceptual baggage that effects how they function.

Both the "regulatory state" and "local corporatism" models respectively posit a qualitatively new governance regime built during the reform era. Neither leaves room for political beliefs and ideologies that are not in the service of markets. The analytic - and normative - desires to see Maoism *replaced* by a new model of the state limits the ability of these models, and many others like them, to explain the complex imbrications and reversals between politics, ideology, and economic development in China. Without taking Maoist epistemology seriously, exported theories of the state can only condemn or dismiss political campaigns and Maoist rhetoric as superficial posturing or regressive behavior temporarily delaying an imagined linear trajectory. The inadequacy of these

⁶² Oi, "The Role of the Local State," p. 1134.

models for explaining the variegated dynamics of Chinese politics warrants a new conceptual and methodological approach sensitive to the Party's self-understanding.

The first step in this direction was taken by a new wave of scholarship called "retrospective governance studies." The edited volume *Mao's Invisible Hand* provides an excellent explanation of the "historical experiences and techniques of Communist Party rule under Mao Zedong, and their retention, reinvention and renovation under Mao's successors."⁶³ A pioneer of this approach, Elizabeth Perry argues that, "China's revolutionary past has not yet been relegated to the dustbin of history."⁶⁴ A longitudinal perspective provides insight into how the Party inherits, borrows, adapts, and changes Maoist government techniques in present circumstances. For example, Perry argues that Maoist mass campaigns have not 'disappeared' but have been transferred from the masses to technocratic Party leaders. Thus, the campaign mentality persists in what she calls "managed campaigns" that favor technocratic decision-making over mass participation. I am deeply indebted to Perry and other authors within this tradition, though I seek to look beyond governance techniques to modes of understanding.

I propose that Maoist epistemology forms the Party's 'operating system' – the basic grammar through which both objectives and problems are identified, decisions are made, and strategies crafted. Added to this 'operating system' are technological upgrades and applications, such as a savvier understanding of media relations, market calculations, expert logics, bio-political governance strategies, and an increasing reliance on the production and manipulation of national sentiments that have replaced class

⁶³ Sebastian Heilmann and Elizabeth J. Perry, "Embracing Uncertainty," in Sebastian Heilmann and Elizabeth J. Perry, eds., *Mao's Invisible Hand: The Political Foundations of Adaptive Governance in China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), p. 9

⁶⁴ Elizabeth J. Perry, "Studying Chinese Politics: Farewell to Revolution?" *The China Journal*, No. 57 (January 2007), p. 5.

struggle as a source of legitimating ideology.⁶⁵ The Party's assemblage of governance objectives, strategies, and techniques are constantly being re-organized, shuffled, adapted and tweaked to keep pace with the political demands of the contemporary moment. The basis for how the Party understands and defines those demands and determines methods for addressing them is rooted in its Maoist epistemology. In the words of Mao's basic definition of governance – "qualitatively different contradictions can only be resolved by qualitatively different methods."⁶⁶

MAO AS CURATOR OF THE CONTEMPORARY

The mainstream perspective that Maoism is inconsequential to contemporary Chinese politics is the result of narrowly conflating Maoist *political thinking* with Mao's *political objectives* of collectivization, class struggle, and mass politics. Portrayals of Mao as the "lord of misrule"⁶⁷ intoxicated with revolutionary aspirations proliferate to the detrimental neglect of his role as a political theorist and architect of China's political system.

I propose that *Maoism is a manner of thinking about politics that shapes the Party's internal discourses, understanding, and motivations in the present.* This section demonstrates the connections between Maoist epistemology and how the Party understands its role, conceptualizes politics, formulates policies, and responds to crises.

⁶⁵ See Lin Chun, *The Transformation of Chinese Socialism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006).

⁶⁶ Mao Zedong, "On Contradiction" (August 1937), trans. public at https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-1/mswv1_17.htm

⁶⁷ Slavoj Žižek, "Mao Zedong: The Marxist Lord of Misrule," Lacan.com at <http://www.lacan.com/zizmaozedong.htm>

According to Mao's dialectical materialist theory of knowledge, cognition begins with perception. "Man at first sees only the phenomenal side, the separate aspects, the external relations of things."⁶⁸ Writing from the Communist Party base camp of Yan'an (延安) in 1937, Mao provides the example of people visiting Yan'an to learn about the Communist Party. Upon arriving, visitors perceive the "topography, streets and houses," meet with local people, and attend meetings and banquets. Perceptual knowledge is necessary but superficial.

Mao considers the technique of investigation (*diao*cha 调查) a social scientific method. This first stage in cognition is analagous to a social scientist arriving at a fieldwork site. It is the preliminary period of "soaking" up perceptions of the surrounding environment without yet synthesizing them into concepts, inferences, and judgments.

After collecting sufficient perceptual data, the next stage is concept building. "A sudden change (leap) takes place in the brain in the process of cognition, and concepts are formed. Concepts are no longer the phenomena, the separate aspects and external relations; they grasp the essence, the totality and the internal relations of things."⁶⁹ Thick empirical perceptions are organized under explanatory concepts and logical inferences.

If a political scientist returned from the field with a series of vignettes and descriptions of events, we would say he or she is not doing political science. What are

⁶⁸ Mao, "On Practice."

⁶⁹ Ibid.

the causal mechanisms of outcomes? What is the relationship between variables? A rational ordering of data is indispensable for the advancement of knowledge.

This second stage of cognition is also the political stage at which the Party creates “ideas, theories, plans or programs.”⁷⁰ Maoist epistemology is a guide for how to govern. Within this framework, the success or failure of political programs depends on whether or not they adequately grasp objective reality. “It is only when the data of perception are very rich (not fragmentary) and correspond to reality (are not illusory) that they can be the basis for forming correct concepts and theories.”⁷¹

Mao affirms Marx’s argument that the purpose of knowledge is to change reality, not reflect it. In characteristically blunt style, Mao writes: “it is a waste of time to discuss epistemology apart from practice.”⁷² This leads to the third stage in cognition – “verification in subsequent scientific practice.” Scientific “validation” occurs when cognitive insights are applied and tested in political practice. “Discover the truth through practice, and again through practice verify and develop the truth.”⁷³

Mao considered himself a social scientist with the state, economy and society as his experimental laboratory. Among the Maoist definitions of politics is “the process of testing and developing theory”⁷⁴ derived from investigation into local conditions. The CCP’s adaptive, experimental, and mobile approach to policy formulation follows Maoist

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Mao Zedong, “Talk on Questions of Philosophy” (August 1964) trans. public at http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-9/mswv9_27.htm

⁷³ Mao, “On Practice.”

⁷⁴ Ibid.

guidelines to “apply theory to practice and see whether it can achieve the objectives one has in mind.”⁷⁵ When policies fail to achieve their objectives, new investigations need to be conducted, and programs, policies, and lines need to be redrawn. These are the Party’s self-correcting mechanisms.

Mao was aware that practice seldom unfolds according to plan. The “discovery of unforeseen circumstances in the course of practice”⁷⁶ requires continual modification and adjustment of policies, plans, and programs. Consequently, Mao’s dialectical materialist theory of knowledge travels a loop of perception, knowledge, and action that needs to be readjusted according to shifting circumstances, but that should remain focused on the achievement of some core purpose.⁷⁷

The box below diagrams the relationship between Maoist epistemology and the structure of CCP governance.

Perceptual	-----	Conceptual	-----	Validation
Investigation	-----	Policy	-----	Adjustment

This Maoist epistemic grid continues to be the basis for how the Party’s diagnosis of its internal pathologies and explanation for policy failure.

Mao explains policy failure as resulting from the mismatch between understanding and reality. When there is a “breach between the subjective and

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ I would like to thank William Hurst for calling this “loop” structure to my attention.

objective, by the separation of knowledge from practice,”⁷⁸ the mechanisms of Communist Party governance do not function as intended. According to the Party, there are different causes for this breach, which result in different types of governance pathologies.

The terms the Communist Party developed to explain these pathologies might seem anachronistic to a contemporary Western reader. What relevance does Maoist jargon of left/right deviations (*pianli* 偏离) and a long and tedious list of –isms (formalism, commandism, bureaucratism, adventurism, opportunism, etc.) have for contemporary Chinese politics in a market era? I suggest that these terms are not moribund Communist catechisms, but diagnoses of real problems endemic to the Chinese political system.

The pathology most devastating to the Party’s ability to govern is formalism (*xingshizhuyi* 形式主义). Mao described formalism as a “poison” whose “spread would wreck the country and ruin the people.”⁷⁹ Elsewhere, he referred to it as a “wind . . . blowing in the Party.”⁸⁰ Contemporary versions refer to it as both a “stubborn illness difficult to treat”⁸¹ and a “public hazard”⁸² threatening the Party’s survival. The

⁷⁸ Mao, “On Practice.”

⁷⁹ Mao Zedong, “Oppose Stereotyped Party Writing,” (1942) trans. public at https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-3/mswv3_07.htm

⁸⁰ Mao Zedong, “Rectify the Party’s Style of Work (1942) trans. public at http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-3/mswv3_06.htm

⁸¹ Shi Wenlong, “Zhidu xingshizhuyi: zhidu jianshe de di yi wanzheng” (Institutional Formalism: The First Stubborn Illness of Institution Building), *Zhongguo qingnianbao* (China Youth Daily) (February 2014) at <http://cpc.people.com.cn/n/2014/0226/c78779-24469002.html>

⁸² Li Shirong, “Fangzhi fenquan quanxian chengwei lingyi zhong xingshizhuyi,” (Prevent the Separation and Limitation of Authority from Becoming Another Kind of Formalism), *Guangdong*

eradication or, at least, mitigation of formalism is the core of current Party Chairman Xi Jinping's campaign to clean up cadre work styles (*gongzuo zuofeng* 工作作风).

Formalism is metaphorically described as “poison” or “wind” because it saturates each level of Communist Party governance. Its different manifestations depend on the context in which they occur. For now, a provisional definition of formalism is a situation in which “outside appearance and inner reality differ” (*biaolibuyi* 表里不一).

At the level of perception/investigation, formalism occurs when Party officials do not conduct comprehensive investigations of local circumstances.⁸³ Instead of spending time in the countryside, Party officials conduct highly ritualized visits in which they only see what local state agents prepare for them. Political theater replaces concrete social scientific investigation. In Mandarin, this phenomenon is referred to as “looking at flowers from horseback” (*zoumaguanhua* 走马观花) and “a dragonfly touching the water lightly” (*qingtingdianshui* 蜻蜓点水). The superficial knowledge obtained by these investigations is the source for policy decision-making. Good policies cannot be made on the basis of bad information. This is one of the root causes for why Party policy diverges from the needs and interests of the masses. “It is the mischief done by this

ribao (Guangdong Daily) at (January 2014)

<http://opinion.people.com.cn/BIG5/n/2014/0127/c1003-24238892.html>

⁸³ This is the context for Mao's admonition to cadres “unless you have investigated a problem, you will be deprived of the right to speak on it” that is often misinterpreted as totalitarian censorship. Mao Zedong, “Oppose Book Worship” (1930) trans. public at https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-6/mswv6_11.htm

formalism which explains why the line and tactics of the Party do not take deeper root among the masses.”⁸⁴

During the conceptual/policy formulation stage, formalism produces another set of pernicious effects. In China’s *nomenklatura* cadre appointment system, higher-level officials evaluate the performance of their subordinates.⁸⁵ Cadres have institutionally conditioned career incentives to choose policies and programs that manifest impressive political achievements. This means that political feasibility, economic viability and long-term impact are often marginalized - if not ignored – in the pursuit of visual representations of success. This phenomenon is variously referred to as “face-engineering” (*mianzi gongcheng* 面子工程) and “political achievement engineering” (*zhengji gongcheng* 政绩工程). According to Cai Yongshun, a face project is a project of “impressive appearance, the practical aspects or the actual outcomes . . . are not their major concern.”⁸⁶

Next, formalism permeates the “verification” stage. When policies fail or produce negative, unintended outcomes, there is an institutional incentive to hide shortcomings rather than critically evaluate what went wrong. One of Mao’s favorite proverbs “hiding a sickness for fear of treatment” (*huijiyi* 讳疾忌医) is often used to

⁸⁴ Mao, “Oppose Book Worship.”

⁸⁵ Marie Edin, “Remaking the Communist Party-state: the cadre responsibility system at the local level in China,” *China: An International Journal* Vol. 1 (2003), pp. 1-15; Kevin O’Brien and Li Lianjiang, “Selective Policy Implementation in Rural China,” *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 31, No. 1 (1999), pp.173-174.

⁸⁶ Cai Yongshun, “Irresponsible state: local cadres and image-building in China,” *The Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics* Vol. 20, No. 4 (2004), p. 22.

describe this phenomenon. The repression of dissent needs to be understood in part as the compulsion to maintain the appearance of success.

Formalism also contaminates the everyday work routines of Party officials. Instead of doing their jobs, cadres are accused of “going through the motions” (*zouguochang* 走过场), “paying lip-service” (*gua zai zuibashang* 挂在嘴巴上) to Party slogans, and producing a “mountain of paperwork and a sea of meetings” (*wenshanwenhai* 文山文海). It has been reported that even Chairman Xi’s campaign against formalism suffers from formalism.⁸⁷

Finally, formalism undermines state-society relations in China. Due to the Party’s formalistic tendencies, people do not perceive themselves as the beneficiaries of government policy⁸⁸; they are disgusted with wasteful expenditures on face projects; and, in the name preserving aesthetic appearance, their freedoms to speak openly, criticize, and conduct citizen investigations are dramatically curtailed. Party officials might not “validate” and “verify” the effects of their policies, but Chinese citizens measure them in the way they impact their everyday lives. The mundane affects of exhaustion, disgust, and resignation felt by ordinary Chinese citizens result from their entrapment in this cycle of formalism. When I interviewed a woman in her 70s in a newly urbanized township

⁸⁷ Amy Qin, “Outburst By Prominent Party Official Reverberates Online,” *The New York Times* (March 12, 2014) at http://sinosphere.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/03/12/outburst-by-prominent-party-official-reverberates-online/?_php=true&_type=blogs&emc=edit_tnt_20140312...

⁸⁸ “Even tasks which concern the immediate interests of the people will result in pseudo-reduction or formal, empty things, unless, instead of being bestowed on them or organized for them by other people, these tasks are taken up voluntarily and consciously by the masses themselves.” Liu Shaoqi, *On the Party*, (1945) trans. public at <http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/liu-shaoqi/1945/on-party/index.htm>

on the periphery of Mianzhu 绵竹 city, I politely told her the new houses are beautiful. She snapped back, “What do I care about beauty? It is totally useless. If you think it is so beautiful, why don’t YOU come live in it?”⁸⁹

In conclusion, formalism erodes the mechanisms and epistemological infrastructure of Chinese governance. Politics becomes aesthetics when the creation, maintenance, and repair of representation become the goal of politics. Instead of policies and programs that improve people’s lives, politics is – in the Party’s own words – a beautiful “flower that does not produce fruit” (*huaerbushi* 华而不实).⁹⁰

Although other scholars have discussed various instances of formalism, it remains marginal to the study of Chinese politics. I suggest, however, that formalism needs to be elevated into a central analytic focus because it detrimentally impacts the Party’s political understanding, policy instruments, management of its own personnel, and ability to govern.⁹¹

COMMUNIST FAITH

The dictum “seek truth from facts” (*shishiqiushi* 实事求是) is commonly misattributed to Deng Xiaoping, who used it to critique Mao’s revolutionary utopianism. Its origin, however, is Mao’s theory of knowledge. This raises an interesting and relevant question: wasn’t Mao notorious for violating his own methodological principles?

⁸⁹ Interview with villager, Mianzhu, X Township, March 2012.

⁹⁰ “Prevent the Separation and Limitation of Authority from Becoming Another Kind of Formalism”

⁹¹ This is why Jean Oi’s idea of a neutral organizational apparatus and policy instruments is fundamentally flawed.

There is broad scholarly consensus that Mao had a voluntaristic notion of political will. According to Maurice Meisner, Mao's "socialist faith"⁹² allowed him to impatiently disregard "the economic forces of history;"⁹³ likewise, Stuart Schram describes Mao as advocating the "primacy of politics and the human factor"⁹⁴ in what Frederic Wakeman calls a contaminating "variant of Jacobinism."⁹⁵ Andrew Walder modifies the definition of voluntarism to include "social analysis"⁹⁶ of and interaction with objective conditions.

The theoretical grounding for faith in the political will comes from Mao's theory of contradictions. In "On Contradiction" Mao executes a coup in the world of Marxist theory. Mao proposes that there are both principal and secondary contradictions. These contradictions are not invariant and fixed but are fluid, mobile and dependent on the particularity of the local situation. The example Mao provides has enormous practical and theoretical implications. Writing in 1937, Mao argued that the anti-colonial struggle against the Japanese was the primary contradiction over Marxist class contradiction. The changeability of primary contradictions extends to relations between the political superstructure and economic base. "When the superstructure (politics,

⁹² Maurice Meisner, "Leninism and Maoism: Some Populist Perspectives on Marxism-Leninism in China," *The China Quarterly* 45 (1971), 2-36; and *Li Ta-chao and the Origins of Chinese Marxism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967).

⁹³ Meisner, 1967, p. 267.

⁹⁴ Stuart Schram, *The Political Thought of Mao Tse-tung* (New York, NY: Praeger, 1969), 266.

⁹⁵ Frederic Wakeman, *History and Will: Philosophical Perspectives on Mao Tse-tung's Thought* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1973), 63.

⁹⁶ Andrew Walder, "Marxism, Maoism, and Social Change, *Modern China*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (Jan. 1977), 103.

culture, etc.) obstructs the development of the economic base, political and cultural changes become principal and decisive.”⁹⁷

The contextual variability of contradiction authorizes the primacy of politics. Historian Alexander Cook beautifully summarizes this point, “at the crucial moment of revolution, the spiritual can become decisive for the transformation of the material.”⁹⁸ Mao’s theory would later be supported with a constellation of historical ‘proofs’ and sacralized as the cornerstone of the CCP’s rise to power.

The CCP’s miraculous survival of the Long March (1935-1938) and unlikely victories against the technologically superior enemies of Japan and Guomindang historically validated the primacy of politics over structural conditions. Mao summarized and converted these military lessons into political ones. “Weapons are an important factor in war, but not the decisive factor; it is people, not things that are decisive. The contest of strength is not only a contest of military and economic power, but also a contest of human power and morale. People necessarily wield military and economic power.”⁹⁹ These sacred historical narratives continue to stage the Party’s faith in its ability to overcome adversity.¹⁰⁰ It is precisely its unswerving (*jian ding bu yi* 坚定

⁹⁷ Mao, “On Contradiction.”

⁹⁸ Alexander C. Cook, “Introduction: the spiritual atom bomb and its global fallout,” in *Mao’s Little Red Book: A Global History*, ed. Alexander C. Cook (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p 6.

⁹⁹ Mao Zedong, “On Protracted War” (1938) trans. public at https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-2/mswv2_09.htm

¹⁰⁰ David E. Apter and Tony Saich, *Revolutionary Discourse in Mao’s Republic* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994). Also, see: Christian Sorace, “Saint Mao,” *Telos* 151 (Summer 2010), pp. 173-191.

不移)¹⁰¹ political will that enables it to pursue core objectives in changing conditions and resolve otherwise insurmountable contradictions.¹⁰²

Faith, however, is a double-edged sword and generates its own pathologies. On the one hand it can inspire confidence and group cohesion in dark times (we could certainly use more political creativity and daring in the unimaginative post-Cold war consensus of late capitalism); on the other hand, it can promote a dangerous sense of political invincibility and reckless adventurism (*maoxianzhuyi* 冒险主义). When faith becomes blind conceit, “swollen-headedness and an inflated ego,”¹⁰³ it leads to “a way of dealing with reality which is against the laws of the development and reality and eventually to failure.”¹⁰⁴

SERVE THE PEOPLE

Maoist epistemology also organizes the Party’s relationship with the masses. Although the Party is a distinct organization, it claims to have no interests or identity of its own other than the interests of the people in all fields.¹⁰⁵ This claim to representation is the basis of the PRC’s social contract and legitimacy. In the present, however, the

¹⁰¹ This is another ubiquitous term in the CCP political lexicon.

¹⁰² It is little surprise that one of Mao’s favorite parables is the “Foolish Old Man Who Moved the Mountains”, a story about faith literally moving mountains.

¹⁰³ Mao Zedong, “Twenty Manifestations of Bureaucracy” (1970) trans. public at https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-9/mswv9_85.htm

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ *Constitution of the Communist Party of China*. 2012. Revised and Adopted at the Eighteenth National Congress of the Communist Party of China.

Party's internal discourse anxiously describes the state-society relationship as undergoing a "crisis of trust" (*xinren weiji* 信任危机)¹⁰⁶ and "credibility" (*gongxinli* 公信力).¹⁰⁷

When we start from the premise that an authoritarian party is incapable of representing society, we logically assume what we should be trying to explain – the processes through which such representation comes apart.¹⁰⁸ It is baffling to me why the Party's organizational *raison d'être* – to only represent the needs of the people and nothing else – is condescendingly ignored in most scholarly accounts of Chinese politics.¹⁰⁹ It would be akin to declaring an intention to study American politics without even a sideways glance at elections. To prevent confusion, I am not arguing that the Party represents the needs of the people (nor would I argue that democratic elections fulfill their representational mandates either) but proposing that it is a problem in need of an explanation.¹¹⁰ This section conceptualizes a Maoist framework of state-society relations

¹⁰⁶ Ma Yuan and Nan Yang, "Guanyu yufang zaihou dongyuan pingtai qi fasheng shehui xinren weiji de sikao yu duice," (Precautionary Reflections and Counter-Measures Regarding Post-Disaster Mobilization Platforms and Social Trust Crisis), *Lingdao Canyue* (Leadership Reference) Vol. 17, No. 459 (June 15, 2008), pp. 15-19. Internal publication.

¹⁰⁷ CASS, "Public Opinion Guidance Work," p. 12.

¹⁰⁸ Wang Hui, "The Crisis of Representativeness and Post-Party Politics," trans. Yin Zhiguang and Gaojin, *Modern China*, Vol. 40 (March 2014), pp. 214-239

¹⁰⁹ I am in full agreement with Lin Chun's claim that, "Whenever the People's Republic failed the people, it turned out not to be because it defied the Western models of government and their colonial extension, but because it departed from its own visionary inspiration and promises of democracy." Chun, *The Transformation of Chinese Socialism*, p.136.

¹¹⁰ It is also a concrete problem that has happened and is not a speculative puzzle that attempts to explain why something has failed to happen, i.e., why democracy or civil society have *not* taken place in China. Although the latter are worthy topics, they derive their interestingness more from their familiarity than for their relevance to China. In the words of Timothy Cheek, "Civil society has come to stand for a reified or de-cultured version of modernization theory: that societies outside of the Euro-American orbit would – or ideally should – eventually, through the mechanism of economic development, become liberal states." Timothy Cheek, "From Market to Democracy in China: Gaps in the Civil Society Model" in *Market Economics and Political Change: Comparing China and Mexico*, Juan D. Lindau and Timothy Cheek eds., (Oxford, UK: Rowen & Littlefield, 1998), p. 220.

that sets the scene for explaining the mechanisms by which political trust was lost in the aftermath of the earthquake.

The masses do not belong to the Party nor are they outside of the Party – but, by definition, a Maoist Party must be one with the masses. Thus, in the words of Judith Farquhar and Qicheng Zhang, “in China, ‘government’ and ‘people’ are not generally experienced as two different modes of being.”¹¹¹ As Lin Chun persuasively argues, the western model of “an intruding state and a dissenting society”¹¹² does not apply to the Chinese context.

The lack of a gap is also figured in Communist Party metaphors that construct the state/society topography in radically different terms from the ones familiar to the Western imagination. Two quotes from Mao Zedong will suffice for illustrative purposes. “We communists are like seeds and the people are like the soil. Wherever we go, we must unite with the people, take root and blossom among them;”¹¹³ and “the people are the sea that the revolutionary swims in.”¹¹⁴ These metaphors describe scenes of intimacy, nourishment, and ecological dependency, not blurred boundaries or adversarial interests.

These are not mere metaphors without practical application – the majority of the Party’s governance techniques were developed in accordance with this philosophy. The Maoist practices of conducting investigating to determine the local situation, mass-line to democratically embed the Party in the people, and the self-identification with the people’s

¹¹¹ Judith Farquhar and Qicheng Zhang, “Biopolitical Beijing: Pleasure, Sovereignty, and Self-Cultivation in China’s Capital,” *Cultural Anthropology*, Vol. 20, Issue 3 (2005), p. 309.

¹¹² Chun, *The Transformation of Chinese Socialism*, p. 218.

¹¹³ Mao Zedong, “On the Chungking Negotiations,” (1945) trans. public at https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-4/mswv4_06.htm

¹¹⁴ Mao Zedong, “On Guerilla Warfare,” (1937), trans. public at <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/works/1937/gerilla-warfare/ch06.htm>

welfare are, in principle, supposed to bind together the Party and the masses. Like any intimacy worthy of the name, the Party's relationship with the masses is volatile. Corruption, neglect, wasteful spending are all signs in the eyes of the people of the Party's infidelity.

In democracies, free elections are the key mechanism of regime legitimacy; in China's one-party system, ethical governance and the intimate relationship between leaders and led are the non-institutionalized bulwarks of Party legitimacy. The lack of a national voting mechanism for Chinese citizens to express their preferences shifts the burden of legitimacy onto strained Maoist mechanisms of governance that desperately attempt or at least pretend to hold together an intimate relationship between state and society. Formalism, corruption, and heavy-handed governance techniques by individual cadres are threats to the system precisely because they damage the Party's basis of authority. Party discourse continually warns cadres that negative individual work-styles damage the "Party's image" (*dang xingxiang* 党形象), which cumulatively might threaten regime survival. This suggests that more is at stake than mere public relations, which all states engage in, but at risk are the highly fluid mechanisms of legitimacy in a one-party post-communist system.

Many Chinese citizens, however, have lost confidence in the Party's ability to represent their needs.¹¹⁵ Consequently, the mechanism of interest articulation between the Party and masses has splintered into particular interest negotiations. This does not intrinsically mean that society is 'opposed' to the Party but that the metrics of governance has shifted from collective struggle, self-sacrifice, and deferred gratification to pragmatism

¹¹⁵ Wang Hui, "The Crisis of Representativeness"; also see, Lianjiang Li, "Political Trust in Rural China," *Modern China*, Vol. 30 (April 2004), pp. 228-252.

based on individual need. This fragmentation of the masses exponentially increases the difficulty for the Party to validate its claim that its actions “serve the people.”¹¹⁶

THE RESURGENCE OF PLANNING AMID THE EXPANSION AND DEEPENING OF THE MARKET

Laissez-faire was planned; planning was not.¹¹⁷

The concept of Maoist neo-developmentalism explains how the Party’s Maoist epistemology shapes its plans and strategies to achieve desired objectives in a market context. From the Mao era to the present, the Party has never relinquished the “superior reflexivity” of socialism that “claimed better insights into the the social and economic conditions of our time that were supposed to afford reliable guidance for political action resulting in a human social order.”¹¹⁸

The Party’s confidence in the rationality of its plans and political determination to engineer economic transformation is a marked departure from the conventional wisdom that the planning apparatus was rendered obsolete in post-Mao China. According to economist Barry Naughton, “Reforms [of the 1980s] were not clearly foreseen or designed in advance . . . Reforming without a blueprint, neither the process nor the ultimate objective was clearly envisaged beforehand . . . such an approach might be admired as the strategy of not having a strategy.”¹¹⁹ Naughton’s emphasis on the

¹¹⁶ In October 2013, Zhejiangyan Province, Yuyao city suffered from historically severe flooding. Frustrated with what they determined to be an “inadequate” relief effort, a group of local residents pried the government slogan “serve the people” 为人民服务 from the municipal government building and demanded the local Communist party secretary and mayor to resign. Sui-Lee Wee, “China sends riot police to block new protests by flood victims,” Reuters (October 16, 2013) at <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/10/16/us-china-protest-idUSBRE99F0BN20131016?utm>

¹¹⁷ Polanyi, *The Great Transformation*.

¹¹⁸ Glaeser, *Political Epistemics*, p. xv.

¹¹⁹ Barry Naughton, *Growing Out of the Plan: Chinese Economic Reform 1978-1993* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1995) p. 5.

unplanned and piecemeal evolution of China's economic reforms in the 80s and early 90s is no longer adequate to explain today's state-led political economic transformations.

The return of the planning apparatus also challenges rosier accounts of China as already on the other side of the transition to a capitalist market economy. "Once the basic building blocks of institutional infrastructure for the market economy are in place, the age of tinkering has arrived."¹²⁰ In vast areas of rural China, the basic building blocks of institutional and economic infrastructures are stuck in ongoing processes of "construction" (*jianshe* 建设) and "transition" (*zhuanbian* 转变).¹²¹ When shifting focus from China's coastal regions and mega-cities to the hollowed out countryside,¹²² the salient problem becomes how to distribute the circulation of capital and economic opportunity in a way that will turn peasants into consumers. To accomplish these goals, intensive planning is required.

In a recent special issue of *Modern China*, Sebastian Heilmann and Oliver Melton argue that, "the demise of the plan has not taken place in China."¹²³ They propose that the PRC's 5-year plans have evolved into a form of "public policy coordination and oversight . . . geared to identify and support the growth potential offered by domestic and global markets."¹²⁴ Introducing Heilmann and Melton's article, Tsinghua University

¹²⁰ Yang Dali, *Remaking the Chinese Leviathan*, p. 21.

¹²¹ The Party's nearly ubiquitous usage of the terms "construction" and "transformation" in its planning documents suggest that in its own esteem the process is nowhere near complete.

¹²² "This privileging of the urban and disparaging of the rural led to what has been called the 'spectralization' of agriculture and the countryside, as villages became ghostly reminders of the past, a wasteland inhabited only by the 'left-behind,' particularly children and the elderly." Emily T. Yeh, Kevin J. O'Brien, and Jingzhong Ye, "Rural politics in contemporary China," *The Journal of Peasant Studies* Vol. 40, No. 6 (2013), p. 917. Also, see: Yan Hairong, "Spectralization of the rural: reinterpreting the labor mobility of rural young women in post-Mao China," *American Ethnologist* Vol. 30(4), pp. 1-19.

¹²³ Sebastian Heilmann and Oliver Melton, "The Reinvention of Development Planning in China, 1993-2012," *Modern China* 39(6) (August 2013), p. 581.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 582.

School of Public Policy and Management and advisor to the government Hu Angang 胡鞍钢 explains China's new style of planning as the distinctive key to its miraculous economic growth, also challenging the mainstream view of China's transition from a planned economy to a market economy as overly simplistic. "China's economic reform does not involve simply replacing the traditional planned economy with a market economy, that is, replacing 'one hand' (the plan) with 'another hand' (the market); instead, it involves replacing 'one hand' (the plan) with 'two hands' (both the plan and market)."¹²⁵ Both articles importantly call attention to the continued relevance of planning to the CCP.

Though this work is a great step in the right direction, some of its key concepts remain under-analyzed. Heilmann and Melton's claim that the planning apparatus has been "redirected to give macro-guidance to the transformation of the economic structure along with market-oriented industrial policies"¹²⁶ does not critically investigate the concept of guidance. The guiding of market mechanisms assumes that they already exist. In the case of the post-earthquake regions of Sichuan, however, such an assumption would be misplaced. During the post-Wenchuan earthquake reconstruction, the state planned the creation of markets and production practices in unfavorable conditions. This is not limited to post-disaster settings - the fact that the reconstruction plans were models of rural development already underway prior to the earthquake indicates their representativeness of a vast number of impoverished counties

¹²⁵ Hu Angang, "The Distinctive Transition of China's Five-Year Plans," *Modern China* 39(6) (August 2013), pp. 629-630.

¹²⁶ Heilmann and Melton, "The Reinvention of Development Planning," p. 585.

in China's interior where the main problem is not how to guide productive factors but how to create them.¹²⁷

HOW TO PLAN A MIRACLE

The Party was far from unprepared for the reconstruction; it was armed to the teeth with a battery of plans, embedded in larger visions of macro-economic transformation. According to an internal publication from the Development Research Center of the State Council (DRC), “The earthquake destroyed the residential structure, public infrastructure and industrial infrastructure of the disaster areas. We must use the reconstruction opportunity and scientific development concepts . . . to comprehensively plan for industrialization, urbanization and new countryside construction.”¹²⁸

The reconstruction not only had to satisfy the immediate needs of disaster victims, but also achieve an amalgam of national-level policy objectives and ongoing campaigns goals. According to a publication by the Sichuan Academy of Social Sciences,¹²⁹ “The Sichuan model demonstrates that disaster reconstruction is no longer only reconstruction, but rather is imbued with the enriched meanings of ‘expanding domestic demand,’ ‘developing the west,’ ‘comprehensive urban–rural development,’ and ‘construction of the

¹²⁷ The ongoing process of *constructing* markets in the countryside is a national priority. See: Zhengce fagui chu (Policy and Legislation Office), “Buduan tuijin nongcun jingji shichanghua jianshe he fazhan – jianshe shehuizhuyi xin nongcun fazhan jizhi tanjiu” (Continuously Advance Village Economic Marketization Construction and Development – Construct Socialism New Village Development Mechanism Investigation), *Quyuan jingji cankao* (Regional Economic Reference), Vol. 16, No. 65 (July 10, 2008), pp. 45-50. Internal publication.

¹²⁸ Guowuyuan fazhan yanjiu zhongxin (Development Research Center of the State Council), “Wenchuan dizhen zaihou chongjian de ruogan zhongyao wenti” (Several Important Problems Concerning the Post-Wenchuan Earthquake Reconstruction), di 90 hao, zong 3202 hao (June 20, 2008), p. 5. Internal publication.

¹²⁹ The Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and its provincial level branches maintain an ambiguous identity as part research university, part government think-tank.

new countryside’ policies.”¹³⁰ One might even say that the Party did not suffer from a ‘lack’ of planning or preparedness, but an excess of it.

To readers unfamiliar with the objectives of these plans and campaigns, their combination in the earthquake reconstruction followed a dialectical structure. The logic is as follows: rebuilding the countryside into concentrated urban townships would improve infrastructures; a modernized countryside would in turn attract investment for industrialization, large-scale agricultural enterprises, and tourism; the resultant job creation for new urban residents (who were formerly peasants) would increase their income; which, finally, would contribute to economic growth through increased consumption!

The epistemological basis for combining multiple objectives within a centrally planned mobilization campaign is Mao’s theory of contradictions. Because all problems are viewed as “interconnected”, in theory, “once the principal contradiction is grasped, all problems can be readily solved.”¹³¹ The reconstruction was the principal contradiction (i.e., opportunity) through which all of the other problems would be solved.

The Party’s confidence translated into a series of concrete promises to Sichuan’s disaster victims. The Party guaranteed that each disaster victims’ family would have a home, at least one family member with full-time non-agricultural employment, and welfare provisions (*jia jia you zhu fang, hu hu you jiu ye, ren ren you bao zhang* 家家有住房，户户有就业，人人有保障).¹³² In addition to these relatively tangible promises, it also

¹³⁰ Gu Songqing, *Fazhanxing chongjian zaihou jueqi de Sichuan moshi* (*Development Model Reconstruction: The Emergence of the Post-Disaster Sichuan Method*), (Sichuan renmin chubanshe, 2011), p. 37.

¹³¹ Mao, “On Contradiction.”

¹³² Wan Penglong and Ma Jian, eds. *Cong beizhuang xiang haomai: kangji Wenchuan teda dizhen zaihai de Sichuan shijian* (*From Tragedy to Heroism: The Sichuan Practice of Resistance Against the Great Wenchuan Earthquake*), (Sichuan renmin chubanshe, 2011), p 21.

vaguely, but repeatedly, indicated that people's incomes and standard of living would be raised dramatically. The development envisioned was not marginal improvement over pre-earthquake standards but a "great leap development" (*kuayueshi fazhan* 跨越式发展) that would catapult Sichuan's rural economy by 20-30 years.¹³³ Traditional models of the "regulatory" and "local corporate" state do not capture the sheer ambitiousness of the transformations intended within a two to three year period of fervent reconstruction activity.

While state capitalism and planning objectives are not particular to China, the special Maoist ingredient is faith in the political will to accelerate dialectical transformations and overcome structural obstacles. On May 12th 2011, the 3rd anniversary of the Wenchuan Earthquake, a commentary was published by the writing team of the People's Daily comment department that uses the pseudonym Ren Zhongping 任仲平.¹³⁴ Given the close link between Ren Zhongping's editorials and official Party Propaganda, we can discern the Party's basic narrative framework for explaining the reconstruction of Sichuan after the 2008 earthquake from the comment piece. After vividly emphasizing the overwhelming magnitude of the disaster, Ren Zhongping rhetorically asks: "how long was needed" to complete the reconstruction? The answer "3 years" immediately leads to another rhetorical question: "who is capable

¹³³ Gu, *Fazhanxing chongjian*, pp. 49-54; 60-62; Wan and Ma, *Cong beizhuang*, pp. 191-199; Hou Shuiping, *Wenchuan dadizhen zaihou hui fu chongjian xiangguan zhongda wenti yanjiu* (*Wenchuan Post-Earthquake Recovery and Reconstruction Related Important Research Problems*), (Sichuan: Sichuan renmin chubanshe, 2010), pp. 4-5

¹³⁴ The pseudonym Ren Zhongping came into existence in 1993 under the auspices of writing commentaries for the *People's Daily* advocating the importance of Deng Xiaoping's reform and opening policies. "When big incidents occur, the CCP publishes articles by Ren Zhongping to boost public morale, and so many high-level officials pay close attention to articles appearing under his name." Tsai Wen-Hsuan and Kao Peng-Hsiang, "Secret Codes of Political Propaganda: The Unknown System of Writing Teams," *The China Quarterly*, Volume 214 (2013), p. 400.

of this kind of faith?” The paragraph deftly shifts tone and points out the protracted amounts of time squandered on reconstruction after the 1995 Kobe Earthquake in Japan and the 2005 Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans.¹³⁵ The relative slowness of other nations/political systems to complete reconstruction augments the miraculous nature of the Chinese accomplishment and the strengths of China’s political system. “It is a symbol; it is a confirmation; it is a symbol confirming the Chinese People’s spirit and faith; it is a key; a key to decipher Chinese socialism.”¹³⁶

This assertion of “faith” impacted the planning objectives and timeline of the reconstruction as well as the decisions, incentives, behaviors, and even lives of Party officials. In the earthquake zone, mobilization slogans such as “shed blood and sweat but do not shed tears; shed skin, shed flesh but do not fall behind! (*liuxue liuhan bu liulei, diaopi diaorou bu diaodui* 流血流汗不流泪，掉皮掉肉不掉队)¹³⁷ were used to inspire cadres and masses to work harder. Local Party officials had performance incentives and political pressure to complete their reconstruction objectives as fast as possible. Examples of cadres dying from overwork,¹³⁸ cadre suicides due to intense pressure compounded with the trauma of being disaster victims,¹³⁹ and cadre dismissals for

¹³⁵ The commentary points out that 6 years later some people in New Orleans are still homeless. Ren Zhongping, “Wenchuan teda dizhen san zhounian zhi” (On the Third Anniversary of the Wenchuan Earthquake,” *People’s Daily* (May 11, 2011) at <http://news.sina.com.cn/c/2011-05-11/113422444531.shtml> (last accessed June 6, 2014).

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ *Sichuan Ribao*, “Feixu shang da xie Qingchuan – Qingchuanxian kexue tuijin zaihou huifu chongjian jishi” (Writing Qingchuan on the ruins – Qingchuan county scientifically advancing post-disaster restoration and reconstruction record of events), May 5, 2010.

¹³⁸ There is a Chinese website devoted to Luo Shibin 罗世斌, the Pingwu 平武 county official who died from overwork in the aftermath of the earthquake, see: <http://www.scol.com.cn/zt/nsichuan/zt/2008/1427/>

¹³⁹ *The China Daily*, “Suicide official mourned in quake zone,” April 22, 2009.

abandoning their posts due to personal safety concerns¹⁴⁰ as well as punishments for not meeting the deadlines underscore the seriousness of the Party's post-earthquake motto "five + two, white + black" (*wu jia er, bai jia hei* 五加二, 白加黑)¹⁴¹ signaling that work must continue night and day without respite.

Within months of the earthquake, however, concerns were already raised at various levels of government and by academics over the potentially negative repercussions of over ambitiously viewing post-earthquake reconstruction as a panacea for China's problems.

On July 3, 2008 at the Post-Disaster Planning Mutual Support Work Conference the Deputy Minister of the Ministry of Urban Development and Housing, Qiu Baoxing warned against "excessively attaching importance to the short-term production of images,"¹⁴² "blindly pursuing the new,"¹⁴³ and naively hoping to "relieve poverty in one step" via reconstruction work. He specifically admonished cadres who arbitrarily demolished their own townships and villages in order to construct new semi-urban spatially concentrated settlements without first scientifically determining whether or not only maintenance and repair were necessary.

¹⁴⁰ *Guangming Wang*, "Jiuzai buli, 15 ming ganbu bei mianzhi le" (Not Exerting Oneself at Disaster Relief, 15 Cadres are Relieved of their Posts), June 15, 2008. During interviews with Party officials, many stories were relayed to me about other cadres who were demoted, fired or investigated for both dereliction of duty, slow reconstruction response, or corruption.

¹⁴¹ In interviews with several local cadres, this slogan was repeated to emphasize the pressure they were under.

¹⁴² Qiu Baoxing, "Zaihou chengxiang chongjianguihua de wenti, fangan he zhanlv" (Problems in Post-Disaster Urban-Rural Reconstruction Planning: Guidelines and Strategies). Zaihou chongjian guihua duikouzhijuan gongzuo huiyishang de jianghua (Speech delivered at a conference on post-disaster reconstruction planning and the provincial partner-assistance program) (July 3, 2008) at http://www.512ngo.org.cn/news_detail.asp?id=1167 Last Accessed November 10, 2012.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

The problems Deputy Minister Qiu predicted were confirmed two years later in a report on the legal issues during the reconstruction summarized as follows:

First, the reconstructed planning is *confused* with long-term development planning. To properly combine post-disaster reconstruction planning with local long-term development planning is certainly reasonable to some extent. But in making reconstruction plans, some regions in Mianzhu unrealistically emphasize promoting urbanization, industrialization and construction of socialist new villages, and attempt to “reach the goal with one stride”, which has increased the burden of post-disaster reconstruction and aroused social dissatisfaction.¹⁴⁴

Many Sichuan academics also lamented that the incentives of the political system and pressure to complete housing reconstruction in under two years reduced the ambitious plan of urban-rural integration to “face projects.”

In this overview of the main patterns of the post-earthquake reconstruction, we can see the shambles of Maoist epistemology. The reconstruction plans did not adequately consider the needs of local disaster victims; the Party planned as if it had control over a complex network of market and non-market factors, without considering that because of the plan’s dialectical structure, if any of the interlocking mechanisms failed, the plan as a whole would fall apart; and, finally, the political imperative to display success resulted in numerous instances of formalism.

When looked at from this angle, Maoist dialectics is a kind of alchemy - a staged performance full of rituals and magical incantations. It is a political *trompe l’oeil*. The failure of genuine economic and social transformations to take place is supplemented by a mirage of their success. A marked departure between the Mao era and the present is that the people rarely play the roles choreographed for them.

¹⁴⁴ Chen Guaming, *Wenchuan dizhenhou hui fu chongjian zhuyao falv wenti* (Research on Main Legal Issues in Post-Wenchuan Earthquake Rehabilitation and Reconstruction) (Falü chubanshe, 2010), p. 62.

THE RECONSTRUCTION'S IMPACT ON LOCAL STATE-SOCIETY RELATIONS

It is widely accepted that in China performance legitimacy of economic growth has supplanted ideological legitimacy of political purity. What are often not critically interrogated, however, are the criteria through which performance is assessed - and this is where ideology and discourse reenter the picture. The determination of successful or failed performance is enmeshed in historically textured norms and expectations. From an embedded perspective, political economy and state-society relations are not separate sub-genres but as Spinoza would say different attributes of the same substance.¹⁴⁵ How do people encounter the state in their daily lives?¹⁴⁶ What are the objects and problems that get invested with political significance and why? How do people experience and explain the causes of their current economic situations? What are the mental associations they make or do not make between politics and the economy? More concretely, why do many disaster victims blame the state for their economic precariousness as opposed to blaming the market, the earthquake, or themselves?

The post-earthquake reconstruction shines a spotlight on the social contract between state and society. How the state represented its obligation to society recursively shaped the high expectations and demands of local disaster victims for the state to provide them with immediate relief, housing, and long-term economic security. The Party's propaganda directive to make the masses "deeply feel and experience the Party and

¹⁴⁵ Spinoza, *Complete Works*, trans. Samuel Shirley (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2002).

¹⁴⁶ "An ethnography of the state begins with how the state is imagined, encountered and reconstructed through everyday practices." Li Zhang, *Strangers in the City: Reconfigurations of Space, Power, and Social Networks Within China's Floating Population* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), p. 11.

state's limitless solicitude (*wuxian de guanhuai* 无限的关怀)¹⁴⁷ was tested against and in/validated by the reality of the limits of state ability.

A common refrain in the earthquake zones was not that the state was too invasive, but that it was not invasive in a way that was beneficial to help the people. A newspaper editor from Chengdu posted the following joke on China's popular social media platform WeChat, "Many people actually view the government as their boyfriend: (1) why don't you pay attention to me? (2) Who needs you to pay attention to me? (3) You owe me an explanation! (4) I don't need to hear your explanations. They are all lies!"¹⁴⁸ These contradictory positions capture the texture of state-society relations in China. We can add to this joke the inconsistent position of the boyfriend who makes grandiose promises and amorous declarations that will inevitably be disappointed. Every time he abuses his partner, he promises that he will 'change.'

The Party was clearly uncomfortable by the level of expectation disaster victims placed on it. According to a report published by the Sichuan Academy of Social Sciences, disaster victims "frequently believe that the government can do anything" that it is "omnipotent" (*wan neng* 万能) resulting in a contradiction between "expectations that are higher than the state's limited capacity."¹⁴⁹

An internal Sichuan Party School research report based on survey of 5,000 disaster victims conducted between July 7 and July 19, 2008, voiced nearly identical concerns:

Our investigation discovered that disaster area residents are intensely dependent on the government in each aspect of reconstruction work . . . 70% of residents hope and feel that the government ought to improve their residential environment

¹⁴⁷ Ma Yuan and Nan, "Precautionary Reflections and Counter-measures," p. 17.

¹⁴⁸ WeChat post, relayed to author on May 28, 2014.

¹⁴⁹ Gu, *Fazhanxing chongjian*, p. 91.

and offer housing subsidies, especially to those whose homes were damaged as a result of the earthquake. This indicates that the disaster victims have faith in the Party and government. On the other hand, policy makers ought to be aware that a synonym for dependence is high expectation and high hopes.¹⁵⁰

The ominous ‘on the other hand’ is a clear warning that high expectations contain the seeds for future disappointment and discontent.

The Party’s failure to improve the economic livelihoods of many disaster victims further weakened its ability to *credibly* assert that it represents the interests of the people. The belief that such a ‘miraculous’¹⁵¹ reconstruction would materially improve the people’s welfare and win their support was based on two questionable assumptions: the Party could ensure economic growth and that its vision for the future would be recognized by the people as their own. Lacking channels for participation, the people felt alienated from the reconstruction process. According to the head of an NGO from Guangdong Province who established a branch in Wenchuan County after the earthquake, “The government never asked villagers what they wanted or to participate in the reconstruction. So most villagers had the attitude: ‘since it is not up to us, what business is it of ours?’ and would sit idly and complain. The leaders of the Guangdong provincial partnership assistance program were extremely worried about this and asked

¹⁵⁰ Wang Fenyue, He Guangxi, Ma Ying, Deng Dasheng, and Zhao Yandong, “Wenchuan dizhen zaiqu jumin de shenghuo zhuangkuang yu zhengce xuqiu” (Wenchuan Earthquake Disaster Area Residents Living Circumstance and Policy Needs), (January 13, 2009) at http://www.china.com.cn/aboutchina/zhuanti/09zgshxs/content_17099440_5.htm (last accessed July 6, 2014).

¹⁵¹ The word “miracle” (*qiji* 奇迹) is frequently used in official propaganda to describe the earthquake reconstruction. See: Gu *Fazhanxing chongjian*, pp.14-20; Prime Minister Wen Jiabao Press Conference Yingxiu Township September 3, 2008 (in Chinese); The Historic Miracle and Revelation of the Wenchuan Earthquake Recovery and Reconstruction, *People’s Daily*, October 27, 2010 (in Chinese); Prime Minister Wen Jiabao’s Speech at the Wenchuan Earthquake Recovery and Reconstruction Symposium May 10, 2011 (in Chinese).

us to come help smooth over the contradictions.”¹⁵² This sentiment was reflected across the majority of interviews I conducted with local disaster victims.

The pervasive sense that many local disaster victims do not, or no longer, perceive the Party as capable of representing their interests was captured in an interview with a municipal vice-secretary in the disaster region.¹⁵³ When I asked him why villagers were unhappy with the reconstruction process, he replied with a question of his own: “if I gave you a present, but it didn’t suit you, you didn’t need it, and you didn’t even want it, but I was adamant about giving it to you, does it still count as a present?”¹⁵⁴

One strategy for dealing with people’s grievances and demands was to blame the disaster victims’ “unreasonable expectations,” “collective irrationality,” and “lingering feudal mentalities.”¹⁵⁵ It would only be a slight exaggeration to suggest that the Party felt victimized in how it was misunderstood by many disaster victims. In the frustrated confession of one cadre: “Expressing my true feelings, even though I bared my heart and

¹⁵² Interview with NGO leader, Guangzhou, December 2012. According to the same source, the NGO organized activities inviting both local cadres and ordinary people (*laobaixing* 老百姓) to events where they could interact in order to “repair the trust, and humanize the relations between them.”

¹⁵³ The Party’s perplexity over how to govern is not limited to the Wenchuan earthquake but also revealed in an internal publication regarding the post-2010 Yushu earthquake reconstruction. “Presently the reconstruction of Yushu has already entered the most important stage . . . At first, the reconstruction was a one-time opportunity to upgrade and improve the livelihood and manufacturing conditions of each ethnic group, as well as a one-time opportunity to improve Yushu’s overall infrastructure, but *why has it met with resistance* (*zu li* 阻力) *from both masses and cadres at each level of the process?*” (emphasis added). Zhonggong Qinghai sheng yushu zhou wei dangxiao keti zu (Qinghai Yushu Prefectural Committee Party School Task Group Report), “Shiming yu chuangxin: Yushu zaihou chongjian moshi yanjiu” (Mission and Innovation: Yushu’s Post-Disaster Reconstruction Model Research), *Lilun dongtai* (Theoretical Trends) Vol. 1908 (December 20, 2011), pp. 25-39. Internal publication.

¹⁵⁴ Interview with X municipal vice-secretary, June 2012.

¹⁵⁵ Dujiangyanshi dangxiao (Dujiangyan Communist Party School), *Huifu, fazhan, chuangxin: 2009 nian zaihou chongjian youxiu yanjiu wenji xuanbian* (Reconstruction, Development, Innovation: Selected Works of Excellent Research Reports Regarding the 2009 Post-Disaster Reconstruction Situation), (2009), p. 91. Internal publication.

gave it to the ‘person in the street’, it did no good. Cadres are passionate, but the masses do not appreciate the kindness.”¹⁵⁶

A complementary strategy was to launch “gratitude education campaigns” to teach discontented disaster victims ‘proper’ affective responses, i.e., how to say thank you for receiving a gift. During my fieldwork, I photographed dozens of written slogans printed on banners and painted on walls throughout the earthquake zone displaying the Party’s attempt to repair the relationship between state and society on the level of representation. “When drinking water, remember the well-digger. Our happiness is given by the Communist Party” (*chi shui bu wang wa jin ren, xingfu quan kao gongchandang* 吃水不忘挖进人，幸福全靠共产党)¹⁵⁷ (see Image 1.1) and, my personal favorite, “earthquakes are pitiless, only the Party has feeling” (*dizhen wu qing, dang you qing* 地震无情，党有情).¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁶“Rang min zuo zhu, qunzhong yishi, wanshan jiceng zhili – Pengzhou shi nanxin cun zaihou chongjian zhong goujian cun ji zhili xin jizhi,” (The Establishment of a New Administration Mechanism at Village Level: Nanxin Village’s Experience). From internal archive of Sichuan Party School.

¹⁵⁷ Wenchuan County, Du-Wen Highway 都—汶川高速公路, March 2012

¹⁵⁸ This slogan was from the April 20, 2013 Ya’an 雅安 Earthquake seen during my time served as an earthquake relief volunteer.



Image 1.1, Author Photograph, Wenchuan County, Du-Wen Highway, March 2012

When these biopolitical strategies and affective pedagogies did not produce their intended results, the Party relied on traditional disciplinary measures to maintain the appearance of “harmony” (*hexie* 和谐) and mirage of success.

In order to protect formal appearances upon which their job security depends, party cadres are generally inclined to “see problems and not see people” (*jian shi bu jian ren* 见事不见人),¹⁵⁹ see “unruly subjects” (*diaomin* 刁民) and not see “citizens” (*gongmin* 公民) and understand governance as “management of the people” (*guanmin* 管民) rather than “serving the people” (*fumin* 服民).¹⁶⁰ Framed by the Party’s political understanding and organizational incentives, the possible roles of local Sichuan residents were object of state benevolence/grateful subject or ungrateful subject/threat – *not citizen*.

People’s trust in the Party as a credible interlocutor was damaged by their treatment as theatrical props or threats. I refer to local state-society relations as “beyond

¹⁵⁹ Cai Xia, “Miandui quntixing shijian de sikao,” *Lilun Dongtai* (Theoretical Trends), Vol. 1795 (October 30, 2008), p. 36. Internal reference.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

repair” in the dissertation title because the Party’s political understanding and governance tools are unable to ameliorate the damage they create.

Chapter 2: Contradictions and Consequences

Before delving into the specifics of my empirical cases, we need to review several broad trends in the reconstruction effort. In Maoist terminology, these trends are the particular contradictions that were supposed to be dialectically resolved by the post-earthquake reconstruction. Mobilization of the Party's political will intended to reconcile the contradiction between accelerated speed and first-rate quality construction; the Provincial Partner Assistance Program was envisioned as the solution to the tensions between immediate reconstruction need, capital and technology shortages, and long-term economic development; and, an updated political system of democratic centralism was called upon to mediate between top-down planning and grassroots participation. The ways in which these contradictions were *excacerbated*, as opposed to reconciled, resulted in a series of new challenges and unintended consequences.

SPEED AND QUALITY

There are many things that can be done effectively in a shorter period of time by increasing the level of activity. For example, water boils faster by raising the temperature of the heat source incrementally above 220 degrees Fahrenheit. If you wish to bake a cake, however, faster than the one hour required by the recipe, increasing the oven temperature from the recommended 300 degrees to 600 degrees is not likely to give a satisfactory result.

The Party was aware that increasing speed would create contradictions with other imperatives of the reconstruction, such as the guarantee of earthquake resistant construction quality. This contradiction was, in theory, resolved by the selfless dedication and work-style of cadres.¹⁶¹ Party members and government officials at all levels were urged to “overcome their fear of heights and fear of speed.”¹⁶²

¹⁶¹ “At no time and in no circumstances should a Communist place his personal interests first; he should subordinate them to the interests of the nation and of the masses. Hence, selfishness,

The decision to combine accelerated speed with superior construction quality would not be possible without the assertion of faith in the cadre's political resolve. The following Party report reveals the logic underlying their combination. "Confronting the urgency of the timetable, the Shanghai Partner Assistance team never forgot the historic task entrusted to them: that they must not disregard the needs of the masses for the pursuit of speed and must not ignore scientific rules in order to rush the completion date (*bu neng wei le gan gongqi er hushi kexue guilü* 不能为了赶工期而忽视科学规).¹⁶³ Reading this sentence critically, its imperatives are less than reassuring and draw attention to the contradiction they are intended to conceal.¹⁶⁴

Another internally published research report warned that "anxiousness for quick results" and "moving excessively and prematurely in advance [will] ultimately harm the direct interests of the masses" by failing to provide a foundation for sustainable economic development. Borrowing a poignant phrase from Confucius, the report concludes that too much emphasis on speed "will move in haste without arriving anywhere" (*yu su ze bu da* 欲速则不达).¹⁶⁵

slacking, corruption, seeking the limelight, and so on, are the most contemptible, while selflessness, working with all one's energy, whole-hearted devotion to public duty, and quiet hard work will command respect." Mao Zedong, "The Role of the Chinese Communist Party in the National War," (October 1938) trans. public at

https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-2/mswv2_10.htm

¹⁶² Gu, *Fazhanxing chongjian*, p. 60.

¹⁶³ Shanghai duikou zhiyuan gongzuo zu bangongshi (Shanghai Assistance Work Team Office), "Jinkou zaihou chongjian bufa, tigao gongzuo duijie xiaolü, Shanghai zhiyuan ge xiang gongzuo youli, youxu, youxiao, tuijin" (Shanghai adheres closely to the pace of reconstruction, improves work efficiency, and promotes powerful, orderly, and effective work projects." Document from internal Sichuan Party School archive on the reconstruction.

¹⁶⁴ There is a wonderful Chinese proverb in which a miser hides 300 silver taels as a precaution against being robbed. Above the spot where he hid the silver, he placed the sign, "300 silver taels not hidden here" (*ci di wu yin san bai liang* 此地无银三百两).

¹⁶⁵ Chinese Academy of Social Sciences Social Studies (CAAS) Post-Disaster Social Reconstruction Group, "Zaihou yongjiuxing zhufang anzhi yao qinfang sanlei qingxiang" (Post-Disaster Permanent Housing Settlement Must Diligently Avoid Three Types of Trends), *Guanli xinxi* (*Management Information*) di 11 qi zong di 250 (2008), pp. 16-18. Internal reference.

According to a survey published in an internal Party journal, many grassroots cadres expressed incredulity and frustration over the reconstruction schedule on the grounds that “it would be impossible to accomplish the goal of completing 60% of permanent housing reconstruction by the end of 2009.”¹⁶⁶ Yet the impossible happened and the majority of reconstruction tasks were completed within two years.

Despite the state’s adamant reassurances that reconstruction quality (*chongjian zhiliang* 重建质量) and reconstruction speed (*chongjian sudu* 重建速度) were to be “organically combined,”¹⁶⁷ there is clear evidence that construction quality was neglected.¹⁶⁸ A news report published in January 2011 highlighted such problems in Jia Ba 家坝 village, which falls under the jurisdiction of Shang De 尚德 township in Gansu province’s Wen county 文县:

After the reconstruction started, 44 village households were moved into concentrated resettlements under the directive of the township government. During the reconstruction process, because of insufficient and careless work in terms of land placement, design, construction, monitoring and housing allocation, serious problems in construction quality emerged. When the villagers were supposed to move in, many “contradictions” and “disputes” arose, which affected their ability to immediately occupy their new homes.¹⁶⁹

The report goes on to list the names and positions of fairly high-ranking cadres who were fined, demoted or suspended for their involvement in the project.

In a village in Qingchuan county, the local party secretary was dismissed from his post because the pace of the reconstruction of homes in his village was not fast enough.

¹⁶⁶ Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CAAS) Social Studies Agricultural Development Group. “Sichuan dizhen zaiqu nongcun huifu fazhan de xingshi fenxi” (Analysis of Sichuan Earthquake Disaster Zones Villager Reconstruction Development Circumstances), *Guanli xinxi* (Management Information), di 11 qi zong di 250 (2008), pp. 22-26. Internal reference.

¹⁶⁷ Gu, *Fazhanxing chongjian*, p. 51.

¹⁶⁸ Louisa Lim, “Five Years After a Quake, Chinese Cite Shoddy Reconstruction,” *National Public Radio*, May 13, 2013.

¹⁶⁹ “Gansu Wenxian zaihou chongjian zijin bei nuoyong: Wenxian xuanchuan buzhang tingzhi” (Gansu Wen county Post-Disaster Reconstruction Funds Embezzled: Wen county Propaganda Bureau Chief Suspended from Office), *Xinhua* (January 19, 2011) at <http://news.sohu.com/20110119/n278974465.shtml> (last accessed April 30, 2012)

His account reveals that his village was behind schedule because of problems in the construction material supply chain. Due to transportation difficulties, the costs of importing construction materials skyrocketed. The quality of cheaper construction materials from the local brick factory was of sub-standard quality. “The quality was not good. To use a cooking metaphor, if you cook only to 70%, it will easily become soft and mushy (*rongyi lan* 容易烂). Some of the bricks still had yellow mud inside. Ordinary people did not want to buy these bricks. At that time, it was explained that this was because of problems with the kiln. In fact, it wasn’t. It was that they wanted to hurry up the work schedule (*gan jindu* 赶进度).”¹⁷⁰

The 2011 Sichuan Provincial Audit Report cites other cases of slipshod construction work undermining basic infrastructure needs. “In Sichuan province, Guangyuan 广元 city, Chao Tian 朝天 district, Yang Mu 羊木 township, during the construction of the primary school, part of the construction site hardened creating an uneven surface. In many places, water has begun to accumulate, resulting in cracks in the school’s foundations.”¹⁷¹ There have been similar problems in elementary schools in Beichuan 北川 and elsewhere. My own fieldwork also uncovered many disputes over quality. In a small village in Wenchuan county, an angry farmer took me on a tour of the main village road, exclaiming, “The central state donated a lot of money so that Guangdong province could come and assist in the reconstruction, but look at this fucking road, it is uneven and full of cracks!”¹⁷²

The lack of oversight was a systemic consequence of the ambiguous legal relationship between Provincial Assistance Partners and local governments in Sichuan

¹⁷⁰ *Wenchuan dadizhen yizhounian zaiqu qunzhong fangtanlü* (Wenchuan Earthquake 1st Anniversary Disaster Masses Interview Transcripts) (2009), p. 168. Internal Publication.

¹⁷¹ Zheng Shunca, “Wenchuan zaihou chongjian xian haohua bangongshilou” (Wenchuan Post-Disaster Reconstruction Luxurious Office Buildings), *Beijing News* (April 21 2012) at <http://news.cn.yahoo.com/ypen/20120421/1001054.html> (last accessed February 24, 2013).

¹⁷² Interview with villager from X village in Wenchuan county, March 2012.

(see next section). In an interview, an official from the provincial assistance general command headquarters in X city, Zhejiang province, informed me that, “we wanted to complete the project and return home as soon as possible. The local governments wanted to increase their access to reconstruction funds. If we interfered with their projects, they would obstruct our efforts to complete our mission. We turned a blind eye to what local officials were doing. They used our money, but we had no authority to supervise them (*jiandu* 监督).”¹⁷³ During two interviews with local construction teams, it was admitted to me that corners had to be cut. Poor construction quality issues were not limited to the post-2008 Wenchuan Earthquake reconstruction – during the post-2010 Qinghai Province Earthquake reconstruction, a new building allegedly collapsed under its own weight.¹⁷⁴

This is especially troubling when one considers the scandal of the collapse of shoddily constructed schools and the fact that two-thirds of the surface area of Sichuan Province is an active earthquake zone.¹⁷⁵ According to the 1985 Wenchuan County Annals, from 1952-1985 Wenchuan County and the surrounding areas have experienced 44 earthquakes above a 4.0 magnitude – including a 7.9 magnitude earthquake in 1973 and a 7.2 magnitude earthquake three years later in 1976.¹⁷⁶ Since the 1950s Beichuan County villagers continuously and unsuccessfully lobbied county officials to relocate the township in fear of what would happen in case of an earthquake.¹⁷⁷ On May 12, 2008

¹⁷³ Interview with official, Zhenjiang province.

¹⁷⁴ Interview with professor from Sichuan Party School, July 2013.

¹⁷⁵ Li Haijin and He Qingmei, “Zaihai zhili, zhengzhi dongyuan yu zhengzhi chongjian” (Natural Disaster Governance: Political Mobilization and Political Reconstruction) in Huang Chengwei and Lu Hanwen, eds. *Wenchuan dadizhen zaihou pinkuncun chongjian jincheng yu tiaocheng* (*Wenchuan Earthquake Post-Disaster Reconstruction of Impoverished Villages: Process and Challenges*), (Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2011), pp. 41-53.

¹⁷⁶ *Wenchuan Xianzhi* (Wenchuan County Annals) (1985), pp. 111-118.

¹⁷⁷ Xiong Jingming, “Yi shengming de mingyi huiwang lishi – dizhen hou du beichuan xianzhi” (In the Name of Life, a Historical Reflection: Reading the Beichuan County Annals in the Aftermath of the Earthquake), *Political China* (2010) at <http://www.aisixiang.com/data/31544.html>

over 12,000 people died in Beichuan County alone, roughly 74% of the county's entire population.¹⁷⁸

THE ECONOMICS OF “BLOOD TRANSFUSION”

The Party also intended to scientifically resolve the contradiction between short-term need and long-term development within the reconstruction plan. The central government devolved political responsibility for reconstruction planning and implementation to provincial, prefectural, and county level governments under the leadership of Wenchuan Earthquake Reconstruction Planning Group. This decentralization of responsibility was horizontally intersected with the Partner Assistance Reconstruction Program (*duikou zhiyuan* 对口支援) – a mechanism to transfer investment capital, human resources, and technological support.¹⁷⁹

Eighteen relatively affluent provinces were paired by the central government with eighteen severely damaged counties in the earthquake zone and mandated to earmark 1% of their annual GDP for each year of the three year reconstruction period. Each province was also required to dispatch cadres, technical staff, and construction workers to be stationed in the earthquake zone. By September 2011, the Partner Assistance Program completed 3662 projects and invested 784.54 hundred million RMB (\$126.84 billion).¹⁸⁰ The program was widely praised in China as adhering to Deng Xiaoping's principle: “let the regions who prospered first bring along less developed regions” (*xian fu dai hou fu* 先富带后富) and embodying the socialist spirit “when disaster strikes, help comes from all sides” (*yi fang you nan, ba fang zhiyuan* 一方有难，八方支援)

¹⁷⁸ Mara Warwick, “Slowly but surely life returns in earthquake-affected area,” World Bank Blog (2008) at <https://blogs.worldbank.org/ eastasiapacific/slowly-but-surely-life-returns-in-earthquake-affected-china>

¹⁷⁹ Liu Tie, *Duikouzhiyuan de yunxing jizhi jiqi fazhihua: jiyu wenchuan dizhen zaihou huiifu chongjian de shizheng fenxi* (*The Operation and Legalization of the Partner Assistance Mechanism: In View of an Analysis of the Empirical Evidence of the Post-Wenchuan Earthquake Recovery and Reconstruction*) (Falü chubanshe, 2010); Hou, *Wenchuan da dizhen*, pp. 396-410.

¹⁸⁰ Wan and Ma, *Cong beizhuang*, p. 9.

).¹⁸¹ In addition to material support, it was also hoped that the exchange would “introduce fresh ideas” (*jiiefang sixiang* 解放思想), governance reforms, and market partnerships into the relatively isolated Sichuan countryside. The Partner Assistance Reconstruction Program was the dialectical solution to resolve Sichuan’s internal developmental contradictions, national contradictions of uneven development, as well as inertia of the countryside.

This attempted resolution of developmental contradictions however created a new set of contradictions. Party officials were concerned that excessive dependence on external capital and assistance from the coastal provinces might cripple local developmental initiative and resourcefulness. Many local governments worried how they would maintain and shoulder the costs of the new infrastructures once the assisting province withdrew. In an attempt to remedy this potential problem, Party documents called for a dialectical combination of “partner assistance support” combined with “self-reliance” (*ziligengsheng* 自力更生)¹⁸² and “self-help” and frequently used the metaphor of transforming “blood transfusion” (*shu xue* 输血) into a “hematopoietic function”¹⁸³ (*zao xue* 造血). According to the Sichuan Academy of Social Sciences’ Report: “When helping the recovery of production equal stress must be laid on ‘blood transfusion’ and ‘blood making’; industrial development and reconstruction of the disaster areas must be organically combined.”¹⁸⁴ The linchpin of the dialectical process is that equal stress must be paid to both terms; the assumption is that outside investment will transform into local growth.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., p. 9; Liu, *Duikouzhuyuan*, p. 26.

¹⁸² This term was also widely used during the Mao period to promote economic autarky.

¹⁸³ Gu, *Fazhanxing chongjian*, pp. 52, 62-64; Liu, *Duikouzhuyuan*, p. 35; Development Research Center of the State Council (DRC), “Wenchuan dizhen zaihai dui woguo jingji zengzhang de yingxiang pinggu” (Assessment of the Wenchuan Earthquake’s Impact on China’s Economic Growth), Di 89 hao zong 3201 hao, 1-24 (2008). Internal reference; Chen Guaming, *Research on Main Legal Issues*, p. 101.

¹⁸⁴ Gu, *Fazhanxing chongjian*, p. 303.

The hurdles to overcome were steep. Prior to the earthquake in 2007 the average total value of production in the earthquake zone was 2066.5 hundred million RMB (\$3.111 billion), which was 53% of the national average.¹⁸⁵ The general budgetary revenue of the local governments was 53.3 hundred million RMB (\$869.5 million) meaning an allocation of 262 RMB (\$42.31) per capita (a dismal 7% of the national average). The average per capita income for rural residents was 1873 RMB (\$302.49), 45.2% of the national average.¹⁸⁶ In the immediate aftermath of the earthquake, the average per capita income dropped below 1000 RMB (\$161.50), not including reconstruction subsidies. More than 580,000 people are estimated to have returned below the poverty-line in Sichuan Province alone as a result of the earthquake.¹⁸⁷ “There was a substantial increase in the amount of rural families without a home, source of livelihood, and means of production now facing greater difficulties, the socio-economic development level of disaster-stricken impoverished villages has severely moved in reverse.”¹⁸⁸ Although central government subsidies and charitable donations helped the disaster victims with immediate survival needs and contributed to approximately one-fourth of home reconstruction costs,¹⁸⁹ they cannot be counted toward “poverty-reducing effect or stable long-term income source.”¹⁹⁰

Consequently, the economic reconstruction plan entailed urbanizing rural residents, providing jobs for them, transforming them into consumers to increase domestic demand thereby facilitating national-level macro-economic adjustments from an

¹⁸⁵ Tu, *Pinkun de yingxiang*, p. 25.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 26.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 24.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 26.

¹⁸⁹ The earthquake reconstruction subsidies were 16,000 RMB (\$2,576.15) for a house with under 3 persons; 19,000 RMB (\$3,059.18) from 3-5 persons household; and 22,000 RMB (\$3,542.21) for 5 or more persons household. The average home construction costs were approximately 80,000 RMB (\$12,880.78) based on interviews. See CASS, *Sichuan dizhen zaiqu*.

¹⁹⁰ Tu, *Pinkun de yingxiang*, p. 27.

export to consumption-driven economy. The clear problem with this dialectical strategy is that a chain is only as strong as its weakest link. When an increase in jobs did not adequately materialize, “new urban residents” were not only cut off from traditional means of agricultural production and survival, but also, lacking sufficient income they were unable to contribute to increased consumption. As a result, they became even more reliant on government poverty-alleviation subsidies, or migrated outside of their locality to earn a living wage, further eroding the economic sustainability of the disaster area.

In internal documents and leadership speeches, the Party acknowledges a dangerous tendency to skip the basic steps in building an economic foundation. “If the public investment projects in the disaster areas lack mechanisms to promote employment and entrepreneurship for the disaster victims, commercial and construction enterprises will be the real beneficiaries and not the disaster masses that urgently need it.”¹⁹¹ The same article warned that this outcome would invalidate the proclaimed “social benefits of reconstruction.”

The primary economic contradiction between great leap development and underdeveloped economic infrastructures was exacerbated by the contradiction between the “Provincial Partner Assistance Program” and local “self-reliance.” The continual flow of capital from outside provinces into the earthquake zones created the momentary appearance of economic vitality. A reconstruction bubble economy formed in which the price of construction materials skyrocketed and a temporary labor-force emerged to assist in the reconstruction needs.¹⁹² After the reconstruction project was completed and the Provincial Work Teams went home, this temporary boost to the local economy went with them. Although long-term contracts were signed between some assisting provinces and

¹⁹¹ Zhu Ling, “Ba jianshao pinkun de mubiao naru zaiqu chongjian jihua” (Incorporate the Goal of Poverty Reduction into Disaster Area Reconstruction Planning), *Guanli Xinxi (Management Information)* (2008), pp. 12-13. Internal Reference.

¹⁹² DRC, *Wenchuan dizhen zaihai*.

avored disaster areas (for example: the Wenchuan-Guangdong Industrial Enclave)¹⁹³ and formal as well as informal networks to help Sichuan's disaster victims find work in the Assisting Provinces were also established – these were the exceptions. According to a high-level Party Official in charge of Zhejiang Province X Township's Reconstruction Assistance Work Team:

The problem with the Partner Assistance Program is that there is no follow up mechanism. We went to Qingchuan County and constructed all these roads and infrastructure but if in ten years, there is a problem – how will they afford to repair it? There is no responsibility mechanism that requires the assisting province to continue helping the receiving partner. A poor county like Qingchuan lacks the necessary capital to maintain the infrastructure we built (*weihu feiyong* 维护费用).¹⁹⁴

An education specialist from the Sichuan Academy of Social Science informed me that there are schools in Beichuan that currently do not have electricity because they cannot afford to pay their bills.¹⁹⁵ As a result of the lack of institutionalization of ongoing wealth transfer mechanisms the Provincial Partner Assistance Program fell wide of the mark of revitalizing the local economy, guaranteeing each family had someone who was a wage earner, and improving the people's livelihood. The dialectical transformation from “blood transfusion” to “blood generation” resulted in an anemic economy.

The Provincial Partner Assistance Program also unintentionally produced a set of contradictions between disaster localities. Due to decentralized policy implementation and differences in the levels and types of assistance supplied by provinces in the Partner Assistance Zone, the earthquake reconstruction process lacked uniform legal standards and institutionalized mechanisms.¹⁹⁶ According a report published on the legal aspects

¹⁹³ Gu, *Fazhanxing chongjian*, p. 303.

¹⁹⁴ Interview, Zhejiang province, January 2013.

¹⁹⁵ Interview, Chengdu, July 2013.

¹⁹⁶ For an excellent perspective on the de-centralized and fragmented relationship between different bureaus in China, see: Andrew Mertha, *China's Water Warriors: Citizen Action and Policy Change* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008); and, Mertha, *Brothers in Arms: Chinese Aid to the Khmer Rouge* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2014)

of the reconstruction: “Due to the difference in financial and effort [sic] aspects of assisting provinces, the assistance fund invested to various assisted regions is different. Though there is a standard of 1% of the financial revenue in the last year, it will still lead to the gap between the living standards of the victims in similar disaster stricken areas with different levels of assistance.”¹⁹⁷ This was a clear recipe for perceptions of unfairness and a loss of Party legitimacy.

For example, in Dujiangyan Municipality, urban residents whose homes were destroyed by the earthquake were allowed to relinquish their previous land-use rights in exchange for new housing provided by the Shanghai Provincial Partnership; whereas in Yingxiu Township (20 minutes away from Dujiangyan by car), local residents were required to pay 80,000 RMB (\$12,880.78) to purchase new housing provided by the Dongguan Provincial Partnership. Part of the housing cost was covered by central government subsidies and Macau Red Cross donations for households below the poverty line; villagers had to either borrow money from family or rural credit institutions in order to make up the shortfall, averaging 40,000 RMB (\$6,440.39). Yingxiu Township residents were painfully aware of the beneficial terms enjoyed by their Dujiangyan neighbors, leading to widespread speculation that the Township government pocketed the money.¹⁹⁸ While it would be impossible to confirm the rumor of illicit activity, on a certain level it does not matter because the perception of unfairness already caused enormous damage to Party legitimacy.

In addition to variation in policy implementation, different levels of political attention were bestowed upon disaster localities. Increased visibility and attention meant increased economic support. This coveted visibility could be derived from

¹⁹⁷ Chen, *Falü wenti*, p. 127.

¹⁹⁸ This allegation was made in several interviews with Yingxiu residents.

numerous sources: media attention given to “celebrity disaster zones”¹⁹⁹ (*mingxing zaiqu* 明星灾区) resulted in even stricter Leninist control over the reconstruction process and its representation; visits from higher-level Party officials were a surefire guarantee that roads would be paved and buildings would be erected (mockingly referred to as an “inspection economy”);²⁰⁰ areas visible from highways and major roads were often given aesthetic allowances to upgrade the appearance of homes; and finally, areas that had good political connections with higher-level officials often received preferential treatment. According to an internal Party publication:

The residents of ‘non-celebrity disaster zones’ expect to receive fair treatment, attention and support from the state and society. Our investigation discovered that the allocation of disaster relief and reconstruction resources was not entirely fair. ‘Celebrity disaster zones’ with convenient transportation, ample resources, and media attention received distinctly more state resources and social support than remote, resource deficient disaster zones who needed help the most... Cadres and residents of non-celebrity disaster zones feel that they have been treated unfairly.²⁰¹

During my fieldwork, local residents frequently took me on tours of their miniature Potemkin villages and pointed out where a paved road petered into gravel explaining that the road was only paved in preparation for a high-profile visit from a Party leader. Conversely, on an official tour in Qingchuan County, I overheard the Party Secretary instruct my guide to “make sure to not let the foreigner see anything bad!”²⁰²

199 Zhao Gang, “Yingdui zaimin de liyi he gongyi suqiu xuyao zhuyi de jige wenti” (Several Problems to Pay Attention to When Handling Disaster Victims’ Benefits and Righteous Demands), *Lingdao canyue* (*Leadership Reference*), pp. 13-15. Internal Reference.

200 Cai, “Irresponsible state,” p. 31.

201 Zhao, *Yingdui zaimin de liyi*, p. 13.

202 The most famous example of the politics of aesthetics and the foreign gaze in China is the virulent reaction to Michelangelo Antonioni’s 1972 film *Chung Kuo*. See, Alice Xiang, “‘When Ordinary Seeing Fails’: Reclaiming the Art of Documentary in Michelangelo Antonioni’s 1972 China Film *Chung Kuo*,” *Senses of Cinema* vol. 67 (July 2013) at <http://sensesofcinema.com/2013/feature-articles/when-ordinary-seeing-fails-reclaiming-the-art-of-documentary-in-michelangelo-antonionis-1972-china-film-chung-kuo/>

THE PARADOXES OF DEMOCRATIC CENTRALISM

The sweeping ambition of the reconstruction plan not only aimed at achieving a great leap in economic development but also intended to usher in a new phase of governance reforms. According to the State Council's Post-Wenchuan Earthquake Reconstruction Regulations, Regulation 31: "In drawing up reconstruction plans, we must absorb the ideas of related government departments, expert participation, and fully listen to the opinions of the disaster survivors."²⁰³ An internal Party journal declared the Party must use the earthquake reconstruction as an opportunity to transform itself into a "service oriented government" that operates according to the principles of "grassroots democracy," "public participation," "transparent information," and "wide-range solicitation of opinion."²⁰⁴ The journal proposed that participation would "allow each person to become a manager of public affairs and allow the government to withdraw into the role of supplying guidance."²⁰⁵ In Russian-nesting doll fashion, the language of democracy and participation was replicated in almost every document at all levels of the Party-State concerning the reconstruction. Even in my interviews with several Party Secretaries in Sichuan's far-flung villages and townships, without fail, each would repeat verbatim the necessity of participation and consultation.

The State Council's demand to include disaster victims in the decision-making process contradicted its desire to tightly control the process from top-to-bottom. The dialectical system of "democratic centralism," like in the Mao days, defaulted on centralism. The two-year timeframe to complete basic reconstruction tasks eviscerated

²⁰³ The State Planning Group of Post-Wenchuan Earthquake Restoration and Reconstruction; National Development and Reform Committee (NDRC); The People's Government of Sichuan Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development (MOHURD). *Wenchuan dizhen zaihou hui fu chongjian zongli gui hua (The Overall Plan for the Post-Wenchuan Earthquake Restoration and Reconstruction)*, 2008.

²⁰⁴ Chinese Academy of Social Sciences Law School (CAAS), National Situation of Politics and Law Research Group. "Sichuan dizhen zaihou chongjian zhong jiceng minzhu de shijian" (Grassroots Democratic Practice During the Post-Sichuan Earthquake Reconstruction), *Lingdao Canyue (Leadership Reference)*, di 11 qi (2010), pp. 37-40. Internal reference.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 40.

any real possibility for grassroots participation in the decision-making process and governance reform. According to political scientists Zhu Jiangang and Hu Ming:

Despite the fact that the Post-Wenchuan Earthquake Disaster Reconstruction Regulations required the drafting of post-earthquake reconstruction plans to “incorporate related governmental departments, experts, and fully listen to the opinions of the masses of disaster victims,” the fact that reconstruction plans were drafted within three months simplified many complicated issues, which were left by the wayside, or disappeared under the bird’s eye view of higher-level officials. It was nearly impossible for the people to participate in the planning process.²⁰⁶

Evidence confirms the lack of participation during the initial phase of post-earthquake construction planning during the summer of 2008. According to a survey of 1000 disaster victims: “65% of respondents reported to have never or only very few times participated in village or community meetings, 23.1% reported occasional participation, and only 11.8% of people frequently participate.”²⁰⁷ The main reason 60% of respondents did not participate in local meetings is because they did not know such meetings existed – if they did at all. This survey is consistent with my qualitative interviews of over one hundred earthquake villagers conducted between January 2012 and August 2013. Most villagers in fact laughed at the absurdity of my question when I asked them if they participated in the reconstruction planning process.

According to a local expert involved in the reconstruction: “There were no institutional mechanisms for soliciting the opinions of ordinary residents. The planning bureau held meetings with different state agencies but never made these open to the public. There was an official ‘request’ for participation but no procedures to do it.”²⁰⁸ This description is supported by O’Brien and Li’s argument that cadres only “selectively

²⁰⁶ Zhu Jiangang and Hu Ming, “Duoyuan gongzhi: dui zaihou shequ chongjian zhong canyushi fazhan lilun de fanying” (Pluralized Public Governance: Theoretical Reflections on Participatory Development in Disaster Reconstruction), *Open Times* No. 10 (2011).

²⁰⁷ Wang Zhuo, “Canyushi fangfa dui zaihou xiangcun chongjiang de zuoyong he yingxiang” (The Function and Impact of Participation in Post-Disaster Township Reconstruction), from the Sichuan Communist Party School internal archive.

²⁰⁸ Interview, Chengdu, March 2013.

implement”²⁰⁹ political objectives that will impact their performance evaluations and ignore non-binding and vaguely worded targets, such as “respect villager autonomy.”²¹⁰ The absence of institutionalized mechanisms for participation is a direct result of the lack of incentive to install them.²¹¹

When such mechanisms exist, it is often not for their nominal purpose of enabling villager participation. According to rural governance expert Peng Dapeng, venues for participation, such as local Village Committees and Community Supervision Committees before the earthquake were “already reduced to tools of municipal administration in the hands of the township government.”²¹² When they convene, they are more often than not “powerless to implement resolutions” resulting in a “power vacuum”²¹³ at the village level. The top-down political imperatives governing the post-earthquake’s reconstruction direction and tempo ensured that these platforms would remain or become “organizational shells.”²¹⁴

For example, in May 2011, Q township established a “Township Community Supervision Committee” with the function of “collecting the opinions of the masses and informing the higher-level authorities.” On a tour of the committee room, the township party secretary told me: “everything is decided by the masses! What the masses say goes! (*qunzhong shuo le suan* 群众说了算).”²¹⁵ This performance of participation was undermined however by interviews with members of a local NGO and over thirty

²⁰⁹ Kevin O’Brien and Li Lijiang, “Selective Policy Implementation in Rural China,” *Comparative Politics* 31, no. 1 (1999), pp. 167-186.

²¹⁰ Ibid., p. 174.

²¹¹ Joseph Fewsmith, *The Logic and Limits of Political Reform in China* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

²¹² Peng Dapeng, “Cunmin zizhi yijing meiyou yi yi le ma?” (Is Villager Autonomy Already Meaningless?) *San nong Zhongguo* (China Village Research Network) (2011) at http://www.snzg.cn/article/2011/0519/article_23894.html

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ Ibid.

²¹⁵ Interview with Party Secretary, Mianzhu City, Q Township, June 2012.

villagers. According to the head of an NGO hired by the Mianzhu municipal government to facilitate the resolution of social issues in the surrounding townships and villages: “The local government doesn’t dare loosen their grip on power. There is a Village Supervision Committee but it is an appendage of the township government run by the local party branch. If the government monitors itself, there is no monitoring at all.”²¹⁶ In the bitter words of a local villager: “the government convenes public discussion meetings rarely and when they do, the villagers opinions will not be absorbed into policy because the government believes that their opinions will not benefit the government at all. The government officials will only consider their own benefits, they do not serve ordinary people.”²¹⁷ In statements like these, we can see the social contract in a condition of disrepair.

CONCLUSION

The contradictions at the core of the Party’s reconstruction plan left indelible imprints on local state-society relations in the earthquake zone.

Poor construction quality is a constant reminder of the Party’s failed mandate to serve the people. In their everyday lives, when local residents struggle with leaking pipes, crumbling plaster, and uneven pavement, they encounter evidence of the state’s prioritization of speed and aesthetics over quality and need. Each time I was shown a fragment of dilapidation, *it was an accusation*, typically accompanied by a cursing out of the local state. In certain cases, local residents also expressed fear for their lives in case of another earthquake.

The failed “economic blood transfusion” also had clear and ongoing impacts on the composition of the countryside, livelihoods of local residents, as well as their own sense of future possibility. For peasants who no longer have farmland but also lack

²¹⁶ Interview, Q Township, March 2012.

²¹⁷ Interview, Q Township, March 2013.

employment opportunities and the qualifications for obtaining them, the contradictions are especially acute and worrisome. The dependence of these urban peasants on the fiscally strapped local states who created them has resulted in mutual acrimony and frustration.

Finally, the lack of grassroots participation - which might have ameliorated the anger of local residents by giving them a degree of 'ownership' over the reconstruction process – exacerbated their sense of ennui and alienation.

The Party's epistemological belief that great leap development can be engineered through scientific planning and political dedication foundered on economic factors beyond its control. The mobilization of the Party apparatus that was supposed to resolve contradictions was channeled into the construction and maintenance of appearances. The governance tools that were designed to form a bond between the Party and the masses were nowhere to be found.

Chapter 3: Dujiangyan City

Capital Goes to the Countryside, But Gets Lost Along the Way

The Maoist campaign mentality to compress the timeframe for the achievement of massive-scale political economic transformations generated “the frenetic physicality of the reconstruction effort, which is transforming the lives of isolated communities with dizzying speed.”²¹⁸ Throughout the earthquake zone, urban-rural integration (*chengxiang yi ti hua* 城乡一体化) was promoted by Party officials at both the national and local levels as a comprehensive solution to the problems of rural underdevelopment.²¹⁹ As a result of the reconstruction, urban space expanded at accelerated speeds and monumental scales.

The phenomenon of peri-urbanization was most evident in those disaster areas in close proximity to the Chengdu metropole, such as Pengzhou 彭州 and Dujiangyan 都江堰, and villages subordinate to major cities like Deyang 德阳, Mianzhu 绵竹 and Mianyang 绵阳 – areas in which urbanization trends were already underway prior to the earthquake. On a lesser scale, the reconstruction project also “extended the periurban zone deep into what were quite recently remote and inaccessible valleys.”²²⁰

In particular, Dujiangyan was targeted as a model example and experimental laboratory for urban-rural integration.²²¹ Drawing from ethnographic observations living in Dujiangyan for nine months, interviewing newly urbanized peasants, and

²¹⁸ Daniel Abramson and Yu Qi, “Urban–rural integration in the earthquake zone: Sichuan’s post-disaster reconstruction and the expansion of the Chengdu metropole,” *Pacific Affairs* 84/3 (2011), p. 497.

²¹⁹ Ye Xingqing, “China’s Urban-Rural Integration Policies,” trans. by Flemming Christiansen, *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs* Vol. 4 (2009), pp. 117-143.

²²⁰ Abramson and Yu, “Urban-Rural integration,” p. 497.

²²¹ “Dujiangyan dazao chongjian yangban he shifan shiyan qu” (Dujiangyan: The Creation of a Reconstruction Template and Model Example Test Area), *Chengdu Wanbao* (Chengdu Evening News) (October 21, 2009) at <http://news.sina.com.cn/o/2009-10-21/053116472002s.shtml> (last accessed June 6, 2014).

reading internal Party research reports, I argue that Dujiangyan reveals the planning flaws, structural vulnerabilities, and limited feasibility of urban-rural integration; urban-rural integration functions as a theoretical solution that does not work in practice. Instead of resolving problems of rural underdevelopment, urban-rural integration displaces them onto the periphery of the city and the liminal subject positions of the newly urbanized peasantry. The reasons the plan failed to achieve its goals are not (only) distorted implementation but more importantly, the episteme underlying the plan itself. This pessimistic conclusion offers a critical assessment of the current regime leadership's adoption of urban-rural integration as the centerpiece of their domestic economic strategy.²²²

BACKGROUND

After the 2008 Sichuan Earthquake damaged a vast area of Dujiangyan's countryside and urban space, both the Chengdu and Dujiangyan Municipal Governments and Party Committees decided to use the earthquake as an opportunity to accelerate urban-rural integration already underway prior to the earthquake. Party officials were instructed to "use the innovative spirit of overall-planning of urban-rural development to explore post-disaster reconstruction"²²³ and "tightly grasp the three

²²² Ian Johnson, "Pitfalls Abound in China's Push from Farm to City," *The New York Times* (July 13, 2013) at http://www.nytimes.com/2013/07/14/world/asia/pitfalls-abound-in-chinas-push-from-farm-to-city.html?pagewanted=all&_r=1&utm_source=twitter; Kevin Yao, "China's cautious land-reform tests cast doubt on big urban vision," *Reuters* (November 10, 2013) at www.reuters.com/article/2013/11/10/us-china-reform-idUSBRE9A90H920131110?utm_source=twitter; "Li Keqiang: Xiaochengzhen bi Beijing hao, wo ting zhe xinli gaoxing" (Li Keqiang: Small Cities are Better than Beijing, My Heart is Happy When I Hear This), *Fenghuang* (Phoenix News) (March 31, 2013) at news.ifeng.com/mainland/detail_2013_03/31/23723223_0.shtml?utm_source=twitter (last accessed April 2013); Tian Xianghua, "Da chengshi xiaochengzhen ying xietiao fazhan" (Large and Small Cities Should Coordinate Development), *Caijing* (April 1, 2013) at www.yicai.com/news/2013/04/2594433.html (last accessed April 2013).

²²³ Dujiangyanshi dangxiao (Dujiangyan Communist Party School), *Huifu, fazhan, chuangxin: 2009 nian zaihou chongjian youxiu yanjiu wenji xuanbian* (Reconstruction, Development, Innovation: Selected Works of Excellent Research Reports Regarding the 2009 Post-Disaster Reconstruction Situation) (2009), p. 19. Internal publication.

opportunities of post-disaster reconstruction, expanding domestic demand, and comprehensive urban-rural development.”²²⁴

Generally speaking, the goal of urban-rural integration is to resolve the disparities between the city and countryside and transform the countryside into a more desirable place in which to reside and earn a living. According to Abramson and Yu, urban-rural integration is based on the belief that “an essentially urban life style has become the model for village development.”²²⁵ It is best conceptualized as a connective tissue between the urban and rural that can prevent further overcrowding of China’s cities and atrophy of its villages. This idea is succinctly articulated by the 9th Plenum of the 11th Congress of Chengdu Municipal Party Committee, “small townships are to serve as the key ‘combination point’ between cities and the countryside.”²²⁶

²²⁴ Ibid., p. 17.

²²⁵ Abramson and Yu, “Urban-Rural Integration,” p. 507.

²²⁶ 9th Plenum of 11th Chengdu Municipal Party Congress, cited in Wang Fang “Qianxi xiao chengzhen fazhan jianshe ‘jie’ yu ‘jie’” (Preliminary Analysis of Urban Development Construction ‘Combining’ and ‘Loosening’) in Dujiangyanshi Dangxiao (Dujiangyan Municipal Communist Party School, ed., *Xin sixiang, xin silu, xin chengguo: Dujiangyanshi di shisiqi qingnian ganbu peixunban diaoyan wenji huibian* (*New Thoughts, New Thinking, New Results: Dujiangyan Municipality 14th Young Cadre Training Class Research Collection of Works*) (2012), p. 75. Internal publication.

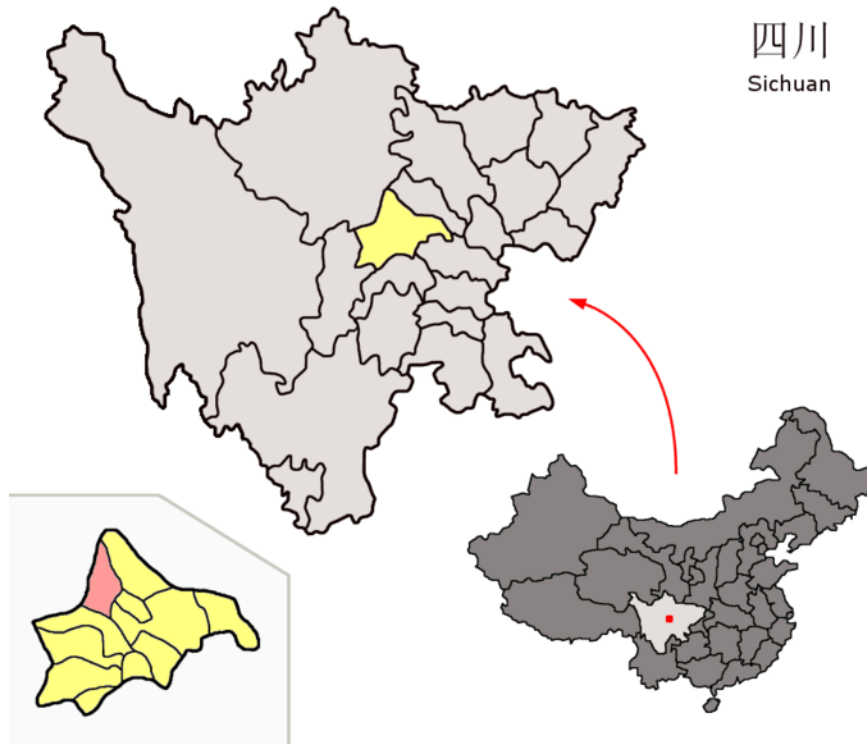


Figure 3.1 Map of Dujiangyan (Orange) and the Greater Chengdu (Yellow) ²²⁷

The urban-rural integration plan for the greater Chengdu Municipal Area, including Dujiangyan Municipality, was organized around the implementation of “three concentrations” (*san ge jizhong* 三个集中).²²⁸ The plan concentrates land, industry, and peasants in new urban townships. The concentration of land is intended to rationalize agricultural land-use from small, fragmented individual plots to a modernized scale and circulate new consolidated land on the market to attract capital to the countryside (*ziben xiaxiang* 资本下乡)²²⁹ providing rent to peasants re-located to concentrated urban

²²⁷ [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Location_of_Dujiangyan_within_Sichuan_\(China\).pn](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Location_of_Dujiangyan_within_Sichuan_(China).pn)

²²⁸ Dujiangyanshi tongchou chengxiang gongzuoju wenjian (Dujiangyan Municipality Overall Planning Urban-Rural Work Department), “Guanyu shenhua tongchou chengxiang zonghe peitao gaige tuijin chengxiangyitihua de yijian” (Opinions Regarding Deepening Comprehensive Integration Reform Promoting Urban-Rural Integration), Document No. 55 (2009), p. 2.

²²⁹ Wang Jiquan, “Zou tese fazhan zhi lu, fuwu Chengdu dadushi – Dujiangyan tuijin dushi xiandai nongye fazhande zuofa yu qishi” (Walking the Road of Specialized Development, Serving the Chengdu Metropolis – Dujiangyan Promotes Metropolitan Modern Agricultural Methods

settlements. The concentration of industrial clusters is designed to create industrial advantages and linkages to attract outside investment and provide employment and increased wages to the now landless peasants. The re-location of peasants to new urban communities (*shequ* 社区) or concentrated settlements (*jizhong anzhi dian* 集中安置点) initiated a process of identity transformation from peasant to urban citizen – alternatively phrased by the Party as “new urban citizen construction” (*xin shimin jianshe* 新市民建设).²³⁰ The first two concentrations converge in the production of revenue streams for the new urban citizen and a “liberation of the peasantry’s consumption power.”²³¹ The macro-economic goal is to “increase domestic demand” (*kuoda neixu* 扩大内需)²³² replacing excessive reliance on exports as the main pillar of the economy, especially in light of the 2008 global financial crisis and sinking global demand for Chinese exports.²³³ Figure 3.2 below diagrams the mechanisms that will be unpacked in the chapter.

and Enlightenment), *Sichuan jingji xinxi wang* (Sichuan Economic Information Net) (July 16, 2012) at <http://www.sc.cei.gov.cn/dir1009/130736.htm> (last accessed June 6, 2014); Ma Zhigang, “Ziben xiaxiang dayoukewei” (Capital to the Countryside with Great Prospects for the Future), *Jingji Ribao* (Economic Daily) (January 30, 2014) at <http://theory.people.com.cn/n/2014/0130/c40531-24268536.html> (last accessed June 6, 2014).

²³⁰ Dujiangyan Party School, *Huifu, fazhan, chuangxin*, p. 38.

²³¹ Wang Fang, “Preliminary Analysis,” pp. 75-77.

²³² Gu, *Fazhanxing chongjian*, pp.10; 37.

²³³ The fact that the Wenchuan Earthquake occurred in 2008 directly in the middle of the global financial crisis (and in many internal Party journals, the reconstruction and financial crisis are analytically linked and studied together) forms the broader macro-economic context shaping the particulars of the reconstruction plan. Guowuyuan fazhan yanjiu zhongxin (Development Research Center of the State Council), “Wenchuan dizhen zaihai dui wo guo jingji zengzhang de yingxiang pinggu” (Assessment of the Wenchuan Earthquake’s Impact on National Economic Growth) Vol. 8/No. 3201 (June 20, 2008), pp. 1-24. Internal publication.

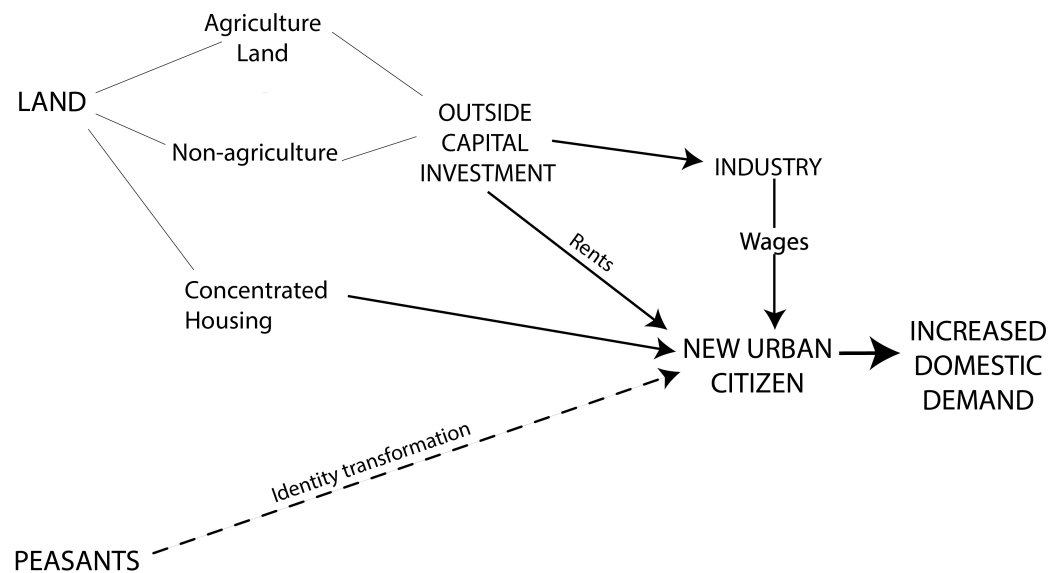


Figure 3.2 How to Increase Domestic Demand

I trace how the three concentrations were supposed to work in theory and how they produced less than desirable results in practice. Despite Mao's insistence that theory must conform to practice, it is often the case, as it was during the reconstruction of Dujiangyan, that abstract theory is disconnected from practical consideration. Although the plan diagrammed in Figure 3.2 appears theoretically sound and elegant, the danger of such a comprehensive plan is that each part has to interlock in a precise fashion for the plan to work. The plan is best described as a series of processes dependent on the other processes. If the antecedent processes under-perform or do not materialize, the plan falls apart.

This is exactly what happened to Dujiangyan's post-earthquake reconstruction/urban-rural integration plan. Efforts to concentrate and circulate land on the market, in a process of capitalizing rural assets, that should have produced a steady stream of rents for the re-located peasantry have been overwhelmingly disappointing. More perniciously, industrialization attempts have sputtered without increasing

employment opportunities, depriving the newly urbanized peasantry of badly needed income in light of their rise in living expenses. Cut off from access to land and unable to find viable non-agricultural employment, the transformation of peasants into urban citizens has ironically become a process of proletarianization and unabsorbed surplus labor. In Figure 3.3 below, the dotted lines represent the absence of what should have been income sources. Due to the pervasive idleness of the residents in these hollow urban shells, I have labeled this phenomenon the creation of an idle proletariat. The net result for local residents is an increased dependency on the Party/State even though their trust and approval of the Party has declined.

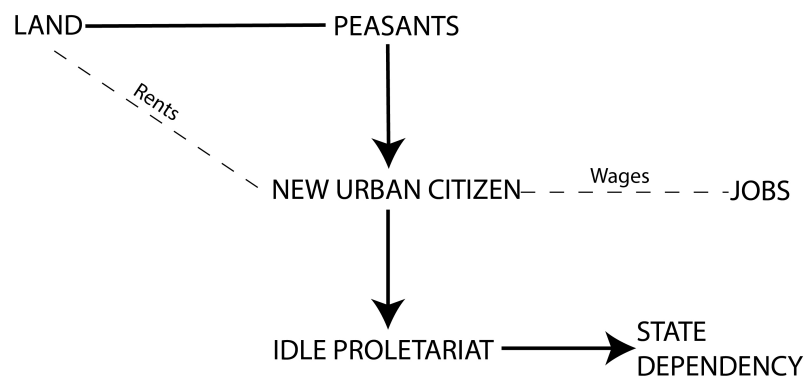


Figure 3.3. Production of the Idle Proletariat

I also argue that ‘poor implementation’ explanation does not account for the plan’s design flaws. The problem of the plan results from the contradictions in the Party’s epistemology and Maoist neo-developmental approach. What I call development by theoretical fiat occurs when the viability of a plan and the conditions required for its successful realization are asserted rather than realistically assessed and

firmly in place prior to implementation. Otherwise, the plan is implemented at the same time as it attempts to produce the conditions for its implementation.

“THE THREE CONCENTRATIONS”

Land

In 2003, Chengdu “became a pilot city for the revision of its municipal master plan and land-use master plan to incorporate urban-rural integration.”²³⁴ One year before the earthquake in June 2007, China’s State Council designated both Chengdu and Chongqing as the nation’s first ‘experimental zones’ for urban-rural integration reform. Dujiangyan Municipality was incorporated in 2003 pilot program and in 2007 was granted status as an experimental model for the “reform of villager property rights system” (*nongcun chanquan gaige* 农村产权改革).²³⁵ On the day of the earthquake, Chengdu municipal Party secretary Li Chuncheng 李春城²³⁶ was in fact en route to Dujiangyan to convene a meeting on the “pilot experiment for comprehensive urban–rural integration.”²³⁷

Before the earthquake, the reforms proceeded at a slow pace. According to a Dujiangyan Party School Professor: “under normal conditions, it is difficult for the

²³⁴ Abramson and Yu, “Urban-Rural Integration,” p. 510.

²³⁵ *Chengxiangyitihua: Chengdu de kexue fazhan zhi lu* 2007 (*Urban-Rural Integration as The Road to Chengdu’s Scientific Development*), Chengdu meiti jituan (Chengdu Media Conglomerate), ed., (Chengdu shidai chubanshe), p. 5. For national level discussions of village property reform, see: Zhong Huaining “Nongcun chanquan gaige yao yi guoqi gaige wei jing” (Village Property-Right Reform Must Use State-Enterprise Reform as Mirror), *Gaige Neican* (Reform Internal Reference), Vol. 19 (2008), pp. 4-5. Internal publication. For negative accounts, see: Yan Hairong, “The Myth of Private Ownership,” *China Left Review*, No. 1 (2008).

²³⁶ During the writing of this dissertation, Li Chuncheng was expelled from the Party and placed under criminal investigation accused of “bribe taking, ‘feudal’ superstition, and personal depravity.” See: Michael Forsythe and Chris Buckley, “China’s Ruling Party Expels and Investigates Official,” *The New York Times* (April 29, 2014). http://www.nytimes.com/2014/04/30/world/asia/chinas-communist-party-expels-senior-official.html?_r=0

²³⁷ CCTV Documentary, *Dujiangyan: Minyi de chongjian* (Dujiangyan: Reconstruction According to the Will of the People), (May 2011) at <http://news.cntv.cn/china/20110521/105513.shtml> (Last accessed November 10, 2012).

government to accomplish this goal of relocating farmers into apartments. Most of them are unwilling to give up their land or demand higher compensation than the government is willing to offer. During the earthquake, their homes collapsed. This provided the Party a perfect opportunity to transform the countryside.”²³⁸ This position, frequently repeated by other Party cadres I interviewed, conforms to the Party’s epistemology view of “crisis as opportunity.”²³⁹ The Dujiangyan Municipality Overall Urban-Rural Planning Work Bureau’s Document No. 55 stresses “the organic combination of village property-rights system reform and post-disaster village housing reconstruction.”²⁴⁰ This combination both met national-level policy targets and was tasked to “break the constraint of post-disaster reconstruction capital bottlenecks”²⁴¹ by attracting outside investment into the locality through the commodification and circulation of land. In the words of Liu Junlin 刘俊林, Dujiangyan Municipal Party Secretary at the time: “after earnest consideration, we decided that even after the earthquake, not only we will not stop the village property right system reform, we will accelerate it. Why? By incorporating the reform of the village property rights system into the core of reconstruction, we can resolve the problem of where the money for reconstruction is going to come from.”²⁴²

To accomplish these goals, a new planning system was created for the township and village levels. This was innovative because planning is traditionally under the jurisdiction of the national, provincial and municipal levels. The goal was to rationalize land use through a series of property-rights reforms. Reform stipulated the clarification, demarcation, and registration of land according to three basic ownership structures: agricultural collectives, village committees, or the township government. The border

²³⁸ Interview with Dujiangyan Party School Professor, Dujiangyan, January 2013.

²³⁹ For a detailed analysis of the Party’s crisis management, *see*: Patricia Thornton, “Crisis and Governance: SARS and the Resilience of the Chinese Body Politics,” *The China Journal*, No. 61 (2009), pp. 23-48.

²⁴⁰ Urban-Rural Work Department Document No. 55, p. 5.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

²⁴² CCTV, “Reconstruction According to the Will of the People.”

between village-land and state-owned land also required clarification and legal definition.²⁴³ Land was reserved for concentrated multi-story housing, combined for intensive agriculture, expropriated for central or provincial state level projects such a road or railway construction, and the remainder devoted to attracting investment through the building of commercial or tourist facilities. The designated uses of land also needed to conform to the regulatory indexes promulgated by the National Land Bureau at the municipal administrative level. These reforms were defended as a necessary precondition for profit sharing derived from “the capitalization of village resources” (*nongcun ziyuan bian ziben* 农村资源变资本).²⁴⁴ According to Document No. 7 published by the specially created office called the Dujiangyan Village Property-Rights System Reform Leadership Working Small Group: “village property rights system reform is the most effective path for ... advancing the liberation and development of rural productive forces.”²⁴⁵

The next step was the “free circulation”²⁴⁶ of land contracting and operating rights through rent, sub-contract, transfer, exchange or jointly held stocks in rural

²⁴³ It is worth pointing out that this document was published in February 2008 three months prior to the earthquake to emphasize the continuity in pre- and post-earthquake planning. Dujiangyanshi nongcun chanquan zhidu gaige gongzuo lingdao xiaozu bangongshi wenjian (Dujiangyan Municipality Village Property Rights System Reform Leadership Working Small Group), *Dujiangyanshi jilitudi suoyouquan quequan banzheng caozuo banfa, shixing* (Dujiangyan Municipality Collective Land Property Rights: Work Methods for Confirmation of Rights and Conferral of Proof, pilot), Document No. 1 (February 2008).

²⁴⁴ Dujiangyan Party School, *Huifu, fazhan, chuangxin*, p. 37.

²⁴⁵ Dujiangyanshi nongcun chanquan zhidu gaige gongzuo lingdao xiaozu bangongshi wenjian (Dujiangyan Municipality Village Property Rights System Reform Leadership Working Small Group). *Guanyu jianli nongcun chanquan zhidu gaige maodun jufen yufang, tiaochu, huajie gongzuo jizhi de yijian* (Opinions regarding the establishment of a precaution, investigation and resolution work system for the contradictions and disputes of the reform of the village property rights system reform). Document No. 7 (2008).

²⁴⁶ Urban-Rural Work Department Document No. 55, p. 5; Dujiangyanshi Dangxiao (Dujiangyan Party School), eds., “Guanyu cun tudi chengbao jingying quan ziyou liuzhuan de shijian yu tansuo – yi Dujiangyan wei li” (Regarding the Practice and Exploration of the Free Circulation of Village Land Contracting Use Rights – Dujiangyan as Example), in *Gongchandang, haowubian: houchongjian shidai dangyuan ganbu dangxing jiaoyu wenji xuanbian* (The Party’s Heroism and

cooperatives. This circulation was designed to “import key enterprises for the industrialization of agriculture” based on the model of “company + village cooperative + peasant household.”²⁴⁷ This was hoped to catalyze a transition from small-scale subsistence farming on scattered, individual land plots to large-scale industrial farming with higher productivity and profitability – achieving the dream of the modernization of agriculture.²⁴⁸ It was promised that the days of asset rich but cash deprived villages would soon be over.

Non-agricultural land could then be opened for commercial investment, tourism, and entertainment. Additionally, any land that was returned to farmland in surplus of the agricultural land quota could be sold or transferred to Chengdu allowing it to urbanize beyond its already exhausted quota. Only Chengdu and Chongqing are allowed to trade or purchase agricultural land from other areas to meet their quotas due to their status as experimental areas.²⁴⁹

To settle disputes arising from the market circulation of land-contracting and operating rights, a special arbitration committee was created on the basis of Dujiangyan Municipality’s Temporary Measures for Arbitrating Disputes Regarding Village Land Contracting Transfer of Village Land Circulation.²⁵⁰ Administratively under the jurisdiction of the Agricultural Development Bureau, the committee was headed by that office’s director and composed of members of from the Petitions and Letters Office, Forestry Bureau, National Land Bureau, Court System, Procurator’s Office and other experts with experience in agricultural management.²⁵¹

Shared Responsibility: Selected Works on Post-Reconstruction Era Party Member and Cadre Education), p. 50. Internal publication.

²⁴⁷ Urban-Rural Work Department Document No. 55, p. 5.

²⁴⁸ Wang Fang, “Qianxi,” p. 75.

²⁴⁹ Interview with Dujiangyan Party School Professor, Dujiangyan, January 2013.

²⁵⁰ Dujiangyan Village Property-Rights System Reform Leadership Working Small Group, Document No. 6 (2008).

²⁵¹ Ibid., p. 3.

According to a 2011 report published internally by a Dujiangyan Municipal Party School research group, there has only been a “small margin”²⁵² in the amount of land circulated on the market. In 2011, Dujiangyan contained a total of 278,900 mu 亩 (a mu = 1/5th of a hectare) of arable land. By December 2010, only 58,700 mu of land was circulated on the market. The annual percentage progressed at a snail’s pace of 2.9% in 2010 and 3.3% in 2009.²⁵³ Additionally, out of the manifold ‘choices’ for circulating the land, it is almost exclusively rented at the price of 800-1200 catties of husked rice (1 catty is equal to 0.5 kilograms).²⁵⁴ Finally, a minority of investors “do not genuinely operate the land, but use it to engage in speculation.”²⁵⁵

In addition to the small amount of land actually being circulated, there are also few interested investors and actual proprietors. By 2008, cumulatively there were 37 proprietors, 52 in 2009, and 67 in 2010.²⁵⁶ The proprietors are roughly divided between specialized cooperative organizations and enterprises; in 2009 out of the 52 proprietors, 43.3% were specialized cooperatives and 39.2% for-profit enterprises. The specialized cooperative organizations are non-profit/non-governmental organizations with the role of linking individual households with enterprises. The lack of investors is due to agriculture’s status as a “weak industry” which requires massive initial capital outlays and promises limited benefits that will only accrue over a long period of time.²⁵⁷ Consequently, the theoretical assertion that leading enterprises will initiate a positive cycle of investment and development failed to materialize.

The enterprises already involved rely on “purchase-order style” production and, as a result, have failed to incorporate peasant households into a “close interest

²⁵² Dujiangyan Party School, “Free Circulation of Village Land,” p. 59.

²⁵³ Ibid., p. 59.

²⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 60.

²⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 61.

²⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 59.

²⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 61.

association.” According to the Party School report, over 60% of agricultural enterprises in Dujiangyan operate according to this “loose organizational structure.”²⁵⁸ Interests of the enterprises and interests of peasant households are often out of synch.

Commercial enterprises desiring to invest in non-agricultural village land face significant constraints as a result of the legal restrictions on land-use rights and profit distribution. Two clauses from the Sichuan Provincial Government’s 2011 Document No. 10 - “a national tax will be levied on construction of land for new urban areas” and “non-governmental capital must not participate in the distribution of earnings from construction on new land areas” effectively dampened any enthusiasm and curtailed collective village organizations from investing in the commercial/industrial development of non-agricultural land as well as from enjoying in any of the profits from prior investments.²⁵⁹

The perversity of the law here is astounding. When non-agricultural collective use land is circulated for the first time, the transaction must be with a registered company (*gua pai* 挂牌). Those restricted from developing the land are also required for it! These paradoxical legal burdens “not only make it impossible for social investment capital to receive any benefit, but also, difficult to even recover initial costs.”²⁶⁰ Consequently, disbursements of already promised investments have been “slowed” to avoid further sunk costs. The lack of social investment transfers the entire burden of funding land re-organization onto the local government – an unsustainable situation over

²⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 62.

²⁵⁹ Dujiangyanshi Dangxiao (Dujiangyan Party School), eds., “Dujiangyanshi nongcun tudi zonghe zhengzhi de shijian yu tansuo”(Practice and Exploration of Comprehensive Renovation of Dujiangyan’s Village Land) in *Gongchandang, haowubian: houchongjian shidai dangyuan ganbu dangxing jiaoyu wenji xuanbian* (The Party’s Heroism and Shared Responsibility: Selected Works on Post-Reconstruction Era Party Member and Cadre Education), p. 70. Internal publication.

²⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 70.

the long-term. The Party School report concludes: “without the investment of social capital, Dujiangyan’s public finances will be powerless to support it.”²⁶¹

To summarize, there are: (1) lack of investors due to political, economic, and legal conditions; (2) a trickle of capital flowing into the countryside; (3) an even smaller fraction of that making its way into the hands of farmers; (4) the inability of an economic transformation to sustain itself; and (5) a municipal government that is forced to prop up local village economies with money it does not have.

According to the Party School report, leading Party cadres are “afraid”²⁶² of coming between peasants and their land and, as a result, do not treat the reforms as a priority. The Party cadres responsible for implementing the plan lack adequate knowledge of the law, neglect management responsibilities, “let things drift” and do not closely supervise the circulation of land-rights.²⁶³ Careless management has led to the failure to create a sufficient number of intermediary service organization necessary for linking peasant households with enterprises, assessing land value, offering legal advice, help with drafting contracts, obtaining banking services, and so on. It is worth reflecting on the fact that there is not a ‘natural’ or ‘organic’ market that would link peasants to enterprises, let alone do so in a fair and equitable way; where Party involvement was in fact required, it was nowhere to be found because of the high level of governance difficulties and low rate of return. This is not government interference of markets but rather government negligence for not intervening in the construction of markets!

This lack of regulatory oversight is especially egregious in light of the fact that some of the contracts between peasant households and enterprises were orally agreed upon and, as such, have no legal basis for dispute resolution. Written contracts were often drawn up in obscure language that did not clearly specify who signed the contracts, the

²⁶¹ Ibid., p. 70.

²⁶² Dujiangyan Party School, “Free Circulation of Village Land,” p. 59.

²⁶³ Ibid., p. 60.

rights and obligations of each party to the contract, or exact amounts of compensation to be paid the farmers. The Party School report laments that this led, in certain cases, to the “violation of peasants’ voluntary will, coerced circulation, and encroachment of peasants’ benefits.”²⁶⁴

Apart from the Party’s lack of involvement in the daily operation of land-right circulation, the plan did not account for, or more precisely, ignored the well-known fact that many farmers are not willing to circulate their land as it is “their very lifeblood” (*ming genzi* 命根子).²⁶⁵ Despite the attractiveness of urban wages, many farmers view the land their guarantee for food and protection against proletarianization. They may also distrust the intentions of both the Party and outside investors to safeguard their interests.

Not all farmers had land to keep, however, as many were required to transfer their land-use rights to the government as the condition to obtain post-earthquake housing in new concentrated townships. It turns out that these landless peasants may in one aspect be luckier than peasants who retained and rented out their land. Pointed out to me by the Party Secretary of an urban community in Pi 郫 county, Dujiangyan’s neighbor, and another experimental site: “The people who have it the worst are peasants who have not lost their land but rent it out – the rent is very little but because they still have land, they are not eligible for social insurance.”²⁶⁶ This is another way of saying that even when the plan works, it does not work as planned.

Industry

The concentration of industry is slightly more straightforward than the tortuous - and for the PRC unprecedented registration, marketization, circulation, and management of land-use rights. The post-earthquake industrialization plan followed a familiar model for the construction of industrial clusters. The goal was to establish

²⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 62.

²⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 61.

²⁶⁶ Interview with Community F Party Secretary, Pi County, February 2013.

dominant industrial clusters for the primary processing of agricultural products and light manufacturing. It was hoped that the clusters would attract outside capital investment as well as factories relocating from the coastal regions to the interior, in search of cheaper labor, lower operating costs, and preferential conditions. At the same time, the tertiary service industry was supposed to expand to keep pace with the accelerated rate of urbanization. These industrial gains were to provide jobs and income for new urban citizens.

The dialectical link between urban development and industrialization was the focal point of the plan. “Combination of town-ization (*jizhenhua* 集镇化) and industrial development”²⁶⁷ are two sides of the same coin – one cannot exist without the other. Regardless of how many apartments were built or how many people re-located, concentrated town construction is made hollow (*kongxinhua* 空心化) without the internal support of economic development.

Due to the “weak agricultural base”²⁶⁸ detailed in the previous section, industries that process agricultural products have not fared well. Dujiangyan has not developed any “specialty” (*tese* 特色) agricultural products that could find a profitable market.²⁶⁹ A Dujiangyan Party School Report bluntly summarizes the problem as follows: “good products are not many, many products are not good” (*hao de bu duo, duo de bu hao* 好的不多，多的不好).²⁷⁰

²⁶⁷ Dujiangyanshi Dangxiao (Dujiangyan Party School), eds., “Shengchan yaosu ziyou liudong hou, ruhe youhua chanye jigou, tuijin chanye quanmian zhenxing kuayue de diaocha yanjiu – yi Dujiangyan wei li” (Following the Free Circulation of Production Factors How to Optimize Industrial Structure, Promote Complete Industrial Revitalization and Leaping Over – Dujiangyan as Example) in *Gongchandang, haowubian: houchongjian shidai dangyuan ganbu dangxing jiaoyu wenji xuanbian* (The Party’s Heroism and Shared Responsibility: Selected Works on Post-Reconstruction Era Party Member and Cadre Education), p. 95. Internal publication.

²⁶⁸ Dujiangyan Party School, “Free Circulation of Production Factors,” p. 94.

²⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 94.

²⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 94.

Dujiangyan's industrial enclaves are also plagued with structural contradictions and inefficiencies. In 2010, the value added from Dujiangyan's total industrial output was 26.37 hundred million RMB (\$421.8 million), 16 hundred million (\$256.0 million) of which was from the Puyang Industrial Enclave - a dismally low number when compared with the 56.08 hundred million RMB (\$891.8 million) of neighboring Pengzhou County. Dujiangyan's industrial performance also pales in comparison with the Chengdu suburbs of Wenjiang 温江 and Shuangliu 双流.²⁷¹ Given its sizable percentage of overall value-added, Puyang Township's Industrial Enclave offers a microcosm of Dujiangyan's industrial problems.

One possible reason for Dujiangyan's weak industrialization is its rather diminished importance within Chengdu's regional economy. Chengdu's rule "one area, one main industry" (*yi qu, yi zhu ye* 一区，一主业)²⁷² has required continual adjustments to find a magical industrial formula. The development of the Puyang Industrial Enclave was consequently slowed by its inability to determine a dominant industry. Its lack of a clear identity/coherence as an industrial enclave rendered it difficult to attract other related industries and enterprises that were supposed to in theory form an industrial cluster. As a result, it lacks "industrial conglomeration" (*jituan hangye* 集团行业), "leading enterprises" (*longtou qiye* 龙头企业) or influential "name brand" (*pinpai* 品牌) that might "influence" (*qidong* 牵动) and "assemble" (*jiju* 集聚) other industries producing an economic "radiation" (*fushe* 辐射) effect.²⁷³ Absent a dominant industry, it follows that the enclave has weak "industrial layering" (*chanye cengxi* 产业层次) and

²⁷¹ Dujiangyanshi Dangxiao (Dujiangyan Party School), eds., "Dujiangyanshi Gongye xin cheng jianshe de xianzhuang ji duice chutan" (Preliminary Exploration of Dujiangyan's New Urban Industrial Construction: Circumstances and Counter-Measures) in *Gongchandang, haowubian: houchongjian shidai dangyuan ganbu dangxing jiaoyu wenji xuanbian* (The Party's Heroism and Shared Responsibility: Selected Works on Post-Reconstruction Era Party Member and Cadre Education), p. 121. Internal publication.

²⁷² Ibid., p. 121.

²⁷³ Ibid., p. 122.

enterprises lack “horizontal” (*heng xiang* 横向) supply chain linkages. The Puyang Industrial Enclave has failed to achieve industrial advantages of scale.

At present, it looks unlikely that it will be able to reverse direction. Because many companies are “small scale” and “insufficiently influential,” they are unable to apply for bank loans and expand their scale of operations. The industrial enclave’s credit guarantee company is also severely limited in how much it is authorized to lend. Insufficient capital circulation constrains enterprises’ ability to expand. Somewhat preposterously, a large percentage of companies in the industrial enclave lack “legal land use formalities” (*hefa yongdi shouxu* 合法用地手续) and therefore cannot be claimed as “legal assets” (*hefa zichan* 合法资产)²⁷⁴ further undermining linkages between enterprises and the coherency of the enclave. Exacerbating matters, Chengdu Municipality’s National Land Bureau has curtailed the amount of land for industrial construction allotted to Puyang. No wonder a report from the Dujiangyan Party School referred to the enclave as having an “uncertain future.”²⁷⁵

The capital shortage of enterprises is passed on to the local state. According to the same report in 2011, the Puyang Industrial Enclave faces a “shortage of capital for follow-up development.” There is an estimated “static capital shortage” of 48 hundred million RMB (\$767.9 million)²⁷⁶ originating from state expenditure in construction, infrastructure, as well as fees related to land-appropriation, demolition and re-location of residents.

²⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 123.

²⁷⁵ Deng Rong, “Nongcun juzhu xingtai gaibian yu shengchan fangshi, guanli moshi de chonggou: guanyu Dujiangyanshi nongmin jizhong juzhu hou xiangguan wenti de diachao yu sikao” (Transformations in the Circumstances of Village Living and Modes of Production, Reconstructing Modes of Management: Investigation and Reflection Concerning Problems in the Concentration of Peasant Housing in Dujiangyan), ed. Dujiangyan shiwei dangxiao (Dujiangyan Party School) in *Dujiangyanshi Di shi san qi qingnian ganbu peixunban diaoyan wenji* huibian (Collected Essays from Dujiangyan Youth Cadre Training Class) (July 2011), p. 37. Internal publication.

²⁷⁶ Dujiangyan Party School, “New Urban Industrial Construction,” p. 122.

In light of the aforementioned problems, Puyang's "ability to absorb the employment needs of labor is weak."²⁷⁷ Addressing Dujiangyan as a whole, a Party School report concludes that: "lack of industrial support makes it difficult to guarantee employment opportunities and means of livelihood for the peasants entering new townships, restricting the development of town-ization."²⁷⁸ In a similarly harsh indictment of the planning process, the Urban Construction Theory Research journal identifies: "the main shortcoming of the plan to spatially concentrate villagers is that it failed to satisfactorily consider villager employment needs ... The reconstruction plan did not devote much consideration to villager production and lifestyle needs."²⁷⁹ This lack of employment opportunity and wages has devastating consequences for the now landless peasant-urban citizen.

To summarize, Dujiangyan's industry, exemplified in the Puyang Industrial Cluster: (1) lacks a dominant industry; (2) is unable to attract outside investment; (3) contains few large enterprises; (4) has limited space for industrial development; (5) exhibits inadequate industrial layering; (5) is plagued by contradictions between Chengdu's regional economic planning and Dujiangyan's local needs; (6) has negligible impact on Dujiangyan's economy and (7) has a weak ability to absorb labor. To return to the language from Chapter 2, the "blood transfused" (*shuxue* 输血) by the earthquake reconstruction has failed to become "hematopoietic cycle" (*zaoxue xunhuan* 造血循环) in

²⁷⁷ Dujiangyan Party School, "Free Circulation of Production Factors," p. 97.

²⁷⁸ Deng Rong, "Transformations," p. 37.

²⁷⁹ Li Bo, "Dujiangyan linpanshi nongcun jujidian" (Dujiangyan 'LinPan Style' Rural Aggregation"), *Chengshi jianshi lilun yanjiu* (Urban Construction Theory Research), Vol. 4 (2012), internet publication. According to Elizabeth Perry, there is precedence for this behavior during New Socialist Village Construction Campaigns in which: "Local governments are criticized for reverting to old Mao-era habits in trying to force peasant compliance without due consideration for local conditions and preferences." Elizabeth Perry, "Managed Campaigns," pp. 41-42.

the local economy; instead Dujiangyan's "ability to produce its own blood is severely deficient" (*zaoxue yanzhong quesun* 造血严重缺损).²⁸⁰

New Urban Citizen Construction

To be forcibly evicted from one's home and neighborhood is to be stripped of a sheathing, which in its familiarity protects the human being from the bewilderments of the outside world. As some people are reluctant to part with their shapeless old coat for a new one, so some people – especially older people – are reluctant to abandon their old neighborhood for the new housing development.²⁸¹

The earthquake offered the local state and party organs the rare opportunity to rapidly implement the long coveted, but politically sensitive, re-location of peasantry. According to official statistics, in rural Dujiangyan the earthquake damaged over 123,800 rural households, 43,000 households required demolition and reconstruction, while 57,000 households needed repair and reinforcement.²⁸² In urban Dujiangyan, the earthquake damaged over 97,000 households, 40,000 requiring demolition and reconstruction, 57,000 needing repair and reinforcement. Given the extensive damage, the Party grasped the opportunity to "break the constraint of the former urban-rural model."²⁸³

Break the model, they did. Post-earthquake housing construction devoured in total 7.7 million square meters.²⁸⁴ The re-location of rural inhabitants incorporated over 50% of Dujiangyan's total rural population into urban communities and incorporation of peripheral townships and former suburbs into the city limits, "enormously expanding Dujiangyan's urban radius."²⁸⁵ Out of Dujiangyan's 69 urban

²⁸⁰ Dujiangyan Party School, "Preliminary Exploration of Dujiangyan's New Urban Industrial Construction," p. 127.

²⁸¹ Tuan Yi-Fu, *Topophilia: A Study of Environmental Perception, Attitudes and Values*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), p. 99.

²⁸² Dujiangyan Party School, *Huifu, fazhan, chuangxin*, p. 15.

²⁸³ Ibid., p. 16.

²⁸⁴ Ibid., pp. 29-30.

²⁸⁵ Ibid., pp. 29-30.

communities, 33 were newly constructed after the earthquake, with 20 still under construction as of 2011. Villages administratively incorporated into Dujiangyan's city limits were re-classified as "communities"; village leaders were renamed "community directors"; political administration was subtly placed under the category of "management" (*guanli* 管理) in an attempt to nominally transform the state into a service-oriented government. Most of the concentrated settlements are composed of 10 story buildings (the largest is 19 stories) with an average of 3,000 units (the largest contains 8,100) and are located at the urban periphery constructed on what was prior to the earthquake agricultural land.²⁸⁶ These communities are mainly mono-functional housing complexes, some of which have "shop front" (*pumian* 铺面), and the majority of them are gated and operated by residential management companies requiring monthly service fees. New communities are often composites of merged villages requiring a new administrative structure (*liang banzi* 两班子); some combine residents who prior to the earthquake lived in urban as well as rural areas, such as the community I rented an apartment in. Typically, formerly rural and urban residents are spatially segregated from each other in different complexes within the same community. Apparently, even the ardent desire to construct new urban citizens reproduces urban-rural hierarchies within its own processes.

Urbanization was also extended in the form of concentrated housing developments into the countryside, creating half urban, half village communities (*ban chengshi, ban nongcun shequ* 半城市, 半农村社区). These concentrated settlements administratively belong to the township they are located in. Consequently, peasants remain in the countryside, but live in buildings that resemble urban communities.

²⁸⁶ Yan Guo, "Emergence of an Integral Post-Disaster Urbanism: On crisis of urban resilience and absence of socio-spatial justice resulted from the post-disaster planning in Sichuan, China," paper presentation at Asian Planning Schools Association 11th International Conference (2011).

This official objective of rationally administered urban space resembled the syndrome of compulsive urban construction that has led to the creation of numerous ghost cities throughout China's urban landscape.²⁸⁷ According to the *Bluebook of Urban-Rural Integration* (2011), published by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, one of the dangers of the national urban-rural integration campaign is the: "urbanization of land enormously exceeds the urbanization of people . . . as well as speed of industrialization" resulting in "hollow townships and villages" (*kongxin zhen, kongxin cun* 空心镇, 空心村) and a "grave waste of land resources" (*tudi ziyuan de yanzhong langfei* 土地资源的严重浪费).²⁸⁸ When I asked a cab driver in Dujiangyan what has changed since the earthquake, he bitterly laughed and responded "urban space but nothing else."²⁸⁹

Dujiangyan indeed suffers from a glut of empty housing units as well as storefronts, especially in the post-earthquake built communities on Dujiangyan's periphery. According to the head of a GONGO (government organized non-governmental organization) in charge of providing social services for these communities, "many of the new communities were built with an oversupply. For instance, Community A contains 30,000 housing units and only 16,000 of them are filled"²⁹⁰ already four years after the earthquake occurred. When I visited this community, I noticed that in addition to vacant apartments, the storefronts lining the street were almost entirely empty or abandoned. I interviewed the owner of one of the only restaurants that was open, who explained: "Most people here cannot afford the rent for these storefronts. If someone opens a shop, they have to raise prices to be able to make ends meet. But nobody wants to pay for such raised prices and the store goes under. It is a

²⁸⁷ See: Sorace and Hurst, "China's Phantom Urbanization," n.d.

²⁸⁸ *Zhongguo chengxiantyitihua fazhan baogao* (Annual Report on China's Urban-Rural Integration), Ru xin and Fu chonglan, eds. (Shehuikexue wenxian chubanshe: 2011), p. 48.

²⁸⁹ Interview with local cab driver, Dujiangyan, April 2013.

²⁹⁰ Interview with GONGO leader, Dujiangyan, February 2013.

vicious circle.”²⁹¹ In an interview with the Party Secretary of Community B, he admitted to me that 1/3rd of the apartments were empty and that they were in the process of “re-locating more villagers” to fill them.²⁹² The new Community C where I lived from November 2012 through August 2013 was filled with residents, but other complexes within the community were almost entirely empty. More conspicuously, I counted over 200 empty storefronts wrapping around the perimeter of the complex I lived in. These storefronts and the land adjacent to them are sometimes informally occupied by people repairing shoes or selling fruits, meats and animal skins from the back of a truck – for the most part though, they are starkly empty. Even worse, in community D, local residents were furious because, according to them, the state promised to each resident a storefront but built the storefronts inside the buildings of the gated community, and some were even located on the third floor, undermining any potential economic utility (local officials have refused to allocate any of the storefronts afraid of the disputes it will raise, so they all remain idle). This led one resident to speculate, that “the government is trying to intentionally hurt the people”²⁹³ – for him, there was no other explanation that could possibly explain the irrationality of the planning decision. Apparently, tensions between the local Party branch and residents in D community over this, as well as other issues (see discussion below over quality disputes) were exacerbated to the point that the local government allegedly instructed security guards to ban outsiders and especially researchers from entering the community – many residents were surprised I had not been detained and escorted out while I was talking to them.

Local residents speculate that the reason for the tremendous rate of empty apartments is corruption and the vacant apartments will sooner or later, by opaque means, become the assets of local officials. “Local cadres will definitely sell the empty

²⁹¹ Interview with restaurant owner, Dujiangyan, January 2013.

²⁹² Interview with Community B Party Secretary, Dujiangyan, February 2013.

²⁹³ Interview with Community D local resident 2, Dujiangyan, March 2013.

housing as commodity housing. Even if they can't sell it, it still counts as fixed assets on their books. Some have already made over hundreds of thousands of profits from this.”²⁹⁴ Another middle aged-man, sitting in the sun, joked with me that since “reform and opening, our government should enter the Guinness Book of World Records for the most advanced science and technology. They are famous for the size of their irrigated pork”²⁹⁵ (*guanshui zhurou* 灌水猪肉). In Chinese the word 灌水 literally means to “irrigate” but has a double connotation of artificially increasing weight (by pumping water into something) or to cook the books through illegal activity. In the words of a cab driver: “After the reconstruction, the Dujiangyan government increased the number of police and frequency of patrols. Do you know why? They are afraid that if residents ever found out how much money was wasted during the earthquake reconstruction, they would set fire to the city and overthrow the government. I am not being reactionary (*fandong* 反动), I am simply stating the facts.”²⁹⁶ While I cannot confirm or deny such conjectures, the excessive construction of urban housing according to a plan that in theory was supposed to economize land and relied on fairly precise population statistics certainly raises eyebrows. This was clearly not the transformation of a “disorderly, unstructured usage of space into its intensive rationalization.”²⁹⁷

What is more, many of the new apartments were built on previously agricultural land, which as angry villagers called to my attention is “loose soil” (*song ruan* 松软).²⁹⁸ According to a dozen of villagers I interviewed as a group from Community D, “the government promised us they would use re-bar to secure the foundations of the building, but we inspected it, and found out they lied to us.”²⁹⁹ While it is unclear how the villagers

²⁹⁴ Interview with Community D local resident 3, Dujiangyan, March 2013.

²⁹⁵ Interview with Community D resident 4, Dujiangyan, March 2013.

²⁹⁶ Interview with cab driver 2, Dujiangyan, May 2013.

²⁹⁷ Dujiangyan Party School, *Huifu, fazhan, chuangxin*, p. 29.

²⁹⁸ Interview with Community D resident 7, Dujiangyan, March 2013.

²⁹⁹ Ibid.

actually inspected and scientifically verified this information, they were clearly upset and anxious over what might happen in case of a future earthquake. The same group of villagers also explained to me that, the quality of construction is very poor. According to one villager, “When I was renovating my apartment, I found out that both the paint and concrete were shoddy. Touching it with your hand, the cement in the walls crumbles, and the paint peels right off.”³⁰⁰ While loose soil, peeling paint, and inferior concrete might appear to some as a-political objects, in Dujiangyan’s Community D, such mundane grievances are palpable proof, to the villagers, of the Party’s failure to serve their interests.³⁰¹ The intimate and ordinary realm of what people care about, understand, and experience is where Party legitimacy is slowly being eroded in rural China. It also should be kept in mind that Dujiangyan was home to three of the most severe school collapses as a result of the earthquake, resulting in an estimated total of over 900 deaths of students and teachers, casting a grim pallor over construction quality disputes.

Problems in daily life are exacerbated by economic stress. According to urban researcher Yan Guo, as a result of Dujiangyan’s “radical transformation of economic structure and labour market, a majority of locals lost their essentials for carrying on life in the city. This vulnerable group, usually are ones affected by the Earthquake, has run out of options but been force [sic] to leave home”³⁰² and migrate for employment opportunities. Sadly, this largely correct account overlooks the fact that many of the newly re-located peasantry lack the necessary skills as well as education levels, and are at an age demographic where even the option of migrant labor is largely closed off to them.³⁰³ Yan is correct that most of those who can migrate have already done so,

³⁰⁰ Ibid.

³⁰¹ See: Julie Chu, “When infrastructures attack: The workings of disrepair in China,” *American Ethnologist*, Vol. 41, No. 2 (2014), pp. 351-367.

³⁰² Yan Guo, “Post-Disaster Urbanism.”

³⁰³ See: Dorothy Solinger, “The Chinese Work Unit and Transient Labor in the Transition from Socialism,” *Modern China* Vol. 21 No. 2 (April 1995), pp. 155-183; Tamara Jacka, *Rural Women in Urban China: Gender Migration, and Social Change* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe 2005); Rachel

leaving behind³⁰⁴ residents for whom the rural-to-urban transformation has become a process of treading water with neither shore any longer in sight.

The Dujiangyan Party School conducted a survey of 30,000 residents who moved into concentrated settlements in 2009. The survey found that 27% of this population sample was between 40-50 years of age, and 21% is over the age of 51, which means that more than 1/4th of the “new urban citizens” are too young to retire and likely too old to learn new skills or migrate for work, if they have not done so already. Within the same population sample, 36% of residents’ highest degree of education was primary school, 42% junior high school.³⁰⁵ Also, 7.8% of the sample population receive welfare subsidies.

Murphy and Ran Tao, “No Wage and No Land: New Forms of Unemployment in Rural China,” in *Unemployment in China*, ed. G. Lee and M. Warner (London, UK: Routledge), pp. 128-149; and, William Hurst, *The Chinese Worker after Socialism* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

³⁰⁴ Ye Jinzhong, Wang Chunyu, Wu Huifang, He Congzhi, and Liu Juan, “Internal migration and left-behind populations in China,” *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, Vol. 40, No. 6 (2013), pp. 1119-1146.

³⁰⁵ Dujiangyan Party School, *Huifu, fazhan, chuangxin*, p. 31; for a discussion of the similarly low educational credentials of laid off state-sector workers, see: Hurst, *The Chinese Worker after Socialism*.

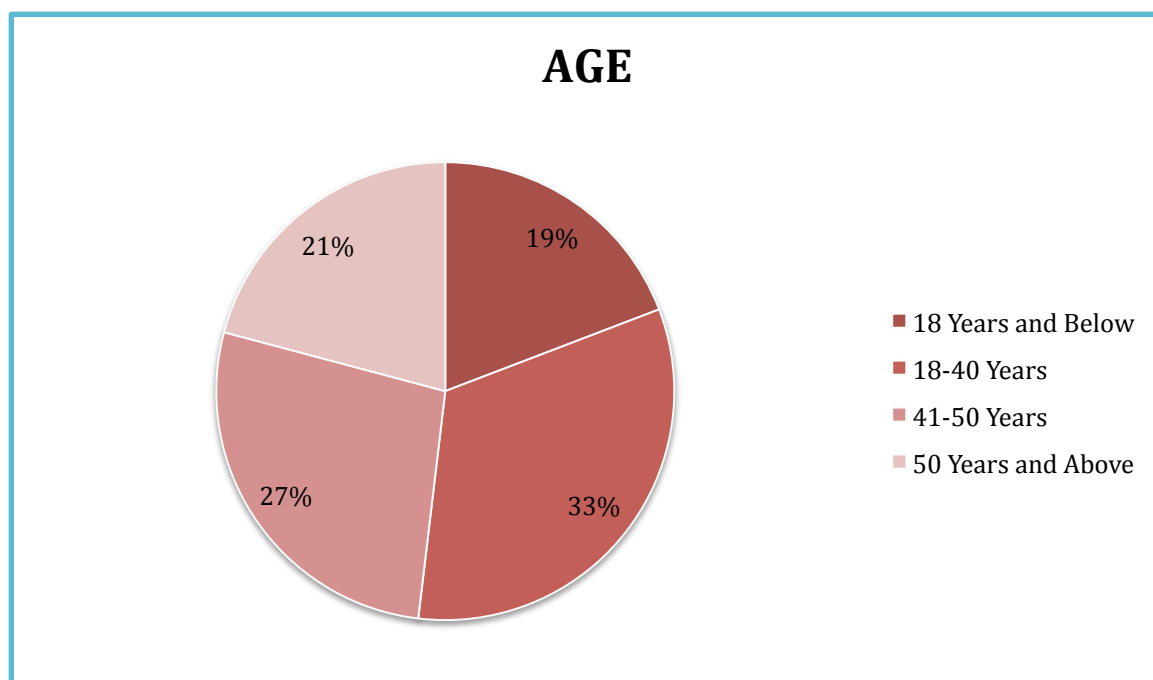


Figure 3.4 Sample New Urban Resident Population By Age³⁰⁶

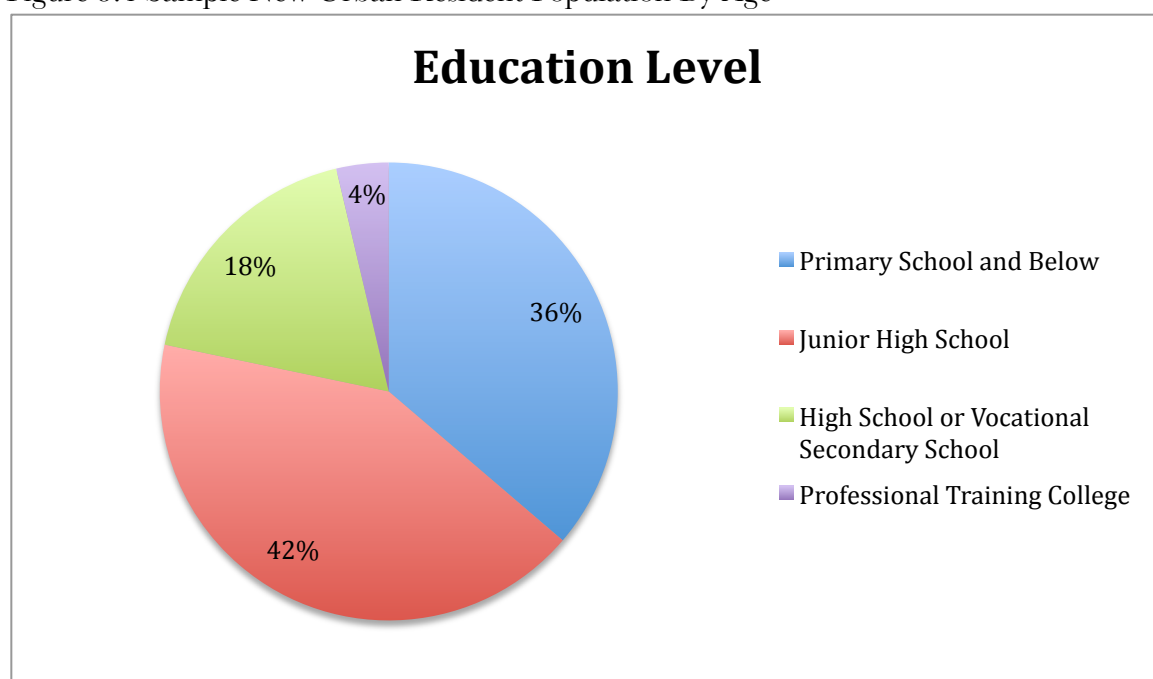


Figure 3.5 Sample New Urban Resident Population By Education Level ³⁰⁷

³⁰⁶ Adaptation from Chinese original. Ibid., p. 30.

³⁰⁷ Adaptation from Chinese original. Ibid., p. 30.

Combining Figures 3.4 and 3.5, this high percentage of uneducated middle-aged residents suggests that even if more jobs were available, this group of people probably would not have the qualifications to be hired. During interviews, many new urban citizens described themselves as un-hirable even as migrant laborers. One middle-aged woman exclaimed, “At my age, and with no education, who would hire me? Not even the factories in Guangdong would take someone like me!”³⁰⁸

Without land to farm, jobs to work, or places to migrate - most residents are idle (*xian zhe* 闲着).³⁰⁹ An anthropology professor in Chengdu described idleness as a phenomenology of “having nothing left, a new form of proletarianization that happens when people’s original living structures collapse (*wajie diao* 瓦解掉).”³¹⁰ This new form of proletarianization is composed of stubbornly unmalleable rural bodies, old and exhausted bodies, crippled bodies (from injuries during the earthquake), in sum, surplus bodies that cannot be absorbed by the circuits of capital taking place elsewhere.³¹¹ In the words of one interviewee, “I wake up and eat breakfast, then walk around until lunch, eat lunch, walk around until dinner, after dinner go to bed and get ready to do the same thing tomorrow.”³¹² Residents also spend their days playing mahjong, card games, or in the

³⁰⁸ Interview with local resident 21, Dujiangyan, April 2013.

³⁰⁹ For comparative examples of boredom and waiting as political economic symptoms, see: Bruce O’Neill, “Cast Aside: Boredom, Downward Mobility, and Homelessness in Post-Communist Bucharest,” *Cultural Anthropology*, 29, no. 1 (February 2014), pp. 8-31; Craig Jeffrey, *Timepass: Youth, Class, and the Politics of Waiting in India* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press 2010).

³¹⁰ Interview with professor from N University, Chengdu, May 2013.

³¹¹ For comparative and theoretical accounts of precarious existence at the periphery of global capital, see: Anne Allison, *Precarious Japan* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013); Tania Murray Li, “To Make Live or Let Die? Rural Dispossession and the Protection of Surplus Populations,” *Antipode*, Vol. 41 (2009), pp. 66-93; Elizabeth A. Povinelli, *Economies of Abandonment: Social Belonging and Endurance in Late Liberalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press 2011).

³¹² Interview with local resident 15, Dujiangyan, May 2013.

winter, sitting around a fire.³¹³ In dry climate, Chinese communist language, a Dujiangyan Party School internal document describes these people as a “surplus population with widespread low quality.”³¹⁴ This resembles the situation of the left-behind rural population in China’s “hollow-villages” more than it does a newly urbanized landscape. According to J. Ye et. al. “those left behind in rural communities are more likely to be women, children and elderly, and their average educational level is comparatively low.”³¹⁵

The implications of this situation for actual residents are rather bleak. Most of my interviewees complained about not having the space to raise pigs, which to them are a lifeline for food security. As one Dujiangyan villager explained: “The government’s ‘integrated program’ has both advantages and disadvantages. The main advantage of moving to this location is it is more convenient for transportation. The disadvantages are living in these multi-story homes. Water, electricity, gas and food all require money. In the past, I didn’t need to pay money in order to burn firewood; we also grew our food, and extracted our own oil. Now we cannot raise pigs and we are far away from our land, to get there is at least half an hour walk. If they let us repair our old houses and build a courtyard-style house where we could raise pigs and chickens that would be ideal. If I had a choice between this integrated program plan and rebuilding my old home on my own, I would choose the latter.”³¹⁶ Many residents are not used to paying for services and goods that were previously free or unnecessary. This is not only a matter of not wanting to or not being accustomed to pay but an inability to pay. A Party School report diagnoses the root of the problem as “living expenses increase, revenue sources

³¹³ Huddling by a fire is a traditional pastime in rural Sichuan; these fires, however, are illegal in urban communities because of the hazards they pose. Dujiangyan Party School, *Huifu, fazhan, chuangxin*, p. 43.

³¹⁵ Ye, “Internal Migration,” pp. 1129-1130.

³¹⁶ *Wenchuan dadizhen yizhounian zaiqu qunzhong fangtanlǚ* (Wenchuan Earthquake 1st Anniversary Disaster Masses Interview Transcripts) (2009), p. 96. Internal publication.

supporting life decrease.”³¹⁷ A common refrain among interviewees was: “since the reconstruction our quality of life has not improved, only the cost of living has increased”³¹⁸, or simply “consumer costs are too high.”³¹⁹

When I interviewed residents from Community D, Complex 2 in Dujiangyan, their narratives registered how the disruptions from re-location permeated every aspect of their lives, in both profound and mundane ways. One elderly resident was distraught because, after losing his ancestral land where he intended to be buried, he will now “die without a proper burial site” (*si wu zang shen zhi di* 死无葬身之地) lacking money to buy a plot elsewhere.³²⁰ The phrase he used also connotes to suffer a tragic ending as a rootless and spectral being. In fact, the previous homes of residents from Community D, Complex 2 only suffered minimal damage from the earthquake; according to the elderly man, “in the name of the reconstruction plan,” their homes were forcibly demolished to make way for the Chengdu-Dujiangyan High Speed Rail (reducing 1 ½ hour bus trip to 40 minutes, costing 15 RMB (\$2.40) per ticket, cheaper than the 17 RMB (\$2.72) bus ticket even). A man in his late-50s complained that the “buildings were too dense” and violated state policy mandating a proportion of “green space” to residential construction surface area.³²¹

Many Party cadres and scholars contend that these problems are “temporary growing pains” that will be resolved in the next generation.³²² The next generation of residents will be accustomed from birth to the amenities of urban life and will have no

³¹⁷ Dujiangyan Party School, *Huifu, fazhan, chuangxin*, p. 32.

³¹⁸ Multiple interviewees, Dujiangyan (common throughout the earthquake zone).

³¹⁹ Multiple interviewees, Dujiangyan (common throughout the earthquake zone). These complaints are also national phenomena. See: Lynnette Ong, “State-Led Urbanization in China: Skyscrapers, Land Revenue and ‘Concentrated Villages’,” *The China Quarterly*, Vol. 217 (March 2014), pp. 162-179.

³²⁰ Interview with Community D resident 8, Dujiangyan, March 2013.

³²¹ Interview with Community D resident 19, Dujiangyan, March 2013.

³²² Interview with Dujiangyan Party School Professor, Dujiangyan, January 2012; Interview with Professor from S University, Chengdu, November 2012.

memory or attachment to life in the countryside, eradicating at least the cultural basis of complaints. Party documents have also started to subtly shift discursive attention and hope to “later-generations.”³²³ While these prognostications may come true, they effectively relegate the re-located disaster victims to the status of a sacrificial generation.

Some of the younger people I interviewed, quite fluently expressed their desires and dreams in the Party discourse of enjoyment, spending, and consumerism. Standing in the doorway of the first floor of her apartment converted into a teahouse, a woman in her thirties informed me that “post-earthquake transformations are huge” and noted specifically an acute rise of “consumer consciousness,”³²⁴ which in Chinese implies developing a reflexive consciousness of oneself as someone who consumes, who is permitted to enjoy and desire consumption – in distinct contrast to the Maoist austerity or the cultural tradition of saving money, spending little. A young mother explained that, “in the past people were not willing to spend money, and would put all of it in savings. Now, the thinking is, if you should spend money, then spend it!”³²⁵

The Communist Party’s macro-economic plan to increase domestic demand requires this micro-level transformation of people’s daily habits, desires, and practices. The CCP is currently leading a massive biopolitical campaign to create new consumer subjectivities. This change in thinking might not, however, be entirely an effect of the Communist Party propaganda machine; some have suggested that new spending impulses are a result of Sichuan residents’ traumatic encounter with their own mortality during the earthquake. “You never know when another earthquake will happen, and if you are unlucky that time, what are you going to do with the money you saved after you are dead?”³²⁶ explained a local Chengdu resident. Problem is, even if people do change

³²³ Dujiangyan Party School, *Huifu, fazhan, chuangxin*, p. 34.

³²⁴ Interview with tea-house owner, Dujiangyan, December 2012.

³²⁵ Interview with local resident 27, Dujiangyan, June 2013.

³²⁶ Interview with Chengdu resident, Chengdu, October 2012.

their subjective desires, there is no guarantee that the economic conditions will be such to support their new desires to buy, decorate, and individualize. The same teahouse proprietor admitted that, “right now this community already has 6 teahouses like this one, so I have to sell tea very cheaply, and make hardly any money.”³²⁷ Her hope is that the idleness of community members will be the engine for her business, “so many people have nothing to do here (*hen duo ren meiyou shiqing keyi zuo* 很多人没有事情可以做), they need a place where they can relax and be entertained.”³²⁸

Despite indications of an entrepreneurial spirit developing among some of their members, the new urban communities lack economic vitality. This pervasive idleness has ironically pushed the people and Party closer together, as the people’s dependency on the Party has increased, even though its trust and approval of the Party has declined. The government’s objective to transform itself into a neutral “service-oriented government”³²⁹ and withdraw from direct and heavy-handed interference in the functioning of the economy and affairs of daily life has backfired dramatically. Instead, the local state and party organs are even more enmeshed in the politics of everyday life. According to one local cadre I interviewed, “it was easier to govern in the countryside because everyone was spread out and self-reliant. Now, in these urban communities, if people have any problem, they immediately come to us. Where else can they go? They have no money to resolve problems on their own;”³³⁰ a Party Secretary from Community F in Pi County,³³¹ disparagingly referred to state’s role in the new urban communities as

³²⁷ Interview with tea-house owner, Dujiangyan, December 2012.

³²⁸ Ibid.

³²⁹ Dujiangyan Party School, *Huifu, fazhan, chuangxin*, p. 19.

³³⁰ Interview with grassroots cadre, Dujiangyan, January 2013.

³³¹ Interview with grassroots cadre, Pi County, February 2013. I have included data from Pi County here not only because it borders Dujiangyan, but, also because it did not suffer severe damage from the earthquake. As a result, Pi County’s “urban-rural integration” developed according to normal conditions, whereas Dujiangyan’s was accelerated under the auspices of earthquake reconstruction. Despite these different conditions, Pi County and Dujiangyan’s urban-rural integration problems are nearly identical.

a “nanny.”³³² Over a dozen urban-community cadres I interviewed, in both Dujiangyan and Pi County, described governing these communities as a “head-ache” and “irritating.”

When residents have trouble paying their bills or if a pipe leaks in their apartment, without cash or the ability to solve problems on their own, they turn to the Party for help or as the object of their grievances. In their eyes, the Party put them there so it is the Party’s responsibility to solve their problems. According to Party Secretary of Community F of Pi County: “people’s dependency (*yilaixing* 依赖性) is very strong. Any problem and they immediately come to the government asking for help.”³³³ This dependency multiplies the encounters and increases the potential surfaces of friction between state and society/Party and masses – it expands the range of objects that can produce political disputes within the territory of everyday life. This also explains why Party officials are obsessively vigilant over small details and mundane disputes, perceiving in them the sprouts (*mengya* 萌芽) of social instability.

Not only are new urban residents more dependent on the Party than they were as peasants, but the Party’s biopolitical investment in “new urban citizen construction” extends its reach into the realms of ordinary life. According to Party Secretary of Community B in Pi County, “urban-rural integration has been underway here for 6 years already, people are still spitting melon seeds everywhere, chaotically throwing their trash where they want – all of these are huge problems! Six years already living here and the same problems still persist, the habits have not changed, despite our efforts to educate and train them.”³³⁴ Another Party Secretary of Community F in Pi County complained about the numerous violations of community rules, such as villagers growing crops inside their apartments, making fires in the courtyard, converting their ground-floors into

³³² Interview, Party Secretary, F Community, Pi County, February 2013.

³³³ Ibid.

³³⁴ Interview with Party Secretary, B Community, Pi County, February 2013.

mahjong parlors or teahouses, among other public/aesthetic nuisances – phenomena I witnessed on a daily basis in Dujiangyan, as well. This Party Secretary explained how she was initially very idealistic and eager to help the farmers in their transition, but now, her hair is going white from the stress. “We are understaffed, and we just can’t chase after all and correct of these violations. We have to some extent tolerate them otherwise they will increase tensions between the Party and local residents.”³³⁵ I interviewed Party-Secretary of Community A in Dujiangyan while he was on his way to hand out “red envelopes” filled with small money gifts to villagers for the upcoming Chinese New Year. When I asked him about these kinds of infractions, he sighed: “we sit down with them, carry out educational campaigns to train them how to live in their new homes, but they do what they want anyway. Management is very difficult.”³³⁶

This suggests that the transition from rural to urban has broken down somewhere along the route to modernity and is not spontaneously resuming itself - even invasive Party tactics cannot seem to push it back on track. Rather than engage in introspective self-criticism that would need to account for the Party’s responsibility for the flaws in the urban-rural integration plan and the promises it made, its favored narrative is to blame the recalcitrant character of the peasantry for de-railing the process.

During conversations with Party officials, and in many internal Party documents, continual reference is made to the “traditional peasant mentality” (*xiao nong yishi* 小农意识) of “waiting, depending, and demanding” (*deng, kao, yao* 等, 靠, 要). The peasants’ “inability to adapt their thinking”³³⁷ as an explanation conveniently individualizes the

³³⁵ Interview with Party Secretary, F Community, Pi County. Adding to the stress levels, new urban communities are understaffed with often 12 cadres for a community of 10,000 people and overwhelmed with administrative obligations delegated by higher-level officials in the township, not to mention demands from below. The Party Secretary cited the phrase: “the higher-levels have a thousand threads, but below, there is only one needle” (*shang mian qian tiao xian, xia mian yi gen zhen* 上面千条线, 下面一根针).

³³⁶ Interview with Party Secretary, A Community, Dujiangyan, January 2013.

³³⁷ Dujiangyan Party School, *Huifu, fazhan, chuangxin*, p. 32; Deng Rong, “Transformations,” pp. 37-38.

problems caused by the reconstruction and re-directs blame away from the Party and more intractable structural issues, such as the lack of economic development. “After concentrating the peasantry into housing, their identities were transformed into that of urban citizens and their dwelling was modernized, but their thinking, sense, and life-style still require a process.”³³⁸ This “antiquated way of thinking”³³⁹ is traced back to “ancestral” patterns of dispersed living that tenaciously “persist in one’s old ways” (*wo xing wo su* 我行我素)³⁴⁰ making the peasantry “resistant” (*di chu* 抵触) to change. In the Party’s eyes, the “low quality (*suzhi* 素质) of peasants”³⁴¹ is responsible for their “lack of indulging in consumerism.”³⁴² People believe that public areas are the state’s responsibility and so do nothing to change their “dirty, disorderly, and substandard”³⁴³ behaviors that ruin the aesthetic of urbanity. Strikingly, rural sensibilities, and not the labor market, are also blamed for unemployment. “Initiative to find employment or engage in entrepreneurship is weak. After becoming citizens on paper, some peasants’ thinking still has not been transformed in the direction of urban citizens. Their ability to independently start their own ventures or find work for themselves is frail. Their thinking is to depend on the government and subsidies of village committees.”³⁴⁴ This dependence on the government is summed up in a uniquely Chinese phrase that is difficult to translate into English, which literally means “it is hot above, but cold down below” (*shangtou re, xiamian leng* 上头热, 下面冷)³⁴⁵ implying that villagers will not act

³³⁸ Ge Zongrong, “Guanyu licheng youcheng zhanlue shiye xia de ‘cheng zhong cun’ gaizao” (Under the Strategic Horizon for Establishing and Optimizing the City: Reforming Village-in-City) in Dujiangyanshi Dangxiao, ed., *Xin sixiang, xin silu, xin chengguo: Dujiangyanshi di shisiqi qingnian ganbu peixunban diaoyan wenji huibian* (New Thoughts, New Thinking, New Results: Dujiangyan Municipality 14th Young Cadre Training Class Research Collection of Works)(2009), pp. 38-39.

³³⁹ Interview, with Party Secretary, B Community, Pi County, February 2013.

³⁴⁰ Deng Rong, “Transformations,” p. 37.

³⁴¹ Ibid., p. 38.

³⁴² Ibid., p. 38.

³⁴³ Ibid., 38.

³⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 37.

³⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 38.

without being told what to do. In addition to lacking self-motivation, peasants' difficult economic conditions are often explained as the result of their lack of discipline and dissolute morality. When I asked one Party cadre why so many residents seem to be lacking money, he responded: "we gave them money after the earthquake, but some people, went ahead and bought a car they cannot afford to put gas in now, or blew all the money on gambling and now have nothing left. So they come back to the local Party branch complaining and demanding more money."³⁴⁶

The Party's position is that idleness is a moral problem rather than a socio-economic phenomenon. In the new urban communities, cadres typically identify idleness as the main culprit for troublemaking without investigating why people have nothing to do, which would implicate the Party in the picture. A Dujiangyan Party School Report nicely captures this sentiment: "Some people with nothing to do make trouble out of nothing, small problems can possibly spark contradictions, to the extent of bringing about mass incidents."³⁴⁷ The government has enlisted NGOs to help fix this problem by organizing community events, leisurely activities, or handicrafts to keep people out of trouble. According to a local Dujiangyan NGO worker: "After becoming urban, most residents don't know what to do and are idle, so we help them do meaningful activities"³⁴⁸ - an example of how discourse slips amid registers of social management and philanthropy.

In addition to NGO activities and educational campaigns to civilize the habits of rural residents, the Party has also launched "gratitude education campaigns" (*gan'en jiaoyu* 感恩教育) in the countryside to train discontented residents how to display the proper affects of gratitude and loyalty to the Party in exchange for the gift of reconstruction. A professor from the Dujiangyan Party School explained to me how the campaign works.

³⁴⁶ Interview with local cadre, Dujiangyan, January 2013.

³⁴⁷ Dujiangyan Party School, *Huifu, fazhan, chuangxin*, p. 16.

³⁴⁸ Interview with NGO worker, Dujiangyan, January 2013.

“The Party will collect stories of events that happened during the earthquake and then disseminate this archive as a way of reminding people of the trauma they experienced and how the Party helped them recover. It is a cruel example, but if your partner died during the earthquake, but you were rescued, the Party will remind you of this as a way of teaching you to be grateful for the fact that you are alive, while others are not. If the Party was not there to help pull you out, you would probably be dead too. This process is then repeated again and again until it sinks in.”³⁴⁹ He referred to it as process of “enlightenment” (*shudao* 疏导) which in Mandarin connotes helping others to see what is right or sensible. Even if this process does not change people’s affects, it at least makes it much harder to articulate discontent – many residents I interviewed told me they did not want to make too much trouble over their problems because they were afraid of being viewed as “ungrateful” subjects. Another strategy for resolving the obstacles slowing down urban-rural integration is to send new urban residents to visit other places, as a way of “training” one’s sensibilities.³⁵⁰ The Party’s local Organization Department or Township Government organize trips to affluent urban areas so that people can learn what civilized life looks like, and to more remote and backward places to appreciate how much better off they are now. The construction of comparative tableaux (past/present; developed/poor) is a strategy borrowed from the 1963 Maoist campaign of recalling the sorrows of the past and savoring the joys of the present (*yikusitian* 忆苦思甜) in which villagers were required to orally re-count their suffering under landlords before the liberation, so they could savor the blessedness of the present and the Party who bestowed it.

³⁴⁹ Interview with Dujiangyan Party School Professor, Dujiangyan, December 2012.

³⁵⁰ Ibid.

CONCLUSION: FANTASY AS NECESSARY SUPPLEMENT OF RATIONALITY

With the earthquake as a convenient alibi, the Party did not want to lose the opportunity to implement top-down plans for the urbanization of villagers. In the stinging words of Yan Guo, the post-earthquake/urban-rural integration plan resulted in a “massive consumption of fertile land for a fantasized urban China.”³⁵¹

Fantasy is the hidden core of Maoist neo-developmentalism. The cold, rationalized jargon of “urban-rural integration” orbits around the figure of new urban citizens pursuing private paradise³⁵² in a moderately prosperous society (*xiaokang shehui* 小康社会). This dream-like status of the figure is protected by a veneer of scientific armor that presents itself as impervious to criticism. The vertiginous stream of statistics the Party publishes on urban-rural integration (or any topic for that matter) is typically more bewildering than clarifying. Reading statistic upon statistic and campaign slogan after campaign slogan has a de-realizing effect on its object. Publishing how many apartments were built, with what infrastructural improvements, accomplishing how many great strides of development, and relocating how many peasants, who have written countless beautiful couplets thanking the Party – crystallizes the circular, self-referential, and fantasmatic elements of development by theoretical fiat.

Dujiangyan’s Planning Exhibition Pavilion is a perfect archive of this urban fantasy. The basement level of the Pavilion contains a miniature model of Dujiangyan, with different sections that light up from pushing the buttons on a control-panel. The walls are decorated with blueprints of Dujiangyan’s urban construction projects, including government buildings, schools, tourist facilities, and residential complexes. As the figuration of an unrealized future, digitized residents are photo-shopped into the images, in some cases, missing a face. Fantasy is not the opposite of reality – it is the

³⁵¹ Yan Guo, “Post-Disaster Urbanism,” p. 6.

³⁵² Zhang Li, *In Search of Paradise: Middle-Class Living in a Chinese Metropolis* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press 2010).

core around which it is organized. During the Mao years, the mythical aura of the model worker Lei Feng set the standard for communist subjectivity. In the present, the goal has shifted from the creation of model workers to model urban consumers. The failure to achieve these dreams inscribes itself in unintended consequences. Peasants might lack employment and purchasing power, but they can no longer go back to being peasants.

Chapter 4: Yingxiu Township

The Political Aesthetics of Development

They show to foreign visitors, comrades from other parts of the country or comrades sent by the central authorities to their area only what is good and not what is bad. They tell these visitors only the achievements, and not the shortcomings and mistakes which, if taken up at all, will not be gone into at any great length but dismissed perfunctorily in a few words.³⁵³

Maoist political aesthetics were “profoundly romantic in form and utopian in vision.”³⁵⁴ Mao’s goal of modernizing China and achieving communism was a bold vision that required inspiring models, representations, and narratives of heroism and sacrifice. On the other hand, Mao was afraid that *formalism* – the pursuit of appearance over substance – would destroy the Party’s credibility and ruin its relationship with society.

This internal conflict did not disappear during the reform era. Drawing from several extended visits to Wenchuan County’s Yingxiu Township, interviews with over 40 local residents, analysis of reconstruction plans, other Party documents, and media reports, I argue that Yingxiu Township reveals local government in China to be an *aesthetic state*. The plan to turn Yingxiu Township into an international tourist attraction was not based on Yingxiu’s objective economic, geographic, infrastructural, and cultural conditions. Instead, Yingxiu was re-constructed as a living museum for inspection visits from high-level Party officials. In the words of an anthropologist who conducted extended fieldwork in Yingxiu, “If you try to examine things from the point of view of economic rationality (*jingji de lǐxing* 经济的理性), you will see so many examples of sheer irrationality, but there is a logic, it is a political-poetic (*zhengzhi de shixue* 政治的诗学) logic. In Yingxiu Township, the government did not consider whether or not Yingxiu’s

³⁵³ Mao Zedong, “Strive to Learn From Each Other And Don’t Stick the Beaten Track and Be Complacent,” (December 1963) trans. public at http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-9/mswv9_10.htm

³⁵⁴ Tang Xiaobing, *Chinese Modern: The Heroic and the Quotidian* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000), p. 283.

economy would be sustainable, they wanted to turn it into a symbol (*fuhao* 符号) and display (*zhanshi* 展示) of the strength of the Party.”³⁵⁵

RIDING ON HORSEBACK, WHILE LOOKING AT FLOWERS

Upon visiting Yingxiu on May 7, 2010, then Sichuan Provincial Party Secretary Liu Qibao 刘奇葆 proclaimed that Yingxiu will become a “world-famous township” (*shijie mingzhen* 世界名镇).³⁵⁶ In the words of the People’s Daily memorial column on the 3rd anniversary of the earthquake, the reconstruction was described as “mind-blowing” (*zhenhan* 震撼) and “hard to believe” (*nanyizhixin* 难以置信).³⁵⁷

A striking indicator that central and provincial level officials regarded the reconstruction of Yingxiu as a remarkable success is the conspicuously high number of cadres who were promoted for participating in reconstruction, drawing the ridicule and ire of local residents. According to 2010 Annual Work Report internally published by the Wenchuan County Communist Party’s Organization Department, between 2008-2010 period, 47 cadres were selectively promoted (*xuanba* 选拔) as a result of their work during the rescue and relief period, 57 cadres for work during the reconstruction period, and 8 cadres for rescue work during the floods that ensued after the earthquake. Throughout the Wenchuan County, 52 “advanced collectives” (*xianjin jiti* 先进集体) and 217 “advanced individuals” (*xianjin geren* 先进个人) were given commendations (*biaozhang* 表彰).³⁵⁸ Although these are county-level data on post-earthquake cadre promotion and

³⁵⁵ Interview with professor from N University, Chengdu, May 2012.

³⁵⁶ Tang Shuquan, “Sichuan shengwei shuiji chengyao yingxiu dazao cheng ‘shijie mingzhen’ (Sichuan Provincial Party Secretary Calls for Yingxiu to Become a ‘World Famous Township’), *Zhongguo xinwenwang* (Chinese News Network) (May 8, 2010) at <http://politics.people.com.cn/GB/14562/11547445.html> (last accessed August 2013).

³⁵⁷ Ren Zhongping, “Wenchuan teda dizhen san zhounian zhi” (On the Third Anniversary of the Wenchuan Earthquake,” *People’s Daily* (May 11, 2011) at <http://news.sina.com.cn/c/2011-05-11/113422444531.shtml> (last accessed June 6, 2014).

³⁵⁸ Zhonggong Wenchuanxianwei zuzhibu (Wenchuan County Communist Party Organization Department), “Guanyu ‘Shiyiwu’ Gongzuo zongjie ji 2011 nian gongzuo anpai de baogao” (Report Concerning the Summary of 11 5th Year Plan Work and Work Plans for 2011) (2010).

commendation, according to interviews with several different local residents, Yingxiu Township had an especially high number of cadres who were promoted. One villager joked, “there is a popular saying: if you want to get promoted, come to Yingxiu!” (*minjian de chuanshuo: xiang shengguan, dao yingxiu lai* 民间的传说：想升官，到映秀来).³⁵⁹

The appearance of success dissolves after spending an extended period of time in Yingxiu and hearing a common set of complaints, frustrations, anxieties, and barely contained anger that saturates most conversations with local residents. A popular joke circulating on the Internet vividly captures the political atmosphere on the ground in Yingxiu: “When a TV reporter was conducting street interviews in Wenchuan County, Yingxiu Township, he asked an elderly man: “Did you hear that Guangdong Province was donating 620 million RMB to build a public cemetery only for Party cadres and government officials? What is your opinion on the matter?” The elderly man paused for a moment to reflect then responded, “If they are going to be buried alive, I absolutely approve!”³⁶⁰ This joke resonates with the tone expressed by most of my interviewees. After a long interview, a retired PLA soldier sighed apologetically: “I am sorry for speaking so long, but I could talk to you for 3 days and 3 nights straight about how angry I am with the reconstruction and not say everything.”³⁶¹ During the course of the interview, he professed nostalgia for the harsh rectification campaigns of the Mao era that disciplined the wayward behavior of local Party cadres. Even grassroots village officials risked breaking ranks and voicing their discontent. During the 2013 Spring Festival, a local village party secretary protested arrears for contracted reconstruction work owed by the township government; he hung a banner on the wall of the administrative building

³⁵⁹ Interview with local resident 47, Yingxiu, June 2012.

³⁶⁰ This joke was sent to me via the popular social network platform WeChat on May 13, 2013, one day after the 5th anniversary of the earthquake by a local Yingxiu Township resident.

³⁶¹ Interview with retired PLA cadre, Yingxiu, March 2012.

proclaiming, “The government is too black” (*zhengfu tai hei* 政府太黑) before he climbed to the top of it with a loud-speaker to broadcast his discontent.³⁶²

From the external vantage point of central level leaders, reporters, and non-local tourists, whose contact with Yingxiu is only momentary and primarily visual, the reconstruction appears as a miraculous success. The Chinese proverb “riding on horseback, while looking at flowers” (*zou ma guan hua* 走马观花) aptly describes the superficiality of this kind of knowledge. Conversely, from the embedded perspective of local residents who are constantly worried over how to financially support themselves in a lifeless local economy, the reconstruction is lived as a failure. This perspectival gap is the result of a breakdown of the Party’s Maoist epistemology outlined in Chapter 1. Party officials only perceive a series of carefully orchestrated scenes preventing them from obtaining any real knowledge about local conditions. The ritualization of the investigation process undermines the ability to formulate policies that adequately address the needs of the masses. This crisis of representation³⁶³ raises the disconcerting possibility that Yingxiu was not reconstructed primarily to serve the needs of its residents.

In the words of a local resident, “The government spent so much money on projects the people do not like or need. They entirely neglected to consider how to improve local residents’ ability to make a living. Instead they only considered how people from the street would view outer appearances (*biaomian shang de dongxi* 表面上的东西). Looking at Yingxiu, it seems good, but this is only a feeling, it cannot be converted into wealth.”³⁶⁴ Most local residents I interviewed validated this perspective by describing the reconstruction as a face project. In their esteem, Yingxiu Township was

³⁶² Interview with local reporter, Yingxiu, June 2013.

³⁶³ Wang Hui, “The Crisis of Representativeness.”

³⁶⁴ Interview with local resident 31, Yingxiu Township, June 2012. According to the anthropologist mentioned earlier: “reconstruction was not about rebuilding a locality, named Yingxiu Township, that people could make a living in and call home. From the start, it was about constructing a window that opened up to the outside and allowed people to look in to see what the state was capable of accomplishing.”

reconstructed as a political symbol and not as a place where they could rebuild their lives and maintain a sense of hope and future possibility.³⁶⁵

THE INSTITUTIONAL ORIGINS OF POLITICAL AESTHETIC RATIONALITY

Mao described eradicating formalism as akin to cutting “chives” (*jiu cai* 韭菜): no matter how much you cut, they will always grow back. I suggest that a reason for formalism’s tenacity is the organizational structure of the Chinese Communist Party.

The breeding ground for formalism is specifically China’s *nomenklatura* system and mechanisms for cadre appointment and evaluation.³⁶⁶ Cadres’ political career prospects are determined by higher-level officials’ perception of their work in its representational mediation: visually in manicured urban aesthetics and statistically in GDP growth. Cadres have rational incentive to invest their resources in the construction of favorable representations that might not accurately reflect reality. In this institutional context, politics is the management of visibility.³⁶⁷

³⁶⁵ Many villagers expressed a sense of economic precariousness and lack of hope for ways to improve their situation. In the words of one villager, “we don’t even have a little bit of hope” (*yi dian xiwang dou mei you* 一点希望都没有). Interview with local resident 34, Yingxiu, July 2013. For a sobering discussion on political economy and hopelessness in post 3.11 Japan, see: Anne Allison, *Precarious Japan* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013).

³⁶⁶ Yongshun Cai contends that the promotion and tenure system of cadres results in image-enhancing projects aimed to impress higher officials that are neither ‘developmental’ or ‘predatory’ strictly speaking, but often, impractical and wasteful. “When politicians are answerable to their superiors, their career goals may drive them to make decisions and allocate resources for the self-serving purpose of image enhancement, with little concern for the economic costs or other negative outcomes of their decisions.” Cai Yongshun, “Irresponsible state: local cadres and image-building in China,” *The Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics* Vol. 20, No. 4 (2004), p. 22. Similarly, Kevin O’Brien and Lijiang Li argue that, “Unlike unpopular policies such as ... enforcing birth control, many popular policies such as employing a democratic work style and respecting villagers’ rights, tend to be nonquantifiable.” Kevin O’Brien and Li Lianjiang, “Selective Policy Implementation in Rural China,” *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 31, No. 1 (1999), pp.173-174.

³⁶⁷ “Politics revolves around what is seen and what can be said about it, around who has the ability to see and the talent to speak, around the properties of spaces and the possibilities of time.” Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, trans. Gabriel Rockhill (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing 2006), p. 12.

In internal Party debates on how to reform cadre management and assessment, its problems are often described in visual metaphors. “Because they lack substantive mass participation, mass selection, mass supervision, the critical determination of whether or not one will get promoted is still oriented around higher-level officials and not the masses and party members. . . . due to the fact that political achievement evaluations are only determined by higher-level officials, *cadres only look upwards* (*xiang shang kan* 向上看)” (emphasis added).³⁶⁸ The cadre evaluation system discounts how ordinary citizens view cadres. According to an internal report from the Central Committee of the Communist Party School, Provincial Leader Advanced Group:

Cadres attach importance to *conspicuous political achievements* and neglect hidden achievements. They focus on present benefits and overlook long-term benefits. Because it is *quicker to see* the results of conspicuous political achievements and present benefits, and easier to evaluate, some cadres have a *short-term vision seeking instant benefits* (*ji gong jin li* 急功近利) and are happy to *grab fame and prestige* (*zhua sheng shi da* 抓声势大) . . . obsessed with making a *superficial display and engaging in face-construction* . . . even to the extent that some cadres who want to *display glorious achievements* (*huihuang yeji* 辉煌业绩) are not afraid of displeasing the masses, but are only afraid that their *high-level authorities will not pay attention* (*bu pa qunzhong bu manyi, jiu pa lingdao bu zhuyi* 不怕群众不满意, 就怕领导不注意) (emphasis added).³⁶⁹

Another institutional mechanism conducive to formalism was the Provincial Partnership Assistance Program, discussed in chapter 2. Generally speaking, provincial partners viewed reconstruction primarily as a means of constructing “business cards illustrating assistance achievement” and sought to complete the process as soon as possible in order to return home quickly with their impressive political achievements.³⁷⁰

³⁶⁸ Cai Xia, “Miandui,” p. 38.

³⁶⁹ Zhongyang dangxiao shengbuji ganbu jinxiuban (Central Committee of the Communist Party School, Provincial Level Cadre Advanced Studies Group), “Ba zhengji kaoping jizhi chuangxin zuowei jingji fazhan fangshi zhuanbian de guanjian zhuashou” (Innovations in the Mechanisms for Evaluating Political Achievement as a Critical Starting Point for Transforming the Mode of Economic Development), *Baogaoxuan* (Chinese Communist Party, Party School Selected Reports), Vol. 6 (2010), pp. 28-29.

³⁷⁰ Chen Guaming, *Legal Issues*, p. 62.

This led to an invidious “competitive wind” (*panbi feng* 攀比风) between provinces to see who could manifest the most impressive achievements within the shortest duration of time. According to Guo Lan from the Sichuan Academy of Social Sciences, “the comparisons of investment and speed resulted in a waste of capital and resources.”³⁷¹ Zheng Yongnian, from the National University of Singapore, critically assessed this mechanism as promoting the “the perspective of political achievements,” while ignoring “the perspective of disaster victims.”³⁷²

What is initially a political question – how do I serve the people and satisfy their needs – mutates into an aesthetic question – how can I construct conspicuous symbols of success that will attract the attention and approval of my superiors?³⁷³ The goal of “serving the people” is sacrificed on the altar of its own representation

Wenchuan County is no exception to the rule. In the initial months after the earthquake, former Wenchuan Party Secretary Wang Bin rebuked cadres who were “indifferent to the interests of the masses and do not sufficiently grasp the urgencies, difficulties, complaints and hopes of the masses. They lack any deep emotion toward the masses and their ‘mass work’ lacks both depth as well as detail. Problems that ought to have been resolved have dragged on for too long without resolution and grow larger resulting in serious grievances and multiple contradictions among the masses.”³⁷⁴ The implication of Party Secretary Wang’s speech follow the logic established in Chapter 1.

371 Wu Yue, “Wenchuan zaiqu chongjian gao mianzi gongcheng, zhengfu dalou, zui chaobiao” (Face engineering in the reconstruction of Wenchuan disaster areas, government buildings exceeded construction limits), *Sohu news* (May 11, 2012) <http://news.sohu.com/20120511/n342984097.shtml> last accessed July 15, 2014.

372 Ibid.

373 This calls attention to the aesthetic dimension within Andrew Walder’s concept of “organized dependence.” Andrew Walder, “Organized Dependency and Cultures of Authority in Chinese Industry,” *Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 43, No. 1 (November 1983), pp. 51-76; Andrew Walder, “The Decline of Communist Power: Elements of a Theory of Institutional Change,” *Theory and Society*, Vol. 23, No. 2 (April 1994), pp. 297-323.

374 Wang Bin, “Zai shi jie xianwei di 32 ci changwei (kuoda) huiyishang de jianghua” (Speech Given at the 32nd Meeting of the 10th County Standing Committee Enlarged Conference) (September 5, 2008).

In a Maoist political system, state-society relations deteriorate without mass work, local investigation, and an emotional connection between the Party and the people. In the absence of these mechanisms, governance becomes “the pursuit of phony political achievements” (*xujia de zhengji* 虚假的政绩).³⁷⁵

The dangers and nihilistic implications of formalism are captured in even starker terms by the next Wenchuan County Party Secretary Qing Lidong 青理东 at a County-Level Party General Congress in October 2009: “The Party’s governance concept is ‘people-oriented’ (*yi ren wei ben* 以人为本), the entire work of post-disaster restoration and reconstruction is organized around the people, improving the people’s welfare, if we depart from this central point, what are we building? How are we building it? Hasn’t everything lost its original meaning?”³⁷⁶

WAITING FOR GODOT POLITICAL ECONOMY

Yingxiu’s post-earthquake economic development options were constrained by a lack of natural resources and de-industrialization. The earthquake ravaged Yingxiu’s scarce arable land ruling out agricultural modernization as a viable development model. On top of this, a process of regional de-industrialization was already under way a decade prior to the earthquake. According to Christopher McNally, since a countywide restructuring and privatization campaign in 2001, “many firms are in dire financial straits. About half of Wenchuan’s industry continues to lose money. Even worse, about 20 percent of industry is polluting and will have to move, close down, or install expensive

³⁷⁵ Wang Bin, “Zai xinren kejiganbu peixunban jieye dianlishang de jianghua” (Speech Given at the Graduation Ceremony for Newly Trained Technical Cadres) (September 20, 2007).

³⁷⁶ “People-orientation” was a key slogan of the Hu Jintao administration and a precursor to their platform of constructing a “harmonious society.” It remains part of the political vocabulary of the Xi administration. Qing Lidong, “Jiefang sixiang, kuaizhongqiuha, nuli shixian sannian huifu chongjian renwu liangnian jiben wancheng mubiao” (Liberate Thinking, Pursue the Good with Speed, Industiously Implement and Complete the Goal of 3 Year Reconstruction within 2 Years), *Zai Zhonggong Wenchuanxianwei shi jie jiu ci quantihuiyishang de jianghua* (Speech Given at the Wenchuan County Communist Party General Congress, 10th Plenary Session), Di ershiba qi, zongdi 85 qi, 18 (October 2009).

pollution treatment equipment . . . many factories are faced with closure.”³⁷⁷ After the earthquake, almost all of the factories surrounding Yingxiu closed down or relocated in fear of future natural disasters.³⁷⁸ Yingxiu Township’s only economic options were to export migrant labor or develop tourism. The former option, however, has the downside of deepening rural-depopulation and does not resolve the need to develop a self-reliant local economy. In the words of a Wenchuan County official: “If we don’t do tourism, what else are we going to do?”³⁷⁹

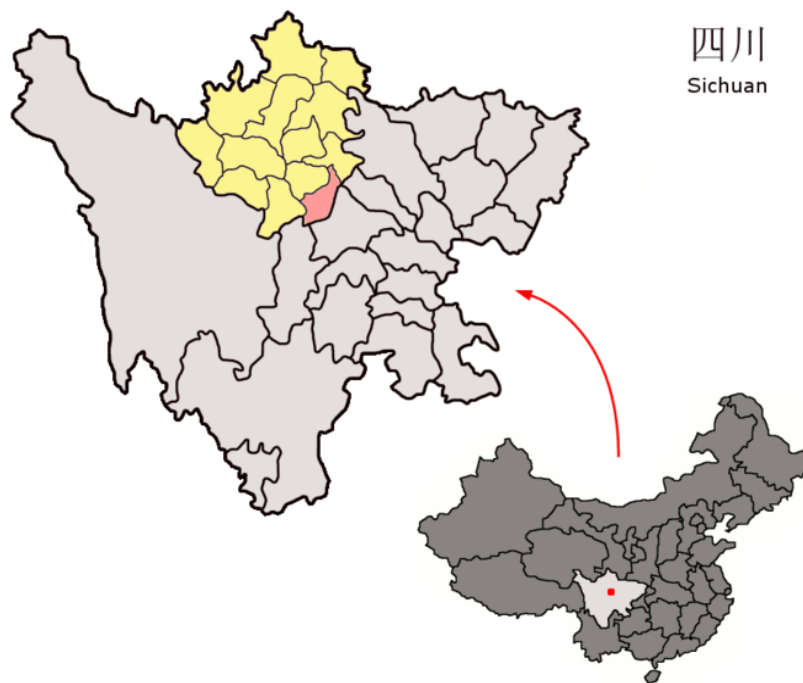


Figure 4.1 Map of Aba Prefecture (阿坝州) in yellow, Wenchuan County in orange top-left, location in China bottom left³⁸⁰

³⁷⁷ Christopher McNally, “Sichuan: Driving Capitalist Development Westward,” *The China Quarterly* No. 178 (2004), pp. 442-443.

³⁷⁸ This fear was not unwarranted. In July 2013, days of torrential rain triggered a landslide that damaged much of Zhangjiaping Village and other parts of Yingxiu Township. The gas station on the road leading to the village (a road I walked along frequently!) was swept away into the river.

³⁷⁹ Interview with Wenchuan County Government official, February 2013.

³⁸⁰ This map was downloaded from Wenchuan’s wikipedia page.

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Location_of_Wenchuan_within_Sichuan_\(China\).png](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Location_of_Wenchuan_within_Sichuan_(China).png)

Prior to the earthquake, a plan to transform Yingxiu and its surrounding townships into a regional tourism corridor was already being drafted. During the Wenchuan County Enlarged Working Conference on July 26, 2007, Wenchuan County Party Secretary Wang announced the goal of “creating a quality tourism brand-name” (*dazao jingping liuyou pinpai* 打造精品旅游品牌) ushered in through a signed agreement to transform Yingxiu and Caopo Townships into a tourist development zone.³⁸¹ As of April 30, 2008 an estimated 1.6 billion Yuan (\$235,294,118 USD) was already invested in the project.³⁸² Wang warned conference participants, however, that they were still a long way from achieving this goal. “The tourism industry in Wenchuan County has not yet achieved scale; its content is homogenous, product development is lagging, and, its market system is incomplete.”³⁸³

After the earthquake, the urgency and national importance of reconstruction did not leave much time or space for these concerns to be adequately addressed. The formulation of Yingxiu’s reconstruction plan was dictated by top-down political process in a compressed timeframe that conspicuously lacked the participation of local residents. On February 9, 2009, the Sichuan Provincial Government convened the “Wenchuan County, Yingxiu Township Master Plan Circumstances Report Conference” (*Wenchuan Yingxiuzhen zongji guihua qingkuang huibao* 汶川县映秀镇总体规划情况汇报).³⁸⁴ The purpose of the conference was to convey the “spirit of written notes” (*pishi jingshen* 批示精神) regarding the planning process from Guangdong Provincial Party Secretary Wang Yang and Sichuan Provincial Party Secretary Liu Qibao; listen to Sichuan Province’s

³⁸¹ Wang Bin, “Zai Zhonggong Wenchuanxian shi jie er ci quanwei (kuada) huishang de jianghua” (Speech Given at the 2nd Meeting of the 10th Wenchuan County Communist Party Committee Enlarged Conference) (July 26, 2007).

³⁸² Wang Bin, “Zai quanxian yijidu jingji xingshi fensi huiyishang de jianghua” (Speech Given at the Wenchuan County First Quarter Economic Circumstances Analysis Conference) (April 30, 2008).

³⁸³ Ibid.

³⁸⁴ *Dongguan shi yuanjian Yingxiu gongzuo dashiji jingxuan* (Dongguan Municipality Reconstruction Assistance Work Hand-Selected Record of Major Events) (2010).

Construction Office's work report on the status of the reconstruction plan; and establish a "Yingxiu Township Plan Coordination Small Leadership Group" (*Yingxiuzhen guihua xietiao xiaozu* 映秀镇规划协调小组) with Deputy Provincial Governor Huang Yanrong serving as the group leader. On April 9, 2009, the "Yingxiu Township Post-Disaster Reconstruction International Discussion Forum" (*Yingxiuzhen zaihou chongjian huoji yantaohui* 映秀镇灾后恢复国际研讨会) was convened in Chengdu. Five days later on April 9th, the Provincial Government held a "routine meeting conference" (*changwu huiyi* 常务会议) to deliberate on Yingxiu Township's master reconstruction plan, a process that was then repeated at the prefectural level days later. Finally, on June 3rd, 2009, Dongguan Municipality – in charge of reconstructing Yingxiu Township under the terms of the provincial partner program - sealed off Yingxiu Township to the outside world and began construction (*fengbi shigong* 封闭施工).

The meetings resulted in an *mélange* of aesthetic reveries imagining the future of Yingxiu. According to various plans, Yingxiu was to become an "earthquake tourism brand" (*dizhen liuyou pinpai* 地震旅游品牌),³⁸⁵ "warm hearted small town" (*wenqing xiaozhen* 温情小镇) with "charming special characteristics" (*tese meili* 特色魅力),³⁸⁶ and "a gallery of master architects, and a museum of anti-seismic architecture."³⁸⁷

French architect Paul Andreu was commissioned to design the Earthquake Resistant Disaster Reduction International Academic Exchange Center (*kangzhen jianzai*

³⁸⁵ "Yingxiu zhaokai chongjian yantaohui" (Yingxiu Convenes Reconstruction Discussion Session) Wenchuan County Government Website (May 25, 2009) at http://www.wenchuan.gov.cn/p/st_news_items_i_x634089993846730000/ (last accessed August 2013).

³⁸⁶ "Wenchuanxian Yingxiuzhen tese meili guihua" (Wenchuan County Yingxiu Township Special Characteristic Charm Plan), Aba Prefecture Government Website (December 2010) at http://www.abazhou.gov.cn/ztjs/sbgc/cgzssbgc/tsmxlzsbgc2/wcsbgc3/201012/t20101227_309299.html (last accessed August 2013).

³⁸⁷ Luo Zhenyu, "Dashi yunji, liangdian fencheng, gongjian zhenzhong Yingxiu – Yingxiuzhen jianshe 'xiandai kangzhen jianzhu bowuguan'" (A Convergence of Great Masters, A Brilliantly Varied Highlight, Working Together to Construct the Earthquake Epicenter Yingxiu: The Construction of Yingxiu Township's 'Modern Anti-Seismic Architecture Museum'). From Sichuan Provincial Party School archive.

guoji xueshu jiaoliu zhongxin 抗震减灾国际学术交流中心);³⁸⁸ IM Pei, the Youth Activity Center (*qingshaonian huodong zhongxing* 青少年活动中心); and, He Jintang, the Earthquake Memorial Museum (*zhenzhong jinian bowuguan* 震中纪念博物馆). These famous architectural buildings are clustered within a short walking distance from the Xuankou Middle School Earthquake Relics (*Xuankou zhongxue dizhen yizhi* 漩口中学地震遗址) – Yingxiu’s primary tourist “attraction.” A main shopping avenue littered with vendor stalls connects the Xuankou relics to the famous buildings forming the core of Yingxiu’s tourism area.

In addition to commissioning world-renown architects for Yingxiu’s reconstruction, in 2011 the Wenchuan County Tourism Bureau successfully applied for Yingxiu to become a national AAAA grade tourist scenic area.³⁸⁹ In April 2012, it ambitiously decided to pursue AAAAA status, the highest grade possible in China for a tourist destination. This application process was significantly hampered and delayed by the vitriolic Internet controversy it provoked over whether a place where close to 7,000 people perished should be commodified as an AAAAA tourist scenic area.³⁹⁰ A Xinhua news report labeled the attempt as having an extremely high “moral risk” (*daode fengxian hen gao* 道德风险很高),³⁹¹ quoting one netizen who described the idea as “universally shocking and offensive to all of society (*jing shi hai su* 惊世骇俗).”³⁹² The sensitive

³⁸⁸ Some of Paul Andreu’s famous work includes the National Theater in Beijing and Charles de Gaulle Airport in France. IM Pei is a Pritzker Prize winner. He Jintang was also the designer of China’s Pavilion during the 2010 Shanghai World Expo.

³⁸⁹ Wenchuan Lüyouju (Wenchuan County Tourism Bureau), “Guanyu baosong ‘Shiyiwu’ gongzuo zongjie ji 2011 nian gongzuo anpai de baogao” (Report Concerning the Summary of 11 5th Year Plan Work and Work Plans for 2011), Document No. 141 (2010).

³⁹⁰ Liang Chen, “Town Rising from the Grave,” *Global Times* (May 10, 2012) at www.time-weekly.com/story/2012-03-08/122611.html (last accessed April 2013).

³⁹¹ Wang Xiaofang, “Sichuan lüyouju: wei jiedao Wenchuan Yingxiu dizhen yizhi 5A jingqu shenbao cailiao” (Sichuan Tourist Has Not Yet Received Application Information for Wenchuan County Yingxiu Township’s Earthquake Ruins to Become a 5A Scenic Attraction), *Xinhua* (February 23, 2012) at http://news.xinhuanet.com/local/2012-02/23/c_122742857.htm (last accessed May 2013).

³⁹² Ibid.

controversy set Wenchuan County officials on pins and needles. In preparation for an interview with the Wenchuan County Tourism Bureau, Bureau Chief, I was sternly warned by the friend providing the introduction to “not under any circumstances mention the AAAAA application controversy.”³⁹³ He canceled the interview at the last minute.

The controversy was not limited to questions of bad taste and how properly to respect the dead, but also raised doubts as to whether or not some of the buildings were unnecessary face projects. The convoluted history of the International Academic Exchange Center is a perfect example. Initially designed as an International Academic Exchange Center, the building was privately contracted to a hotel conglomerate, which changed the name to The Yingxiu Hotel (*Yingxiu da jiudian* 映秀大酒店). Photographs of the sign of the hotel’s name were posted on the Internet sparking another controversy in which many netizens expressed their disgust with such attempts to capitalize on the earthquake. The sign was torn down and the name reverted to the International Academic Exchange Center. But the building nonetheless continued to function as a hotel. A frustrated local resident described the name change as: “Different broth, same medicine” (*huan tang bu huan yao* 换汤不换药).³⁹⁴ Months later, afraid that the name International Academic Exchange Center was driving away potential business, the owners changed the name of the sign yet again, back to The Yingxiu Hotel. An interview with an employee at the hotel revealed that, “we rarely have any customers here. The large catering hall is only used when the government hosts official events.”³⁹⁵ Although this story is humorously absurd, in the eyes of local residents it is further evidence that they were not intended as the main beneficiaries of the reconstruction process. Shaking his head, one local resident sighed: “the government cannot arbitrarily

³⁹³ Interview with Tourism Professor from L University, Chengdu, June 2012.

³⁹⁴ Interview with local resident 36, Yingxiu, June 2013.

³⁹⁵ Interview with hotel employee, Yingxiu, July 2012.

invest in any project whatsoever. Some of these projects are simply a ‘waste of manpower and resources’ (*lao min shang cai* 劳民伤财).”³⁹⁶

This waste of ‘manpower and resources’ unambiguously violates the Party’s guiding principles and the main economic objective of Yingxiu’s reconstruction. Spelled out by Wenchuan County Party Secretary Qing Lidong, Yingxiu’s reconstruction must:

...adhere to the best, scientific construction quality and safety standards, and serve an example of ‘popular sentiment construction’ (*minxin gongcheng* 民心工程), ‘transparent construction’ (*yangguang gongcheng* 阳光工程), and ‘exemplary construction’ (*yangban gongcheng* 样板工程). . . [in order to] guide capital flows (*yindao zijin liuxiang* 引导资金流向), develop a physical relaxation and rural vacation setting for city dwellers (*tixian nongjiale* 体闲农家乐) ... promote the transformation from a village economy toward a tourist economy, and the transformation of a scenic economy into a people’s wealth economy (*huimin jingji* 惠民经济); finally, it must facilitate the retention of local labor and raise the income of local residents.³⁹⁷

Within this discourse, if Yingxiu’s impressive architecture and tourist economy fails to generate wealth for local residents, it is nothing more a gratuitous face project. This is because the reconstruction of Yingxiu is not simply an entrepreneurial attempt at developing tourism, but an official promise and moral responsibility to improve people’s lives.

Despite the fact that hundreds of thousands of tourists have visited Yingxiu since the earthquake, money has failed to ‘trickle down’ into the hands of local residents. The reason for this is that the state’s plan, despite its impressive rhetorical willpower, did not sufficiently account for the interaction of market and non-market factors. “From the perspective of tourist development, Yingxiu’s reconstruction plan was intrinsically

³⁹⁶ Interview with villager 55, Yingxiu, July 2012.

³⁹⁷ Qing Lidong, “Pa poshang kan zhua zhongdian, xushi tupu cu kuayue” (Climbing Up a Slope on the Threshold of Grasping the Important Points, Store up Power to Break Through and Step Across), *Zai jiakuai tuijin shi da zhongdian gongzuo dongyuan huishang de jianghua* (Speech Given at the Conference for the Accelerated Promotion of 10 Large Important Points Work Mobilization Conference), di 5 qi, zongdi 96 qi (2010).

flawed.”³⁹⁸ Its flaws confirm John Donaldson’s argument that “the effect of tourism [on poverty alleviation] depends upon whether the tourist industry is designed in such a way as to include or exclude the participation of the poor. To understand this, we must analyze not only the volume, but also the distribution and structure of tourism.”³⁹⁹

In distribution terms, Yingxiu’s tourist activity is condensed around the Xuankou Middle School Earthquake Relics and surrounding architecture. Businesses even a block over, not to mention those located on Yingxiu’s periphery, receive almost no tourists. Many local residents, however, in anticipation of the promised tourism boom, converted their two story homes into rural guesthouses, opened restaurants, and souvenir shops. According to one noodle shop owner, “I only sell a dozen bowls of noodles every month.”⁴⁰⁰ Most guesthouses have only hosted a few lodgers in the entire time they have been open. Some have already closed down as their owners decided to migrate to other cities for work.⁴⁰¹ Other people, particularly those in their late 40s, 50s, and 60s sit and wait, lacking the skills to find work as migrant laborers. “People who had money already moved out. The rest of us who do not have anything are stuck. What is someone my age [50 years-old] supposed to do? No one will hire me as a migrant worker. I am stuck here and the future is vague and distant (*miao mang* 渺茫).”⁴⁰² Most of my interviewees described a similar feeling of treading water in a space of deflated hope and economic anxiety. The fact that so many rural guesthouses, restaurants and souvenir shops exist alongside each other has perniciously created an oversupply for an almost nonexistent demand.

³⁹⁸ Interview with Tourism Professor, L University, Chengdu, April 2012.

³⁹⁹ John Donaldson, “Tourism, Development and Poverty Reduction in Guizhou and Yunnan,” *The China Quarterly* Vol. 190 (2007), p. 335.

⁴⁰⁰ Interview with noodle shop owner, Yingxiu, March 2012.

⁴⁰¹ Interview with several local residents, Yingxiu, July 2012.

⁴⁰² Interview with local resident 61, Yingxiu, July 2012.

A second overlapping reason for local businesses' failure to attract customers is a lack of space that could accommodate the needs of tourists. The majority of houses in Yingxiu Township are two storied buildings with an average surface area of 120 square meters (ranging from 100 – 140 square meters). This dense living space cannot provide adequate or comfortable lodging for tourists. It also restricts the kinds of entrepreneurial activities available to local residents. One resident complained, "Before the earthquake, we used to run a decent business selling women's fashion. But now, in this cramped space, where are we supposed to hang and display the clothing? And how are customers supposed to move around and shop? So, we opened a much less profitable convenience store."⁴⁰³ Almost 95% of my interviewees cited "cramped space" as a major grievance. The density of the buildings might not have even been necessary from a planning perspective – Yingxiu has a startling high rate of empty buildings – but it has precluded the successful development of "shophouses."

Thirdly, Yingxiu Township's regional location works against its ability to attract overnight guests. Yingxiu Township is only a 1 hour and 20 minute bus ride from Chengdu; 30-minute minivan ride from Dujiangyan; 20-minute minivan ride from Shuimo Township⁴⁰⁴; and, is also en route to the stunningly beautiful Jiuzhaigou 九寨沟 nature reserve. As a result, most tourists arrive in Yingxiu, spend a few hours wandering the earthquake relics and museum (that is really all you need), and then return to Chengdu or proceed to the next destination. Seldom do people spend the night or even stay for dinner. "The largest problem with Yingxiu's tourism industry is that no

⁴⁰³ Interview with local husband and wife, Yingxiu, July 2012.

⁴⁰⁴ In April 2011, Shuimo Township was awarded "The Global Best Implementation of Post-Disaster Reconstruction" award at the United Nations 6th Global Forum on Human Settlement, see: http://news.xinhuanet.com/english2010/china/2011-04/26/c_13845512.htm According to many local Shuimo residents, the situation there is scarcely better than the one in Yingxiu. Many businesses have already closed down for lack of business. Interviews with local residents, Shuimo township, February 2013.

one stays there. Large tour groups arrive on bus, do a little sightseeing, and leave without staying to eat lunch.”⁴⁰⁵

The relative ease with which tourists can leave Yingxiu for other destinations is compounded by the fact that there is no good reason to stay there. Yingxiu lacks anything resembling a nightlife or entertainment facilities. Moreover, Yingxiu’s harsh climate and terrain render it unsuitable for tourist development. After heavy rains, the Min River 岷江 rises dramatically, often triggering serious floods as well as rock and mudslides.⁴⁰⁶ Finally, the fact that nearly 7,000 people died during the earthquake, including hundreds schoolchildren, envelopes Yingxiu in a somber atmosphere unsuitable for overnight tourism. Most of the tourists visiting Yingxiu that I interviewed cited the presence of “ghosts” (*gui* 鬼) as a central reason for why they did not want to spend the night. “Too many people died in Yingxiu, there are too many ghosts there. If you stay there for too long, it will bring you bad luck.”⁴⁰⁷

The concept of “earthquake tourism” is also too one-dimensional to be sustainable over the long term. After visiting Yingxiu once, there is no compelling reason to visit there again. As time moves on, the salience of the earthquake in public memory will also fade. A 60 year-old man, who runs a hotel on the bank of the Min River analyzed the situation in the following terms: “Depending on the ‘earthquake brand’ as our economic lifeline is too dangerous. People’s interest in the earthquake will gradually fade. You come once, you won’t come a second time. But we have no land and no industry. In eight, ten years, if no tourists come, what then? It will become a problem of having enough food to eat and clothing to keep warm (*wenbao de wenti* 温饱的问题).”⁴⁰⁸

⁴⁰⁵ Interview with Tourism Professor, L University, Chengdu, April 2012

⁴⁰⁶ See discussion of July 2013 floods.

⁴⁰⁷ Interview with tourist from Shanghai in Yingxiu, February 2013.

⁴⁰⁸ Interview with small hotel owner, Yingxiu, July 2012.

Perhaps the most damning evidence of Yingxiu's economic woes is the failure of the "A Ray of Sunshine Tourism Investment Management Limited Corporation" (*yimi yangguang liyou touzi guanli youxian gongsi* 一米阳光旅游投资管理有限公司). After a 7.0 earthquake devastated the small town of Lijiang 丽江, Yunnan 云南 Province in 1996, the tourist development firm "A Ray of Sunshine" made a fortune transforming Lijiang into one of China's most popular tourist destinations. The company detected a similar opportunity to turn Yingxiu into a "tourist resort that features earthquake tours and patriotic education" and signed a 40-year contract in early 2011 with the Yingxiu Township government.⁴⁰⁹ The resort consisted of hotels, teahouses, bars, commercial shops, and a venue for sunbathing.

Poor planning due to a lack of knowledge regarding local conditions, however, plagued the so-called resort area. According to a local resident, "The development project violated the laws of nature (*weibei ziran de guilü* 违背自然的规律). How is it even possible to sunbathe in Yingxiu? Yingxiu and Lijiang have different climates. It rains all the time here."⁴¹⁰ The resort area also suffered from a less than ideal geographic location. Despite being only a 5-minute walk from the Xuankou Middle School Earthquake Relics, it was still too remote to be on the radar of Yingxiu tour groups. After months of losing money, "A Ray of Sunshine" closed down their Yingxiu operations, withdrawing all employees, as well as interior furnishings. James Scott's influential critique that state planning goes awry when it overlooks local knowledge equally applies to market actors as well.⁴¹¹

⁴⁰⁹ Li Li, "County Rebuilds After Quake," *China Daily*. (February 1, 2011).

⁴¹⁰ Interview with local resident 31, Yingxiu Township, July 2013.

⁴¹¹ Scott, *Seeing like a State*.



Image 4.1 Photograph taken by author within abandoned storefront (March 2012).

If “A Ray of Sunshine” could not survive under these conditions, the prospects are rather bleak for local residents whose resources are even more threadbare. “How can Yingxiu retain tourists? If Yingxiu is unable to develop its tourism industry, then villagers have no source of income.”⁴¹² This conditional logic is already reality for most local residents. The extent of economic precariousness can be glimpsed in the disturbing symptoms in a set of disturbing symptoms. According to a reliable local

⁴¹² Sun Xin, “Huidao dizhen zhongxin cunwei shuiji de Yingxiu zhi huo” (Returning to the Earthquake Epicenter, Yingxiu’s Party Secretary is Puzzled), *Zhongguo Qiyejia* (May 2011) <http://finance.jrj.com.cn/biz/2011/05/1211159949990.shtml> (last accessed August 2013).

source, in the past two years, a handful of destitute local residents have dismantled, stolen, and sold public infrastructures. “People here have no work and no land they can cultivate. So they steal public infrastructure to support themselves (*daoqie gongong de shebei qu mai yang ziji* 盗窃公共的设备去卖养自己). All of the electrical wires in the public park built by Dongguan have been stolen. Some people have even been dismantling the sewers. Arresting them is no use. When detained, they accusatorily say, ‘I have no other way to support myself, what do you expect?’”⁴¹³ Several local residents who were unable to afford Yingxiu’s new housing have also started squatting in some of Yingxiu’s ample supply of empty housing units.⁴¹⁴

⁴¹³ Interview with local reporter, Yingxiu, July 2013.

⁴¹⁴ Ibid. Another source of contention that I have not been able to treat in this chapter is the fact that the Yingxiu Township government required villagers to *purchase* their newly reconstructed homes. While this might not sound odd, many local residents are upset over the fact that the Yingxiu Township government did not spend a cent to construct the homes – they were built by Guangdong Province’s Dongguan Municipality as part of the Provincial Partner Assistance Program. Moreover, the Yingxiu Government deducted all forms of financial aid and subsidies (such as central government subsidies and Macau Red Cross Poverty Relief Funds) directly from the price of the housing. To make matters worse, 20 minutes south from Yingxiu Township in Dujiangyan Municipality, local disaster victims only had to hand over to the government their land-use rights and were then authorized to move into new housing free of charge. Many Yingxiu residents believe that corrupt local officials illegally appropriated the money. The rhetorical accusation “*Where did the money go?*” was frequently repeated during my interviews.



Image 4.2 Photograph by author of lights stolen from beneath a bridge (August 2013).

It is no surprise then that the topic of tourism and local economic development is now regarded as a “politically sensitive issue” (*zhengzhi shang mingan de wenti* 政治上很敏感的问题) by the township government. In March 2013, the township party secretary prohibited me from distributing a 300-person survey on the relationship between post-earthquake tourism and local economic development. The timing of my survey was unfortunate, as angry local residents had been ramping up their demands to know exactly how much money was spent on individual projects during the earthquake reconstruction. Despite the central government’s requirement of transparency, Yingxiu township officials have refused to release data related to the earthquake reconstruction budget publically, for fear it could “spark a fire.”⁴¹⁵

⁴¹⁵ Interview with local resident 31, Yingxiu, July 2013.

Finally, it merits consideration that the “dream palliative”⁴¹⁶ of tourist development is a pervasive phenomenon in the post-earthquake region. During research visits to villages in Mianzhu Municipality, Beichuan County, Qingchuan County, Mao County, and other parts of Wenchuan County, I repeatedly encountered villagers and village Party Secretaries who were anxiously hoping to develop tourism as a means of economic salvation. This trend has not gone unnoticed by the international and domestic media. On May 13, 2013, National Public Radio broadcast a report identifying similar issues plaguing Beichuan’s New County Seat: “The town center of new Beichuan consists of handsome, sturdy brick and wood buildings, mostly housing tourist shops selling cheap souvenirs. There’s one big problem, though: There are few tourists. Having lost their land, residents struggle to get by. ‘Business is no good here, especially this year,’ says vendor Zhang Ming, who runs a stall selling cold drinks and homemade tofu. ‘In this street, almost 70 percent of people are losing money. This year is worse than last year. No one comes here anymore.’”⁴¹⁷ Reports suggest that Qinghai Province’s Yushu municipality might also suffer from the same post-disaster tourism syndrome. “The tourists and businesses that residents hoped would materialize after the rebuilding have not appeared. Before the earthquake, the city was a thriving trading hub for the region’s Tibetan pastoralists, but government planners have reimagined Yushu as a tourist attraction for Chinese seeking to experience the fetishized mystique of Tibetan culture. The new city is flecked with museums, although none have opened yet.”⁴¹⁸

⁴¹⁶ Interview with professor from B University, Hong Kong, May 2012.

⁴¹⁷ Lim, Louisa, “Five Years After a Quake, Chinese Cite Shoddy Reconstruction,” *National Public Radio* (May 14, 2013) at <http://www.npr.org/blogs/parallels/2013/05/14/183635289/Five-Years-After-A-Quake-Chinese-Cite-Shoddy-Reconstruction> (last accessed August 2013).

⁴¹⁸ Andrew Jacobs, “4 Years After Quake, Some See a Resurrected Chinese City, Others Dashed Dreams,” *The New York Times* (May 21, 2014) at http://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/22/world/asia/4-years-after-quake-some-see-a-resurrected-chinese-city-others-dashed-dreams.html?_r=0

The perils of a Waiting for Godot political economy is best summarized by the acerbic remark of a Chengdu NGO worker: “If a place like Yingxiu is unable to generate sustainable tourism, how are places like Qingchuan County, 5 hours away from Chengdu, and without the same national-level attention, supposed to do it?”⁴¹⁹

THE LEADERSHIP VISIT

The state’s reconstruction plans were clearly flawed, but this fact alone does not entirely explain the bitterness of Yingxiu residents. Consider the different narrative “frames”⁴²⁰ available to local residents to explain their economic insecurity: blame the vagaries of the market; like laid-off workers in Shanghai, view themselves as entrepreneurial agents ultimately in control of their future;⁴²¹ or, attribute responsibility to the earthquake and the cruelty of fate. The fact that most local Yingxiu residents I interviewed *blame the local state* for their precarious existence requires further explanation than inadequate economic planning.

I suggest that the reason for their anger toward the state resides in their perception that the state *wasted* resources on improving its image rather than their lives, which violates the Maoist social contract of serving the people. My argument finds evidence in the way local disaster victims negatively experienced the high-profile leadership visits to the earthquake zones. In theory, such visits were supposed to affectively connect the leadership with the masses and provide them with insight into the local situation. In

⁴¹⁹ Interview with local Chengdu NGO worker, January 2013.

⁴²⁰ William Hurst, “Mass Frames and Worker Protest,” in *Popular Protest in China*, ed. Kevin J. O’Brien (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), pp. 71-87.

⁴²¹ “Borrowing from market ideologies . . . workers that fare the worst are responsible for their own failure. This individualism of course goes hand in hand with a market ideology that is presented as natural and infallible. The inevitability of the market is itself used as further justification for labor restructuring. A worker fails the market; the market does not fail the worker.” Mary Gallagher, *Contagious Capitalism: Globalization and the Politics of Labor in China* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), p. 149; also see: Mark Blecher, “Hegemony and Workers’ Politics in China,” *The China Quarterly*, No. 170 (June 2002), pp.283-303; and, Hurst, *The Chinese Worker After Socialism*.

practice, they were carefully staged events that entailed obscene expenditures of money and repression of anyone who might tarnish the aesthetics of the performance.⁴²²

Local residents frequently expressed their disgust with the frequency, elaborate process, high cost, and superficiality of leadership visits (see appendix 1 for a chart of selective high-profile inspection tours from May 2008 – June 2010).⁴²³ The exorbitant amount of wasted money validated for local residents their perception that the Party was more concerned with staging an idealized relation to its people than with “serving” their own actual needs.

Before Xi Jinping’s official crackdown on governmental excesses, the unwritten rules of Chinese political culture dictated a lavish manner for greeting leaders.⁴²⁴ During the reconstruction, this consisted in expensive flower arrangements, paving of roads, banquets, police entourages and other aesthetic related expenses. “Anytime a leader visited, township officials would excessively purchase flowers. The moment the leader left, the flowers would be tossed in the garbage. The next day a new leader would arrive, and the cycle would begin all over again.”⁴²⁵ According to the same interviewee (a local reporter), “The night before Prime Minister Wen Jiabao planned to visit the ruins of Xuankou Middle School, I saw construction workers paving an asphalt road in the middle of the night. When I asked a worker, ‘Aren’t you afraid that paving

⁴²² In our age of digitized, media-driven politics, public-relations are ubiquitous. Think of any presidential campaign or, for a negative example, Bush standing on the aircraft carrier in 2003 declaring “Mission Accomplished.” They pose thorny political problems in China, however, because they violate the Party’s prohibition against formalism. The paradoxes of formalism are explained later in the chapter.

⁴²³ It is also worth noting that the first exhibition room in the Yingxiu Earthquake Museum is devoted to blown-up photographs of leadership visits and descriptions of their courage visiting the disaster areas.

⁴²⁴ Chairman Xi Jinping’s nationwide crackdown on “undesirable work styles,” such as lavish banqueting, official car use, and other special privileges, launched in 2013 is an attempt to manage this contradiction. See, Dexter Roberts, “Xi Jinping is No Fun,” *Businessweek* (October 3, 2013) at <http://www.businessweek.com/articles/2013-10-03/china-president-xi-jinping-revives-self-criticism-sessions-in-maoism-lite>

⁴²⁵ Interview with local reporter, Yingxiu, June 2013.

at night will be uneven?’ he responded, ‘No, after Prime Minister Wen leaves tomorrow afternoon the road will be torn up.’⁴²⁶ The reporter went back days later and verified that the road indeed was gone.

This perpetual construction/destruction nexus provided a lucrative source of income for local township officials and their extended family members. The construction worker admitted to the reporter that the asphalt was mixed in nearby Pi County by a contractor who was a relative of a Yingxiu Township government official. Unfortunately, this is not an anomalous example. In nearby Shuimo 水磨 Township, asphalt roads also transiently appeared and disappeared in the wake of leadership visits. This formed an aesthetic-economic circuit in which central government funds were allocated to finance temporary spectacles for central level leaders, profits were reaped by township-level officials in charge of the process, and the people watched in indignation from their tents.

A post on the popular Internet service Weibo 微博 (similar to Twitter in the US) vented frustration with similar processes.

I was taking a nap when I received a call from a friend in Yingxiu’s Yuzixi Village. He said to me, because the 5.12 anniversary is almost here, once again central government leaders will come to Yingxiu for an ‘inspection.’ The local government wants to do some ‘image projects’ (*xingxiang gongcheng* 形象工程) to welcome them. They want to carve the names of former volunteers who helped in the relief effort into a memorial on Compassion Road. My friend nearly exploded emotionally when telling me this, disgusted that the local government cared so much about these ‘face projects’ and ‘political achievement projects’ (*zhengji gongcheng* 政绩工程). The only real political achievement is to lead the disaster masses to better lives (*zhenzheng dailing zaihou qunshong guo shang hao rizi caishi zhenzheng de zhengji* 真正带领灾后群众过上好日子才是真正的政绩).⁴²⁷

The Weibo post defines “waste” through a set of Maoist expectations for state conduct. There is nothing intrinsically wasteful about building a wall to honor volunteers in the

⁴²⁶ Ibid. The reporter was explicitly warned by Township officials not to develop too close of a relationship with me *bu yao gen na ge lao wai zou de hen jin* 不要跟那个老外走得太近.

⁴²⁷ Weibo post. Downloaded file in author’s possession.

earthquake relief effort; such a project only becomes wasteful when viewed as a violation of the Communist Party's guiding principles.

Leadership visits also required the managed participation of disaster victims. When leaders visited a locality, local officials created a tableaux-vivant of completed work and happy satisfied local residents. In the words of a Pi County government official, this entailed “carefully selecting people's who know to speak (*zuiba hui shuohua* 嘴巴会说话) and will only express positive opinions.”⁴²⁸ In Yingxiu Township, this tendency allegedly reached absurd proportions. Before Prime Minister Wen visited hospital tents to console sick patients, township officials transferred the patients to a nearby hospital in Dujiangyan, and replaced them with cadres pretending to be villagers undergoing medical treatment. Village level cadres were hooked up to intravenous drips, injected with glucose, in preparation for Wen's visit. Only reporters from the state-run news agencies the People's Daily, Xinhua, and CCTV were granted access to report on the event and enter the tents.⁴²⁹ According to a local village cadre, “I was upset because Prime Minister Wen only visited the first tent and I was in a tent in the back. I went through all of this and didn't even get a chance to meet him.”⁴³⁰ One local villager sarcastically described the event as a “collective sickness” (*jiti shengbing* 集体生病) implying that a much deeper pathology permeates the Party. Another local villager was livid because she was unable to obtain treatment for her son who was actually sick.⁴³¹

Whether or not this event happened is unlikely to be verified, but on a certain level, indexicality is irrelevant. These stories root in local residents' imagination of the state and are extremely hard, if not possible, to dislodge through proof. The excited

⁴²⁸ Interview with Pi County Government Official, February 2013.

⁴²⁹ Interview with local reporter, Yingxiu, June 2013.

⁴³⁰ Interview with villager 51, Yingxiu April 2013.

⁴³¹ Interview with villager 47, Yingxiu, July 2012.

telling of unflattering stories is a symptom of the state's broken credibility and a form of grassroots protest that negates the state's official narrative.

The obsession with appearance also directly harmed the interests of local residents. Prior to the 2011 Spring Festival, the reconstruction of Yingxiu township was still incomplete. Although housing structures were finished, the Dongguan 东莞 Municipal Partnership Reconstruction Team still needed a few more months to address infrastructural issues. Despite the incompleteness of the project, the Yingxiu government decided to relocate villagers to their new homes for Spring Festival.⁴³² The political-aesthetic value and symbolic significance of the propaganda opportunity took precedence over the 'mundane' concern of whether or not the houses were ready for habitation. Soon after moving-in, the local government was flooded with complaints by angry villagers whose new homes suffered from leaky pipes and other infrastructural issues. To address this problem, the government enlisted a local NGO to conduct household surveys, identify the specific problems, and organize villager repair teams to address them.⁴³³ In this case, a leaky pipe is more than just a leaky pipe – it is a condensation of the state-society split lodged in the ordinary.

Choreographing leadership visits required repressive tactics to ensure that unscripted voices and perambulating bodies did not mar the performance. During high-profile inspection tours, some Yingxiu residents were forced to remain in their homes, placed under surveillance by the police, threatened with violence, and on occasion beaten up.

⁴³² The Wenchuan County Government indeed posted an article on their website with the headline: "Yingxiu Masses Move into Their New Homes to Celebrate the New Year" (*Yingxiu qunzhong qian xin ju xin nian* 映秀群众迁新居过新年), including the obligatory photographs of local residents gathering, singing, dancing, and wearing ethnic Qiang costumes at http://www.wenchuan.gov.cn/p/st_news_items_i_x634321492011450000/. The Chinese Communist Party have in their own way perfected the Platonic "*choreographic* form of the community that sings and dances its own property unity." Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, p. 14.

⁴³³ Interview with leader of grassroots NGO, Wenchuan County, February 2013.

According to an elderly villager, “When Prime Minister Wen Jiabao visited, the government dispatched the armed police forces (*wujing* 武警) not only to protect him, which would be natural, but also to monitor us. They would not let anyone leave their homes without prior authorization. If you tried to go outside for whatever reason, you would be forced back into your home.”⁴³⁴ From the elderly man’s account, it can be gathered that in addition to protecting Prime Minister Wen’s physical security, the police engaged in aesthetic maintenance.

The tableaux’s lifeless integrity also required physical assaults on mobile bodies that threatened, inadvertently or not, to disrupt the still life. Before the inspection tour of an official from the Provincial Bureau of the Ministry of Finance – referred to by local cadres as “The God of Wealth” (*cai shen* 财神) in eager anticipation of the rewards to be reaped from a successful visit – a group of “unidentified young men” (*bu ming shenfen* 不明身份)⁴³⁵ with an unclear relation to the official public security apparatus patrolled the site of the visit. With terrible timing, a Beijing lawyer on an earthquake disaster tour was in the process of photographing the site when the unidentified security agents ordered him to delete his photographs. When he refused, they gagged his mouth and restrained his hands, detaining him until after the ‘God of Wealth’ departed.⁴³⁶

In a similar account:

Recently Wen Jiabao visited Yingxiu and took the road here from Xuankou Township. The government closed the main road, which is totally normal when Central level leaders come on inspection ... but the other surrounding, smaller roads were also closed. There was a person who tried to cross one of the smaller

⁴³⁴ Interview with retired PLA cadre, March 2012.

⁴³⁵ See: William Hurst, Mingxing Liu, Yongdong Liu, and Ran Tao, “Reassessing Collective Petitioning in Rural China: Civic Engagement, Extra-State Violence, and Regional Variation,” *Comparative Politics*, forthcoming Summer 2014.

⁴³⁶ “Wenchuan Yingxiuzhen qingyang ying ‘caishen’ lushi ailu bei kaowuzui” (Wenchuan County Yingxiu Township Clearing the Space to Welcome the ‘God of Wealth’: Lawyer Blocking Road is Manacled and Gagged) (October 18, 2010) at http://www.360doc.com/content/10/1018/10/84177_61936983.shtml (last accessed March 2012).

roads and was forcefully stopped by a traffic cop, who almost knocked the guy the down! I rushed over and yelled at the cop ‘you nearly knocked that guy down!’ As a result, the cop said to me, ‘You son of a bitch (*gui erzi* 龟儿子), not only does it not matter if I knock you down, I should beat you up, as long I don’t kill you, it would be a good thing.’ As soon as I heard this, I nearly exploded, all I said was ‘you nearly knocked that guy down!’ ... I should go get a metal stick and beat him until he can’t get up! I thought to myself ‘you are a county traffic police officer, the country trained you (*guojia peiyang ni* 国家培养你), gave you, you son of a bitch, the food you eat, and you want to hit us common people?!?’⁴³⁷

The last line reveals how the violent behavior of individual cadres dismembers the imaginary unity between Party and masses. Prior to the earthquake, Wenchuan County was already struggling with how to rectify overly aggressive police behavior. At a 2006 conference dedicated to “educational warning” (*jingshi jiaoyu* 警示教育) and “rectifying” (*zhengdun* 整顿) the behavior of police cadres, Wenchuan Party Secretary Wang raised the following concerns:

Police cadres sole objective is to wholeheartedly serve the people ... But there is a minority of police cadres who lack affection, understanding, and communication with the masses. When receiving the masses, they are impatient, unenthusiastic, and aloof. Their door is hard to enter (*men nan jin* 门难进), facial expression is ugly to look at (*lian nan kan* 脸难看), and language is coarse (*hua nan ting* 话难听) ... Some cadres’ law enforcement style is simply rough and cruel (*cu bao* 粗暴) ... not respecting the persons involved, ignoring the suffering of the people .. These problems injure our relationship with the masses ... As soon as you put on a police uniform, and wear the national emblem, you have already delivered yourself over to the nation; your each and every moment represents the national interest and image of the nation (*guojia de xingxiang* 国家的形象).⁴³⁸

The importance of this passage resides in connection between “cadre behavior” and “the Party’s image,” which is a coded way of saying political legitimacy. The abstractness of the state and remoteness of the center (the synecdoche “Beijing”) are materialized through daily encounters with grassroots level cadres. When local police officers abuse their citizens in order to preserve an image of local contentment, the question – who does

⁴³⁷ *Wenchuan dadizhen yizhounian zaiqu qunzhongfangtanlü* (Wenchuan Earthquake 1st Anniversary Disaster Masses Interview Transcripts) (2009). Internal publication.

⁴³⁸ Wang Bin, “Zai quanxian zhengfa duiwu jingshi jiaoyu ji jizhong jiaoyu zhengdun dongyuan dahuishang de jianghua” (Speech Given at the Wenchuan County Politics and Law Troops and Concentrated Education Rectification Mobilization Large Conference) (December 16, 2006).

the Party serve - poses, repeats, and amplifies itself. The people are crushed under the weight of their formal representation.

High-profile leadership visits often prompted local level officials to scramble to conceal evidence of malfeasance. Long after Yingxiu Township was directed to dismantle all tents and move their residents into temporary housing (*ban fang* 板房), Huangjiayuan Village residents still lived in a tented encampment having been overlooked in the distribution of temporary housing.⁴³⁹ Days before Wen arrived on an inspection tour, the entire tent village was hurriedly moved into the mountains.⁴⁴⁰

These tactics were not always successful. Months after the earthquake on September 5, 2008, Party Secretary Wang warned: “At present, the construction of transitional housing is uneven . . . in some areas, the problem of formalism is severe, false statements (*shuo jia hua* 说假话), empty talk (*kong hua* 空话), fraudulent reports (*xubao* 虚报), falsifying by over or under-reporting (*man bao* 瞒报) still exist. Individual townships and villages have not built temporary housing but reported that the work was already complete.”⁴⁴¹

Several villagers complained about “moldy relief supplies” (*famei jiuzai wuzi* 发霉救灾物资) destroyed by township officials prior to another Wen inspection tour. According to local accounts, rainwater ruined a substantial amount of relief supplies – such as winter tents, blankets, clothing, and rice – which were stored in a warehouse where they went unattended. Before Wen’s inspection visit, cadres burnt the evidence

⁴³⁹ The fact that the Township government never publically provided a reason as to why Huangjiayuan Village residents were not given temporary housing unsurprisingly resulted in a proliferation of rumors among the villagers. According to one account, a conglomerate owned by Deng Xiaoping’s eldest daughter previously purchased the land assigned to the village for the construction of temporary housing. Local government officials did not want to ‘ruin’ the property by constructing temporary housings. Interview with villager 55, Yingxiu Township, June 2013. Even though it is impossible to know whether or not this story is true, it demonstrates how the opaqueness of state motives creates the conditions in which rumors thrive.

⁴⁴⁰ Interview with professor from B University who conducted social work in Yingxiu Township, Hong Kong, May 2012.

⁴⁴¹ Wang, Speech at Wenchuan 10th Standing Committee Meeting, September 2008.

of their negligence. In the vivid recollection of one villager, “We were sitting in our temporary shelter and we saw black plumes of smoke in the distance. We were worried there was a fire so we called 119 (China’s emergency hotline) and rushed to the scene. When we got there, we saw local cadres burning molded relief supplies in preparation for Wen Jiabao’s visit. This kind of waste was painful to watch.”⁴⁴² Some villagers speculated that the relief provisions were not distributed because local township officials were hoarding them in order to sell them at a later date.⁴⁴³ When I asked a local village Party Secretary about the veracity of the accusations, he dryly responded, “only a few hotdogs expired.”⁴⁴⁴

The formal similarity of the narratives in this section is striking. Almost each account begins with “before Prime Minister Wen arrived...” and concludes with a range of tactics deployed by township officials in order to choreograph a scene for his gaze. For the performance to be believable and produce its intended effect of displaying a unified state and society, it cannot expose the process of its own construction. Local residents make terrible audience members – their experiences of being locked in their own homes, memories of smoldering relief goods, and leaking pipes all bear traces of the production process. These traces are the fracture lines that gradually accumulate and widen into veritable cracks within the foundation of state legitimacy.

CONCLUSION

In our present time saturated with new technologies, media, and images, the management of aesthetics as a component of politics is unavoidable.⁴⁴⁵ What I call an

⁴⁴² Interview with villager 47, Yingxiu, June 2012.

⁴⁴³ Interview with villagers 33, 39, 47, 59, Yingxiu, March 2012.

⁴⁴⁴ Interview with Yingxiu X village Party-Secretary, June 2012.

⁴⁴⁵ I prefer not to use the term “public relations” on the grounds that it euphemistically naturalizes commercial advertisement as the hegemonic form of sociality and public interaction. It is also distinct from “propaganda” defined as state-sponsored dissemination of information, which is typically exaggerated and stylized. The “management of aesthetics” identifies a regime of power organized around the creation, ordering, and maintenance of images. In China, this

aesthetic state is a government institution whose primary purpose and decision-making calculus is to magnify and glorify its own image.⁴⁴⁶ The CCP's Maoist tradition of romanticism and organizational penchant for formalism facilitates the reduction of government to the production of images. The phenomenon, however, is global, applies across regime-type, and merits future comparative research.

Yingxiu Township was re-constructed to be looked at from afar rather than lived in. The reconstruction of the earthquake's epicenter was understood as a historical showcase of the Communist Party's strength and legitimacy.

The entirety of society and the world will inevitably use telescopic and microscopic lenses to inspect each domain, each layer and each angle of the earthquake reconstruction work. They will do this in order to observe, assess and ultimately evaluate the sustainability of China's current political, economic and social system, and in order to verify and weigh the Chinese Communist Party's governing capacity (*zhi zheng nengli* 执政能力) as well as the elite social strata's level of leadership.⁴⁴⁷

The fact that the world was imagined to be watching guaranteed that a top-down political-aesthetic process, akin to the opening ceremonies of the Beijing Olympics, dictated the reconstruction of Yingxiu. There was too much at stake to take the time and risk listening to what the people wanted.

The anticipated judgment of higher-level officials on inspection visits ensured that Yingxiu would be represented as a model success, regardless of the experiences and

regime would include "urban management police" (*chengguan* 城管) whose mission is to maintain a 'tidy,' aesthetic order and clean up 'chaotic,' street vendors; local government officials' obsession with planting trees, parks, and eco-landscaping (see next chapter); micro-management of the façades of rural houses along major highways; decisions to construct massive public projects with no public or social benefit; repression and censorship of critical voices and unruly bodies; including traditional propaganda slogans, posters, news articles and discourse; and the list continues. See, Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*, trans. Gabriel Rockhill (London, UK: Continuum, 2004).

⁴⁴⁶ I am also thinking of Achille Mbembe's description of the *fetish of state power*, in which he warns that, "we should not underestimate violence that can be set into motion to . . . safeguard the official forms that underwrite the apparatus of domination." Achille Mbembe, "The Banality of Power and the Aesthetics of Vulgarly in the Postcolony," *Public Culture* Vol. 4, No. 2 (Spring 1993), p. 15-16.

⁴⁴⁷ Su, "From a Bird's Eye Perspective."

opinions of local residents. The need to satisfy the voyeuristic gaze of higher-level officials siphoned resources and attention away from addressing the needs of the earthquake victims, who were ultimately treated as mannequins in a display window. To borrow a phrase from Alain Badiou, Yingxiu residents were “present in the world but absent from its meanings and decisions about the future.”⁴⁴⁸

⁴⁴⁸ Alain Badiou, *The Rebirth of History: Times of Riots and Uprisings*, trans. Gregory Elliot. (London, UK: Verso, 2012), p. 56.

Chapter 5: Qingchuan County

The Ideology of Ecology

When a man in a forest thinks he is going forward in a straight line, in reality he is going in a circle, I did my best to go in a circle, hoping to go in a straight line.⁴⁴⁹

BACKGROUND

Adjacent to Sichuan's capital Chengdu, Dujiangyan Municipality implemented a massive-scale expansion of the city into the countryside after earthquake. Yingxiu Township developed its post-earthquake tourist economy development plan by leveraging its 'fame' as the epicenter of the 2008 earthquake. As a remote, mountainous, and impoverished county on Sichuan's border with Gansu Province, Qingchuan 青川 lacked these so-called structural advantages of the other cases.

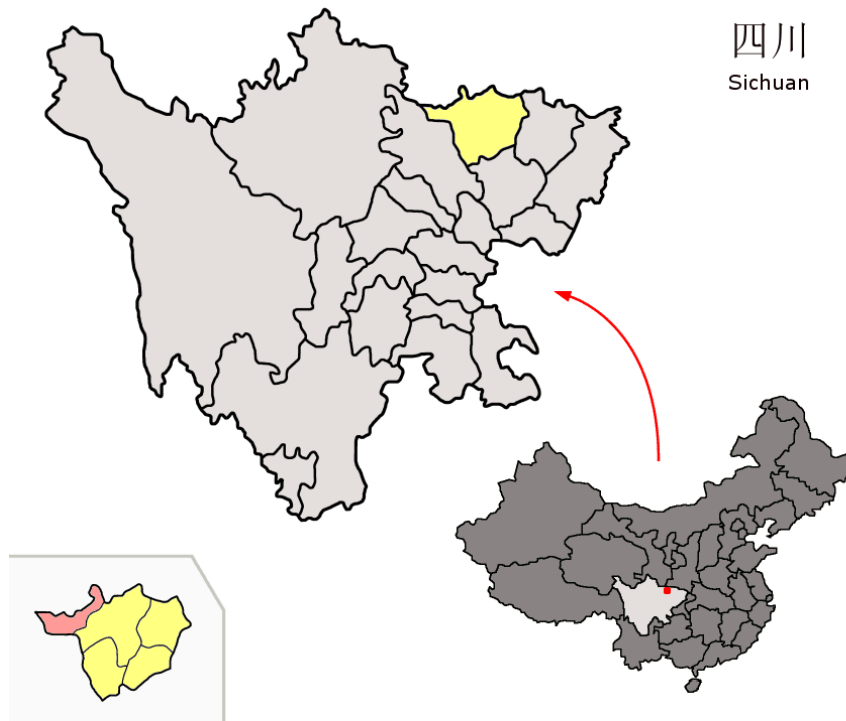


Figure 5.1 Map of Qingchuan County's Location in Sichuan Province Top-Left and in China Bottom-Right⁴⁵⁰

⁴⁴⁹ Samuel Beckett, *Molloy* in *Three Novels: Molloy, Mallone Dies, and The Unnameable* (New York, NY: Grove Press 2009), p. 79.

Qingchuan is one of Sichuan's poorest counties. In 2010 the Development Research Center of the State Council (DRC) internally published a report on Qingchuan's pre- and post-earthquake economic situation. "Qingchuan County is located in a remote mountain area, with inconvenient transportation, and is economically impoverished and backward. Before the earthquake, poverty was already substantially worse than other national poverty alleviation project areas."⁴⁵¹

The reasons for Qingchuan's underdevelopment are in part historical. A report from the local paper the *Guangyuan Times* 广元时报 describes Qingchuan's twentieth century history as a continuous series of "selfless contributions" (*wusi gongxian* 无私奉献) that permitted Qingchuan "no chance for development" (*fazhan wuyuan* 发展无缘).⁴⁵² According to the 1985 Qingchuan County gazetteer, "during the Republican period, [Qingchuan] cultivated opium, was harmed by bandits, and suffered from uninterrupted natural disasters. The people's livelihoods were wretched. In 1936, a long drought resulted in the calamity of cannibalism."⁴⁵³ Tragically, Qingchuan's fate did not improve during the first two decades of CCP rule. During the height of the Great Leap Forward in 1959 and 1960, Qingchuan's population growth rate decreased precipitously, by -10.98% and -42.76% respectively, with an estimated total of 11,807 deaths out of a total population of 133,498 for the entire four-year campaign period (1958-1962). The massive death toll went beyond people. "In the month of May 1958, with great fanfare all of the sparrows and mice were exterminated during the 'four harms' campaign, using

⁴⁵⁰ This map was downloaded from Qingchuan's wikipedia page.

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Location_of_Qingchuan_within_Sichuan_\(China\).png](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Location_of_Qingchuan_within_Sichuan_(China).png)

⁴⁵¹ Guowuyuan fazhan yanjiu zhongxin (Development Research Center of the State Council), "Sichuan sheng dizhen zaiqu hou chongjian shiqi: jidai jie jue de wenti ji jianyi – yi qingchuanxian wei li" (Sichuan Province Earthquake Post-Disaster Reconstruction Period: Problems in Urgent Need of Resolution and Suggestions – The Example of Qingchuan County" Vol. 164, No. 3695 (September 10, 2010), p. 12. Internal publication. Heretofore referred to as DRC Qingchuan.

⁴⁵² Guangyuan Times, "Kaifang zhuang ge."

⁴⁵³ *Qingchuan xianzhi* (Qingchuan County Annals), 1985 edition, p. 8 and 157.

guns and medicinal poison to surround and annihilate, piling up the corpses of birds and mice.”⁴⁵⁴

Qingchuan also participated in Mao’s “Third Front” (*san xian* 三线) campaign (1964-1971) to relocate strategic industrial and military bases to China’s mountainous interior to secure them in case of foreign attack in an increasingly volatile geo-political climate.⁴⁵⁵ “During Third Front Construction, Qingchuan ‘donated’ without compensation over 700 mu of land. In the 1990s, however, the military construction factories successively moved away depleting the county’s financial revenue by one-fifth.”⁴⁵⁶ Qingchuan’s industrial development never recovered.

Qingchuan continued to suffer during the reform and opening period (1978-present). In 1984, the construction of the Baodian reservoir 宝电水库 severed Qingchuan’s primary outbound highway, which was only reopened to regular traffic in 1998. Six townships adjacent to the reservoir were prohibited from new construction for fourteen years; over 30,000 mu of fertile land and forests were submerged under water; nearby enterprises migrated, while private enterprises “died” (*si diao* 死掉); Qingchuan’s GDP slid by one-third during the process. The economic effects of the reservoir construction still linger today. According to a State Council Development Research Center report, currently 10,971 people out of the 15,673 total relocated population (*yimin renkou* 移民人口) are categorized as below the poverty line (*pinkun renkou* 贫困人口).⁴⁵⁷ Some villagers still rely on boats as their main means of transportation.

⁴⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁵ Barry Naughton, “The Third Front: Defence Industrialization in the Chinese Interior,” *The China Quarterly* Vol. 115 (September 1988), pp. 351-386.

⁴⁵⁶ “Kaifang zhuang ge han shanyue – qingchuan xian kuoda dui nei kaifang jishi” (The Magnificent Song of Opening Up Shakes the Lofty Mountains – Qingchuan County Enlarging Internal Openness to the Outside), *Guangyuan shibao* (Guangyuan Times) (September 15, 1999). Qingchuan County is administratively subordinate to Guangyuan Municipality.

⁴⁵⁷ DRC Qingchuan, p. 6.

The May 12th, 2008 Wenchuan Earthquake spared Qingchuan County no mercy. Four earthquake rupture points (*baofadian* 爆发点)⁴⁵⁸ are dispersed throughout Qingchuan rendering it extremely earthquake prone. Many county officials I interviewed declared that Qingchuan was the only county to suffer comprehensive damage to its entire surface area during the 2008 earthquake. Out of Qingchuan's total population of approximately 250,000 people, an official estimate of 4,697 people perished and over 15,000 people were injured. In Donghekou 东河口 Village alone 184 households comprised of 780 people were buried under 100 meters of a collapsed mountain.⁴⁵⁹ The village is now a national memorial site. Almost all of Qingchuan's residents suffered varying degrees of damage to their homes, and nearly the entirety of Qingchuan's public infrastructure, including schools, hospitals, and roadways were damaged if not destroyed. After the earthquake, 1,507 landslides and a countless number of aftershocks challenged relief efforts and delayed reconstruction.⁴⁶⁰

Qingchuan's fragile ecology that constrained its development in the past deteriorated tremendously as a result of the earthquake. Most of Qingchuan's 3271 square kilometer surface area is mountainous land with high slopes unsuitable for agriculture and suffering from soil erosion. The earthquake damaged 42,529 hectares of arable land among which 1234 hectares were "extinguished" (*mie shi* 灭失).⁴⁶¹

In the face of such massive devastation Qingchuan's only developmental path was to "restore its ecology" (*xiufu shengtai* 修复生态)⁴⁶² and capitalize on its natural resources. The county's post-earthquake economic development plan drew from prior strategies of

⁴⁵⁸ According to the USGS earthquake glossary, "the rupture front [or point] is the instantaneous boundary between the slipping and locked parts of a fault during an earthquake."
<http://earthquake.usgs.gov/learn/glossary/?term=rupture%20front>

⁴⁵⁹ *Wenchuan dadizhen yizhounian zaiqu qunzhong fangtanliu* (Wenchuan Earthquake 1st Anniversary Disaster Masses Interview Transcripts) (2009), p. 173. Internal publication.

⁴⁶⁰ DRC Qingchuan, p. 2.

⁴⁶¹ Ibid., 6.

⁴⁶² Ibid.

increasing the scale and modernizing the technology of agricultural production;⁴⁶³ developing “specialty” agricultural products at the township and village level with market potential⁴⁶⁴; integrating Qingchuan into regional, provincial and national markets through the expansion of transportation and distribution infrastructures;⁴⁶⁵ and, converting uncultivated and excess agricultural land into forests as part of a national campaign to increase forest coverage.⁴⁶⁶ Similar to Dujiangyan Municipality and Yingxiu Township, post-quake economic development revolved around the intensification and acceleration of plans that were already underway prior to the earthquake.

What is unique about the Qingchuan case is the emergence of the discourse of “ecological civilization” (*shengtai wenming* 生态文明). Several years before the

⁴⁶³ In Qingchuan, the post-earthquake Provincial Partner Assistance Program originated in a prototype experiment in 2001 when Zhejiang Province dispatched cadres from its Science and Technology Bureau (*keji ju* 科技局) to help Qingchuan upgrade its agricultural production methods, and cultivate 灰树花 *grifola frondosa*, a polypore mushroom commonly known as ‘Sheep’s Head’ in English. As a result of this long-standing relationship, Zhejiang Province was paired to assist Qingchuan’s reconstruction. “Hui shu hua ‘hua’ kai Qingchuan” (The Blooming of *Grifola Frondosa* in Qingchuan), *Sichuan ribao* (Sichuan Daily) (March 28, 2002).

⁴⁶⁴ An important goal of post-earthquake economic development in Qingchuan was for each village to produce a specific agricultural product associated with its name. This strategy referred to as “one village, one product” (*yi cun, yi pin* 一村，一品) dates back to at least 1995 when the *People’s Daily* published an article on Qingchuan’s cultivation methods. “Qingchuan linye xiaoyi lian nian dizeng” (Qingchuan’s Forestry Increasing Efficiency Over Time), *Rennmin ribao* (People’s Daily) (August 25, 1995).

⁴⁶⁵ Qingchuan’s strategy of linking large-scale enterprises with individual peasant households in order to facilitate market linkage has a long history and is also a national model for agricultural development. These linkages were central to the reconstruction strategy. “Qingchuan zhuanbian jingji zengzhang fangshi tuijin kechixu fazhan jishi” (Qingchuan Promoting Sustainable Development and Transforming Economic Growth Model – Record of Events), *Guangyuan ribao* (Guangyuan Daily) (March 15, 2006).

⁴⁶⁶ Reforestation was a popular policy in Qingchuan since the late 1990s. “Qingchuan xian shishi shengtai jianshe shiji” (Qingchuan County Implementing Ecological Construction – Record of Events), *Guangyuan ribao* (Guangyuan Daily) (September 27, 2005). Also, for a regional level discussion, see Christine Jane Trac, Amanda H. Schmidt, Stevan Harrell and Thomas M. Hinckley, “Is the Returning Farmland to Forest Program a Success? Three Case Studies from Sichuan,” *Environmental Practice* 15/3 (September 2013), pp. 350-366; Alicia S.T. Robbins and Stevan Harrell, “Paradoxes and Challenges for China’s Forests in the Reform Era,” *The China Quarterly* Vol. 218 (June 2014), pp. 381-403.

earthquake, Qingchuan officials and local media promoted the county as an “ecological society”⁴⁶⁷ and an experimental pioneer in re-thinking development in ecological terms. Qingchuan’s “ecological consciousness” and dialectical strategy of “protecting the environment and advancing the economy” were said to differentiate Qingchuan from other agricultural counties. This new discourse transformed Qingchuan’s developmental constraints into developmental advantages.

Serendipitously for Qingchuan, the concept of ecological civilization gained national prominence when it was mentioned in the 17th Party Congress Report in October 2007.⁴⁶⁸ During the 18th Party Congress, it was elevated into one of the “Five in One Constructions” (*wuwei yiti* 五位一体) next to “economic construction,” “political construction,” “cultural construction,” and “social construction.” These are the five pillars for China’s ultimate goal of becoming a “moderately prosperous society” (*xiaokang shehui* 小康社会). Needless to say, Qingchuan government officials I interviewed were extremely proud of their ‘advanced-thinking’ and conceptual precedent setting. The discursive consolidation of ecological civilization at the national level guaranteed its centrality in all of Qingchuan’s post-earthquake planning documents. Qingchuan’s previous experiments and struggles in agricultural production were recast in the glowing ideological light of “ecological civilization.”

ECOLOGICAL CIVILIZATION

Ecological civilization is best understood as a regulative ideal under which a set of exploratory ⁴⁶⁹ practices, developmental models, and pedagogies are clustered.

⁴⁶⁷ Guangyuan ribao, “Shengtai jianshe.”

⁴⁶⁸ Zhao Jianjun, “Jianshe shengtai wenming de ruogan sikao,” *Lilun dongtai* (Theoretical Trends) Vol. 1794 (October 20, 2008), pp. 20-28. Internal publication; Qiu Baoxing, “Shengtai wenming shidai xiangcun jianshe de jiben duice” (The Age of Ecological Civilization, Fundamental Measures for Township and Village Construction) *Baogao xuan* (Selected Reports), pp. 1-22. Internal publication.

⁴⁶⁹ Ketu zu (Task Group) “Tansuo jingji he shengtai wenming xietiao fazhan de xin daolu” (Exploration the New Road of Economic and Ecological Civilization Coordinated Development), *Lilun Dongtai* (Theoretical Trends) Vol. 1817 (June 10, 2009), pp. 34-40. Internal publication.

Interpretive latitude is built into the concept that allows it to be refined in order to address local conditions and adapted to the specific needs of different economic sectors and administrative bureaus.⁴⁷⁰

The concept originated as part of an internal Party discussion on the “global ecological crisis” (*quanqiuixing shengtai weiji* 全球性生态危机) triggered by the ongoing mode of industrial development and insatiable capitalist growth.⁴⁷¹ Professor Zhao Jianjun 赵建军, from the influential Central Party School (where government and party leaders are trained and advised)⁴⁷² formulates the construction of ecological civilization as an urgent imperative for the survival of humanity. He concludes, “The earth no longer has the capability to support industrial civilization’s development in this way.”⁴⁷³ Another internal Central Party School publication argues that without a structural shift in the global mode of economic development “humanity will bring disaster to itself”⁴⁷⁴ (*zuizhong yangji renlei zishen* 最终殃及人类自身). Ecological civilization is the Party’s vision for a new horizon emerging from the twilight of industrial civilization.⁴⁷⁵

Ecological civilization is articulated in policy form by changing political objectives. Instead of the mantra of development at all costs, measured in terms of GDP growth, the Party is experimenting with new definitions and measures of development.⁴⁷⁶ The Party is attempting to chart a new course of “sustainable development,” “green economy,”⁴⁷⁷

⁴⁷⁰ Heilmann, “Policy Making Through Experimentation.”

⁴⁷¹ For an analysis of capitalism and ecological catastrophe, see: Slavoj Žižek, *Living in the End Times* (London, UK: Verso, 2011).

⁴⁷² For a brilliant ethnography on cadre training, see: Pieke, *The Good Communist*.

⁴⁷³ Zhao, “Jianshe shengtai wenming,” p. 25.

⁴⁷⁴ Zhou Shengxian, “Nuli tuijin shengtai wenming jianshe: jiji tansuo zhongguo huanjing baohu xin daolu,” (Strive to Promote Ecological Civilization Construction: Actively Explore a New Road for China’s Environmental Protection) *Baogao xuan* (Selected Reports) Vol. 8, No. 320 (May 18, 2010), p. 6. Internal publication.

⁴⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 15.

⁴⁷⁶ Zhao, “Shengtai jianshe,” p. 20.

⁴⁷⁷ Zhou, “Nuli tuijin shengtai wenming,” p. 8.

and “people-orientation” in order to remediate the devastating environmental and human costs of uneven capitalist development.

Ecological civilization however is rife with contradiction. To borrow one of Mao’s concepts, the “primary contradiction” (*zhuyao maodun* 主要矛盾) is between the profit structure of global capitalism and its internal limit, environmental protection. Internal publications within the Party also draw attention to this contradiction. “Without a doubt, economic development and the protection of the environment is from start to finish contradictory” (*haowuyiwen fazhanjingji yu baohu huanjing zhijian shizhong cunzai maodun* 毫无疑问发展经济与保护环境之间始终存在矛盾).⁴⁷⁸ The closure of polluting industries, the cost of retrofitting and salvaging other industries, the foregoing of profits to be gained from the extraction of natural resources, and the loss of jobs entailed by all of the above (and the list can go on) stand in diametrical conflict with the logic of late global capitalism and China’s economic development. To put the problem in layperson’s terms, you cannot have your cake and eat it too.

In an underdeveloped county such as Qingchuan, these contradictions are exacerbated. Qingchuan’s 12th Five-Year Plan (2011-2015) clear spells out its predicament in these terms. “We must abandon the mode of large-scale growth (*bixu fangqi cufangxing zengzhang fangshi* 必须摒弃粗放型增长方式). For underdeveloped counties, this undoubtedly increases difficulties for development.”⁴⁷⁹ Despite the fact that Qingchuan’s total economic output is 0.09% of the provincial economy, it cannot rely on large-scale industrialization to close the developmental gap. Consequently the

⁴⁷⁸ Zhonggong zhongyang dangxiao baokan she keti zu (Central Committee of the Communist Party of China Party School Press Research Group), “Jiakuai shengtai baohu diqu shengtai buchang jizhi de jianli” (Accelerate environmental protection areas and the construction of ecological compensation mechanisms), *Lilun Dongtai* (Theoretical Trends) Vol. 1867 (October 30, 2010), pp. 29-34. Internal publication.

⁴⁷⁹ *Qingchuan xian guomin jingji he shehui fazhan “shi er wu” guihua gangyao* (Qingchuan County National Economy and Social Development 12th Five-Year Plan Outline), heretofore Qingchuan 12th Five-Year Plan.

demands for industrial upgrade, environmental protection, and optimization of land resources even further limits Qingchuan's margin for development. The report laments that Qingchuan's "environment and restricted development zones severely curtails its growth resulting in an extremely prominent contradiction between limited environmental capacity and demands for accelerated development."⁴⁸⁰ In this candid admission, the dialectical opposites resist 'unification' in a magical formula – they are revealed as genuine tensions between environmental protection and economic growth. The plan also discretely admits Qingchuan's inability to overcome the structural relations in which it is embedded.

As the processes of industrialization and urbanization are driven forward at a rapid speed, China's national economy has entered into a new stage of high-speed growth. Across the country, competition increases developmental speed and intense contestation over market access and essential factors of production. Qingchuan's economic strength is weak; distribution costs are high; level of industrialization is low; and, competitive ability relatively inferior. This phase of large-scale economic growth has not fundamentally changed ... We face increasingly higher pressure participating in market competition.⁴⁸¹

Qingchuan is unable to theoretically climb its way out of the contradictions between national economic dynamics, increased regional competition, and its own low level of economic infrastructure. Without massive structural reforms of the national economy (not to mention global economy), Qingchuan will remain pinched between the demands for rapid growth and environmental protection.⁴⁸²

⁴⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁸¹ Ibid.

⁴⁸² These contradictions are not limited to Qingchuan or post-disaster settings. According to an internal central-level analysis of Dengjiang 澄江 County in Yunnan 云南 Province, the experiment to turn the county into a model of ecological civilization has been placed at risk by the threat of financial unsustainability. After shutting down the surrounding mines that previously supported the local economy, "the county government faces a contradiction between income and expenditure of its fiscal balance sheet ... future development funds are insufficient as a result of the contradictions between development and protection ... ordinary residents are lacking principle sources of income." Task group, "Tansuo jingji he shengtai wenming," p. 37.

According to the Party's Maoist epistemology, the solution to large-scale political economic contradictions is transforming people's subjective beliefs and attitudes. The ideological mechanisms of ecological civilization borrow heavily from the Maoist tradition of *political thought work* (*sixiang gongzuo* 思想工作) – defined as the inculcation of Party sanctioned values in the behaviors, attitudes, and opinions of the mass public through the mobilization of the political apparatus. From this perspective, ecological civilization is a new iteration of the Party's ongoing Maoist biopolitical campaigns to improve the population's overall quality (*suzhi* 素质).⁴⁸³ It does this by educating people how to think and ethically relate differently to their natural surroundings. Protecting the environment requires “a transformation of concepts” (*zhuanbian guannian* 转变观念), “behaviors” (*xingwei* 行为) and “attitudes” (*taidu* 态度)⁴⁸⁴ as the foundation for a new “value-system” (*jiazhiguan* 价值观)⁴⁸⁵ and “ecological consciousness” (*shengtai yishi* 生态意识) at the individual level. The public is encouraged to no longer conceptualize the environment a “conquerable object” (*zhengfu de duixiang* 征服的对象) but as the indispensable basis of human life.

A member of Qingchuan County's Guanghui 光辉 Village Political Thought Supervision Group (*zhengzhi sixiang gongzuo ducha zu* 政治思想工作督查组) provides an illustrative account of thought-work in the context of environmental protection: “People in the mountains rely on chopping trees and selling them as firewood in order to buy oil and salt. It is now forbidden to cut down trees. ‘What are we supposed to do?’ they ask. ‘What do you mean create a forest? If we have to wait for the trees to grow up, we will already be in the ground.’”⁴⁸⁶ He explains that the purpose of thought-work is to answer

⁴⁸³ Ann Anagnost, “The Corporeal Politics of Quality (Suzhi),” *Public Culture* 16(2) (2004), pp. 189-208.

⁴⁸⁴ Cai, “Jiefang sixiang,” pp. 10-16; Zhao, “Jianshe shengtai wenming,” pp. 20-28.

⁴⁸⁵ Zhou, “Nuli tuijin shengtai wenming,” p. 6.

⁴⁸⁶ Ibid.

such concerns and provide policy education so that the conservation of trees will appear more ‘valuable’ than timber.

According to the Party’s political understanding, without mass work, ecological civilization will fall victim to formalism. In the words of Party secretary of Qingchuan’s Hongguang 红光 township, “Ecological civilization means constructing a foundation, training villagers, developing the ways they think about production - and proceeding step-by-step. This kind of mass work is the basis of great leap development. Without the foundation of the masses, it has no meaning, it is just a pile of formalism.”⁴⁸⁷

In fact, various Party documents worry that environmental protection is especially susceptible to perils of formalism. According to a *People’s Daily* op-ed published in 2013, “You request greening the environment, you get a desolate mountain painted with green lacquer and a bunch of dried up trees with new branches stuck in them. You request the reduction of emissions and energy-saving, you get a temporary stoppage of electricity harming local residents to go a few days without electricity.”⁴⁸⁸ Another example of environmental protection campaigns with questionable results but visual prominence is Xi’an’s 西安 mist cannon (*wu pao* 雾炮) that is alleged to reduce car exhaust, dust and PM 2.5 pollution (see photograph below). A tweet on May 10, 2014 from New York Times reporter Chris Buckley sarcastically captions the photograph “a visual definition of futility.”⁴⁸⁹

⁴⁸⁷ Interview with Qingchuan County, Hongguan Township Party Secretary, May 2013.

⁴⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁹ May 10, 2014, Twitter.



Image 5.1 Xi'an "Mist Canon"

From a political-aesthetic logic, it does not matter if this truck is only minimally reducing environmental pollutants, it matters that it presents the state in action.

A crucial question pertaining to the study of Chinese politics is how to distinguish between policy implementation and its theatrical performance. In the above examples of the "mist cannon" and green lacquered branches, the answer seems quite obvious. In many cases, however, the relationship between formalism and governance is much more complex and ambivalently knotted together.

In chapter 1, I introduced the concept of Maoist neo-developmentalism to emphasize the role of extensive and invasive state planning in capitalist construction; in chapter 3, I explained Dujiangyan's plan for urban-rural integration as an example of 'development by theoretical fiat'; and, in chapter 4 described the reconstruction of Yingxiu township as an example of political aesthetics. In the remainder of this chapter,

I will demonstrate how these tendencies converged and interacted in Qingchuan's plan to transform itself into a "model example of an ecological county."⁴⁹⁰

QINGCHUAN'S 12TH FIVE-YEAR PLAN

Qingchuan County's National Economic and Social Development "12th Five Year" Plan Essential Points (*Qingchuanxian guomin jingji he shehui fazhan shierwu guihua gangyao* 青川县国民经济和社会发展“十二五”规划纲要) articulates the guiding principles for the county's developmental ambitions, describes how they conform to national, provincial and regional objectives, and provides detailed instructions for development at the zone (*dai* 带) and township (*xiangzhen* 乡镇) levels for the 2011-2015 planning cycle. Officially concluded in 2011, the post-earthquake reconstruction is the foundation for the 12th Five Year Plan's next step of "revitalized development" (*zhenxing fazhan* 振兴发展).⁴⁹¹

The Preface describes the "action plan" (*xingdong gangyao* 行动纲领) as a "magnificent blueprint for a new great leap" (*xin kuayueshi hongwei lantu* 新跨越的宏伟蓝图) of socio-economic development. The first chapter summarizes and assesses the 'miraculous' achievements of the 11th Five Year Plan (2007-2011) (see appendix 5.1) that de facto merged with the reconstruction plan for the post-2008 Wenchuan Earthquake. This chapter performs the embedding work of linking Qingchuan's local situation to global economic dynamics, national macro-economic adjustments and specific campaigns and directives⁴⁹² handed down from the center. These linkages are important because they legitimize Qingchuan's developmental strategy according to national objectives and

⁴⁹⁰ Qingchuan xian wei (Qingchuan County Party Committee), "Chuangjian shengtai wenming shifan xian de jue ding" (Decision to Establish Ecological Civilization Model County) Document. No. 357 (November 11, 2011); "Qingchuan 'Shengtai wenming shifan xian' jianshe zhishi tuijin" (Qingchuan "Ecological Civilization Model County" Construction Advances Firmly) *Meili Zhongguo* (Charismatic China) (January 26, 2014) at <http://ml.china.com.cn/html/mingxian/csfc/20140126/308375.html> (last accessed June 8, 2014).

⁴⁹¹ Qingchuan 12th 5 Year Plan.

⁴⁹² These include the Open Up the West and Build a New Socialist Countryside Campaigns.

position it as a likely recipient for central-level aid. This section identifies Qingchuan's "market potential" (*shichang qianli* 市场潜力) in its "abundance of natural resources" (*ziran ziyuan fengfu* 自然资源丰富) as part of the goal of constructing a new ecological civilization.⁴⁹³

The second chapter enumerates the "Guiding Ideas and Development Goals" (*zhidao sixiang he fazhan mubiao* 指导思想和发展目标). It subdivides Deng's mantra "development is still the overriding principle"⁴⁹⁴ (*fazhan caishi ying daoli* 发展才是硬道理) into six interlocking subtypes of development. There is "rapid development" (*jiakuai* 加快) (growth component), "coordinated development" (*xietiao* 协调) (regional component), "innovative development" (*chuangxin* 创新) (technological component), "low carbon development" (*diyan* 低碳) (ecological component), and "harmonious development" (*hexie* 和谐) (social component). The new prism of development is refracted through these categories.

The second chapter, third section enumerates the intended percentages of increase for each economic sector during the five-year planning cycle. These goals also include other categories such as the urbanization and forest coverage rates (see appendix 2).

The third chapter outlines the "optimization of spatial arrangements."⁴⁹⁵ This chapter is unique because it assigns "functional capacities" (*gongneng* 功能) to individual zones and townships. It geographically divides the county into ecological protection zones and conservation districts, industrial clusters, and residential areas. The spatial arrangement of productive capacities is organized according to a 'specialized' plan of "one axis, two wings" (*yi zhou, liang yi* 一轴，两翼).⁴⁹⁶ The industrial hub of Zhuyuan

⁴⁹³ Qingchuan 12th 5 Year Plan.

⁴⁹⁴ Qingchuan 12th 5 Year Plan.

⁴⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁶ Ibid.

located in the county's southern region forms a central axis with the county seat Qiaozhuang in the northern region. This geographical division of labor was not 'accidental' but was engineered as part of the reconstruction plan. The eastern and western wings were also assigned different developmental objectives based on their natural resources and productive capabilities.

The second section spatially arranges agricultural production into a "five zones, five parks" (*wu dai, wu yuan* 五带, 五园)⁴⁹⁷ model. Each zone is categorized according to indigenous resources and market advantages. The zones overlap in certain places, meaning that some townships are engaged in two or more types of production. Zone 1 is for tea production; zone 2 is mushroom production; zone 3 is walnut, Chinese olive oil, and wood oilseed production; zone 4 is raw forest materials; zone 5 is animal husbandry; and oddly, a sixth zone is added at the bottom of the paragraph for aquatic products such as artificial ponds for the cultivation of Chinese giant salamander (*Andrias davidianus*) (*wawa yu* 娃娃鱼). Each zone is meticulously subdivided into "lines" (*xian* 线) and "areas" (*qu* 区) that link individual townships together into production sub-units. These linkages operate according to the strategies of "one village, one product" (*yi cun yi pin* 一村一品) and "specialized township, specialized village, specialized large family" (*zhuan ye xiang, zhuan ye cun, zhuan ye da hu* 专业乡, 专业村, 专业大户).⁴⁹⁸

The chapter's third section administratively maps industry into "three large concentrated economic areas" (*san da ji zhong jing ji qu* 三大集中经济区). These are the Zhuyuan Economic Development Zone (*jing ji kai fa qu* 经济开发区), Chuan-Zhe Cooperative Industrial Park (*he zuo chan ye yuan* 川浙合作产业园) and an Agricultural By-Product Processing Area (*nong ye fu chan pin jia gong qu* 农业副产品加工区). The fourth section optimizes the spatial arrangement of the service industry, namely, tourism. This

⁴⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁸ Qingchuan DRC, p. 4.

section is graded along a descending scale into zones, areas, slices (*pian* 片), and points (*dian* 点).

This administrative cartography of economic development reveals the continuation of a ‘command mentality’ at least at the county level. The problems discussed in the chapters on Dujiangyan, Yingxiu, and now Qingchuan share the same underlying problem that technocratic planning does not guarantee market success. The examples of economically viable SEZ’s and industrial parks are in the aggregate relatively small compared to the number of remote and poor counties like Qingchuan attempting to engineer integrated markets single-handedly by policy fiat. It would be inappropriate to label Maoist neo-developmentalism as a form of ‘market-distortion’ because the market is precisely what it is attempting to construct! On the other hand, what other options does the county government have?

The fourth chapter “Enthusiastically Develop Ecological Agriculture” (*ji ji fazhan shengtai nongye* 积极发展生态农业) spells out a clear rubric for agricultural development down to the village level. Given that 80% of Qingchuan’s population is agricultural, modernization of Qingchuan’s agricultural industry is the key to its economic development. This chapter is framed by another set of nested guiding principles, which are: “standardization” (*biaozhunhua* 标准化), “specialization” (*tesehua* 特色化); “scientific and technological innovation” (*nongye keji chuangxin* 农业科技创新), and “marketization” (*shichanghua* 市场化).⁴⁹⁹ For agriculture to be profitable it needs to achieve a larger production scales and expand market networks, infrastructure, and distribution. These are standard developmental tropes in circulation for the past two decades.

Among the reasons why these transformations undergo indefinite durations is that local residents are reluctant to participate in them. According to an interview with a

⁴⁹⁹ Qingchuan 12th 5 Year Plan.

high-level government official from Zhejiang Province's Provincial Assistance Team, Qingchuan villagers':

methods were old-fashioned and their thinking was passive. They would hand pick the mushrooms and wait for people to come and buy them or they would use them at home. The goal now is increasing the scale of production. At first villagers did not believe these new production methods. They were worried that industrialization of production methods would not be able to sell more products. They worried there would be no market and were not willing to invest even a little of their own money.⁵⁰⁰

Exemplified in the preceding passage is the Maoist link between thinking and development. In this context, thought-work tactically engages how villagers think about production, scale, and profit. Backward (*luohou* 落后) thinking slows down the modernization of agriculture and the insinuated wealth to be generated from it. This passage also reveals the awkward position of villagers whose understandable skepticism of their own market potential and reluctance to part with their life savings is viewed as an 'obstacle' by the local state, whose solicitations rely on a raft of assumptions and guarantees that they ultimately cannot provide. To address villagers' 'subjective' anxieties, the Zhejiang Provincial Assistance Team in tandem with Qingchuan county returned to a familiar strategy in the CCP's developmental playbook. "We encouraged large households to undertake these kinds of production experiments first. Then we used the profits they obtained as a 'leading model example' (*shifan daitou* 示范带头) to 'provide impetus' (*daidong* 带动) to smaller households to follow their example. We also invited local Qingchuan farmers to Zhejiang to 'study' our methods of large tent planting, as well as dispatched cadres from the Zhejiang Agricultural Bureau to provide on-site training in Qingchuan."⁵⁰¹ The method of example setting is a mainstay of Maoist governance techniques that continues in the present, repurposed to fit a different developmental agenda. Consequently, Qingchuan County's 12th Five Year plan is

⁵⁰⁰ Interview, Zhejiang Province, January 2013.

⁵⁰¹ Ibid.

replete with familiar references to models, example setting, and linkages between large and small households.

Another peculiar reason for the slowness of the process is the relatively scant amount invested in agriculture during the reconstruction period. “The Qingchuan County post-earthquake reconstruction plan contained a total investment of 169 hundred million RMB (\$2.62 billion). The estimate total investment for village construction was 28 hundred million RMB (\$434.1 million) only 16.57% of the total investment. Moreover, this amount was mainly concentrated in village reconstruction and infrastructural facilities. Investment in farmland infrastructural construction was relatively small. There was a prominent contradiction of insufficient investment in agricultural production.”⁵⁰² Given this disparity, it did not come as a surprise that many of my interviewees were convinced that the reconstruction process was saturated with corruption. According to a man in his 50s, “the central government and Zhejiang Provincial government gave Qingchuan tons of money for the reconstruction, but each hand it passes through, money gets skimmed from the top, when it gets to its destination – the people – not much is left.”⁵⁰³

Most Qingchuan villagers exhausted their savings and took out loans to pay for the portion of the reconstruction of their homes not covered by state subsidies.⁵⁰⁴ Consequently, most peasant families were unable to invest in their own means of production and those who lost their means of production as a consequence of the earthquake plunged below the poverty line.⁵⁰⁵ The DRC conducted a randomly sampled survey of 150 agricultural households in Qingchuan conducted by the Development Research Center of the State Council in 2009 that found 63.5% of peasant

⁵⁰² Qingchuan DRC, p. 6

⁵⁰³ Interview with local resident 75, Qingchuan, June 2013.

⁵⁰⁴ Qingchuan DRC, p. 7.

⁵⁰⁵ Qingchuan DRC, p. 5.

households surveyed experienced a decline in standard of living (*shenghuo shuiping* 生活水平) relative to pre-earthquake levels and a total of 30% lack any primary source of income (*wu zhuyao zengshou lai yuan* 无主要增收来源). The survey revealed that on average Qingchuan peasants took out 25,300 RMB (\$4,047.61) in loans to finance the reconstruction of their homes (an interview with the Deputy Mayor pegs the average at 30,000 [\$4,799.53] in his township) and, 49.7% of survey respondents worried that the loans would be difficult to repay.⁵⁰⁶ According to an interview in May 2013 with the Qingchuan County Poverty Alleviation and Immigration Bureau (*fupin yimin ju* 扶贫移民局) Bureau Chief, Qingchuan has over 53,700 residents living below the poverty line, roughly 26.96% of the total population.⁵⁰⁷ Despite such questionable county-level resource allocation and priorities, hard budget constraints, financing shortfalls, and exacerbated poverty, the 12th Five-Year Plan continues to extol Qingchuan's virtue as an "ecological agriculture pilot scheme county."⁵⁰⁸

The fourth chapter of the plan sets production targets for each of the five primary zones of agricultural production. For example, by 2015 tea-production is supposed increase its base of operations by adding 17,000 mu of land, including an "organic" tea production park of 5,000 mu, contributing to a total 150,000 mu of land designated for

⁵⁰⁶ On the basis of my interviews in other earthquake counties, even into late 2013, loan-repayment continued to be a major anxiety and difficulty for local-residents. One visibly anxious village Party secretary from Mao county told me that "although the houses look good from the outside, villagers are unable repay their loans. They put it off for as long as they can, and in the meantime, the inside of their houses remain empty." Interview with Party secretary from X village, Mao county, July 2012.

⁵⁰⁷ The Qingchuan government is also engaged in a series of "poverty-alleviation" projects that mainly consist in assigning leading cadres, including the 10 members of the Qingchuan County Party Standing Committee, responsibility for improving the economic situation of poor, individual households. These cadres form a "poverty-alleviation leadership small group" (*fupin lingdao xiao zu* 扶贫领导小组). These "one-on-one" (*yi dui yi* 一对一) enable cadres to individually provide "investment capital" and "technology training" to impoverished households. The county also set up a "poverty-alleviation hotline" (*fupin rexian* 扶贫热线) for people to call in case of economic and production emergencies. Interview with Qingchuan County Poverty Alleviation and Migration Bureau, Bureau Chief, Qingchuan, May 2013.

⁵⁰⁸ Qingchuan 12th 5 Year Plan.

tea production. Tea output is set at 3,400 tons.⁵⁰⁹ Even though agricultural communes were dismantled and the command economy discarded, counties in rural areas continue to set production targets for market transactions.

The remaining 50 pages of Qingchuan's 12th Five Year Plan continue with meticulous plans for a variety of governmental affairs. These topics include but are not limited to: the "ecologization" of industry; investments in tourism infrastructure; comprehensive urban-rural integration; transportation networks; irrigation facilities; flood-prevention engineering; energy resources; informatization (*xinxihua* 信息化); poverty-alleviation; environmental protection; educational and medical facilities; spiritual civilization construction; social management; and, disaster prevention. This short-list reveals relatively no space outside of the capture, in varying degrees, of the planning apparatus.

Pointing this out is not the same as rendering a normative judgment about the 'reach of the state.' The state's presence is necessary in order to maintain the minimal economic flows that do exist (and, to provide a counterfactual, what would happen to the local economy if the state withdrew its presence?). Contradictions sharply arise however in the very gesture of a 'command economy' mentality attempting to construct a market economy. This dynamic produces a de-stabilizing promise and illusion of control. When reality challenges that illusion, both the propaganda and repressive arms of the state are called in to defend the image. Caught up in the middle of these contradictions are Qingchuan's peasantry engaged in modes of reading the state, interpreting its overtures and protesting its failures.

Interview transcripts with local villagers and ethnographic observations of daily life in Qingchuan during three extended stay trips in 2013 provide an intimate and detailed perspective on Qingchuan's post-earthquake economic situation. By carefully

⁵⁰⁹ Ibid.

listening to villagers' accounts of their economic status we can hear the tatters of the discourses of ecological civilization and the state's plans for rural prosperity.

LOCAL PERSPECTIVES

Qingchuan's Hongguang township contains several villages (two of which I visited) whose local economy revolves around raising rabbits, shearing and selling the fur.⁵¹⁰ According to the township Party secretary:

Villagers raised rabbits before the earthquake but did not earn any money. It was more of a hobby. It lacked scale and did not produce any economic benefit. Today, their enthusiasm is slowly increasing, which is a good thing. We have scientific methods of feeding and defending against disease. In the past, peddlers would come to purchase the fur and take it to the market. This is now a standardized process to improve the price of sales. Next, we plan on expanding the scale and number of households involved. We call this leading by model example. We introduce to villagers new kinds of breeds as well as policy guidelines. If their heart is afraid of investing, the government provides preferential policies (*youhui zhengce* 优惠政策) to overcome their worries. Policy support means the government provides subsidies and the villagers provide some of their own money too.⁵¹¹

Carefully analyzing the Party Secretary's description reveals two important patterns of how local officials conceptualize post-earthquake development. First, he repeatedly distinguishes the 'scientific' scale, standardization, and economic benefit from the disorganization and non-profitable practices of the past. Secondly, he emphasizes villagers' subjective attitudes and thoughts, their fears as well as enthusiasm, as the motor of economic development.

⁵¹⁰ In 2000, Qingchuan villagers started a "rabbit raising fur growing association" (*zhang mao tu yangzhi xie hui* 长毛兔养殖协会). "Qingchuan nongmin yi shang cu nong" (Qingchuan villagers doing business to promote agriculture), *Sichuan nongcun ribao* (Sichuan Village Daily) (February 2, 2003).

⁵¹¹ Interview with Qingchuan County, Hongguan Township Party Secretary, May 2013.

I was accompanied by an official from the Hongguang township government to visit Taolong 陶龙 village and inspect their rabbit-raising farms. As soon as we arrived, angry villagers surrounded our car and obstructed us from inspecting the rabbit cages or photographing the village. After the yelling in local dialect between my government escort and the villagers subsided, he pulled me aside and explained that the County Animal Husbandry and Food Bureau promised the village's total 19 rabbit-raising households "development capital" (*fazhan zijin* 发展资金) of 3000 RMB (\$479.95) per household. After finding out only 5 households received the subsidy, villagers were furious over the inequity of the back-channel patronage networks. The official actually complained the entire car-ride back to the township government office that he was "helpless" (*wu nai* 无奈) because this issue is beyond his jurisdiction and frustrated that local villagers failed to make this distinction. There was an acute contradiction between this official's sense of his own diminished place in the political pecking order and the villagers' enlargement of his powers as a state agent with the ability to 'get things done.'⁵¹² Yet, the villagers displayed a savvy understanding of political aesthetics. After the argument settled down, I spoke with an older villager who explained, "If we don't make a scene, we won't get the money."⁵¹³ The township government official admitted candidly that, "the villagers know that this rabbit farm is one of Qingchuan's only economic 'bright spots' (*liang dian* 亮点). Higher-level officials and media are often brought here to see the example of Qingchuan's post-earthquake success. Blocking access hurts the government."⁵¹⁴ Finally, egalitarianism persists in villagers' sense of entitlement. In the words of the township official, "it would have been better not to give any subsidies rather than only five."⁵¹⁵ Despite being only a minor incident, one that will never make

⁵¹² This is an incredibly common trope in scholarship on local governance in China (especially rural China).

⁵¹³ Interview with villager 102, Qingchuan, May 2013.

⁵¹⁴ Interview with township official, Qingchuan, May 2013.

⁵¹⁵ Ibid.

the news, and that no one outside of the few individuals involved will remember or care about, I suggest that political scientists should pay careful attention to ordinary frictions, which are the pulse of rural politics.

In addition to an expectation of fairness, villagers also expected the state to protect them against market failure. Expectation and perceived state responsibility for economic success or failure constitute an important vector of rural political dynamics. Party discourse contradictorily encourages these expectations through its socialist promises to guarantee economic development, at the same time as it rebukes villagers for a mentality of “waiting, depending, and demanding” (*deng, kao, yao* 等, 靠, 要).⁵¹⁶

As the PRC attempts to ‘digitize’ governance and complaint handling, the Mayor’s Mailbox (*shizhang xinxiang* 市长信箱) is a potentially interesting data source. Local residents are encouraged to publically post queries and complaints that the Mayor’s Mailbox Office relays to appropriate members of the government to handle and respond to publically. Based on the handful of selections I read from within the past year, responses typically are posted within two weeks after appropriate time is devoted for ‘investigation.’ In one letter, a villager from Yaodu 姚渡 township profusely thanks the county government for their benevolent policies to help villagers ‘become rich’ (*zou yi tiao zhifu zhi lu* 走一条致富之路). He then tactfully embeds his village’s mushroom production operation into the official state discourse of enriching the peasantry (“our village’s development of mushroom cultivation has allowed peasants to see the hope of becoming rich”).⁵¹⁷ The next sentence cannily frames his letter as a “succinct work report” (*jiandan gongzuo huibao* 简单工作回报) of the village’s production situation to the Party secretary. In 2011 the government “took the lead” (*qiantou* 牵头) in cultivating mushrooms (the words “to take the lead” implicitly ascribes responsibility to the state to

⁵¹⁶ See discussion in chapter 3.

⁵¹⁷ Qingchuan County Mayor’s Mailbox, “Dailing nongcun zhifu” (Leading the Village to Become Rich” (February 15, 2012) at <http://gmail.gy169.net/article.asp?id=57581> (last accessed April 27, 2014).

ensure the plan succeeds) and organized several households, along with the Guangyuan Municipality State Investment Company (guangyuanshi guotou gongsi 广元市国投公司) to invest a total of 500,000 RMB (\$79,992.32) in mushroom production. The author explains, “because of a shortage of technology and experience 2/3rd of the production were ruined. We were not discouraged and made use of the remaining 1/3rd to redeem some of our loss.” Appealing to national policy objectives of revitalizing the countryside, the letter continues: “this has allowed us to create many jobs and allowed villagers to remain in their native place without having to migrate to other cities” thus, discursively aligning itself with Party objectives. Finally, the letter summarizes its main point “last year we did not make any profits. We saw the hope of becoming rich but did not become rich” (*women kan dao zhifu de xiwang, dan meiyou zhifu* 我们看到致富的希望，但没有致富) as a transition to its ultimate request, “this year we want to continue planting and expand production, with ‘one household bringing along many households’ (*yi hu dai duo hu* 一户带多户)⁵¹⁸ and provide our village with employment opportunities. Because of a capital shortage (*zijin quefa* 资金缺乏), our equipment is out-of-date ... We hope that the government can give us support and allow us to become more confident. We are definitely able to set off a single spark (*xingxingzhihuo* 星星之火) to ignite the entire countryside and lead villagers to prosperous days.” This letter is a perfect example of the expectations villagers hold for the state to compensate against market risk on the basis of the state’s own policy objectives. In addition to interweaving state policy into the letter, the author concludes by re-purposing Mao’s famous call to revolution “a single spark can start a prairie fire” (*xingxingzhihuo, keyi ranyuan* 星星之火，可以燎原) into Deng Xiaoping’s mantra to “get rich is glorious.” This rhetorical merging of Mao and Deng lends historical credibility to the village’s claim for continued state support.

⁵¹⁸ This repeats planning discourse verbatim.

The county sent Yaodu township's Party and Government Committee to investigate, which determined that joint-ventures in neighboring villages did not face similar production difficulties (the logic of market competition). As a compromise, the township government offered subsidies for each 'bag' (*dai* 袋) of mushrooms produced, and free provision of steel frameworks for canopies to protect the mushrooms from the heat (the logic of state benevolence). The response ends with a gesture of encouragement for leading the "development of special-characteristic (agricultural) industries." While the reader is most likely not terribly interested in the fate of mushroom production in an obscure village in a remote county, this exchange is extremely insightful into the terms through which the state and society speak to each other.

The county's plan for economic development intimates a prosperity it cannot guarantee. In most cases, the reality is that government-led programs for special crop production are tenuous processes with mixed results. Besides out-migration for work, villagers typically experiment with combinations of crop cultivation in order to support their livelihoods. The following excerpt from an interview with a Party secretary from a village adjacent to Qingchuan's county seat exemplifies the makeshift production strategies adopted by peasants as a means to ensure their precarious survival.

Before the earthquake we had no source of income. We mainly grew grain, raised pigs, and sometimes burnt firewood to turn it into charcoal. In 2007, we tried raising sheep, but most of them died as a result of disease. We also had no grass to feed them during the winter. For those that survived, the prices we got for them were low. We've also tried to grow fruit, but the water and soil quality is too acidic. Also, we have no flat land here – we are surrounded on both sides by mountains. About 30 years ago, we tried to cultivate Chinese medicine, but all of these are not ways of thinking that will produce wealth (*facai de silu* 发财的思路). In 2004, we tried to grow tealeaves [goes into a long explanation of tea cultivation methods] but the manual labor required is not worth the money it

fetches on the market. Anyone who is young has migrated elsewhere to find work.⁵¹⁹

Interviewed in 2009, his assessment of the post-earthquake future is not reassuring. “Right now, we have no plans. If we do not come up with something soon, the reconstruction subsidies offered to us will be taken away.” His account registers the historical truth that the local government is out of ideas as it has ‘groped’ its way from one experiment to the next for the last nearly three decades! The unspoken point here is that people manage to survive; they only do not manage to do so profitably.

Another villager’s post-earthquake account describes an existence maintained on the periphery of the market economy.

What would do if we left the village? We have nothing. If we moved, we would also have to find a way of earning money and the state again would not take responsibility for this (*you bushi guojia baogan* 又不是国家包干). The first six months after the earthquake we lived on a livelihood subsistence of 300 RMB (\$48.07) per month. After that, the government only provided a 200 RMB (\$32.05) per month subsistence to the elderly and children. They also gave us rice and oil ... Each year we raise five pigs and sell four on the market for 5,000 RMB (\$801.26). We also sell some of the potatoes we grow. Young people from the village all migrate for work. We have no savings, but in this way we manage to get by. Right now our anxiety is that you need to pay money to see the doctor, and money to send children to school. Each year we only receive an 800 RMB (\$128.20) subsidy from planting trees on trees on the mountain.⁵²⁰

This account is representative of interviews I conducted with other Qingchuan County villagers, as well as villagers in other earthquake zones. Villagers find themselves pinched between increasing expenses (school, medicine) and scant resources, including meager state welfare, with which to make ends meet.

When farmers “shift” (*zhuan yi* 转移)⁵²¹ to non-agricultural modes of labor, their prospects for earning money are also rather bleak. The following narrative discloses a

⁵¹⁹ *Wenchuan dadizhen yizhounian zaiqu qunzhong fangtanlü* (Wenchuan Earthquake 1st Anniversary Disaster Masses Interview Transcripts) (2009), p. 167. Internal publication.

⁵²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 189

⁵²¹ The transformation of labor from agricultural to non-agricultural (*zhuan yi laodong* 转移劳动) is a policy objective that is included in cadre evaluation indices.

sadly familiar scene of “cruel optimism”⁵²² in the future and the state’s responsibility to equitably distribute resources, in this case jobs.

We borrowed money from family and friends in 1999 in order to buy land and build a house. In 2008, we sold our old car and borrowed more money in order to buy a truck for transporting merchandise. That way, we hoped to repay the loans in a few years. When the earthquake happened, our house was damaged beyond repair; my husband and other family members died; our belongings were stolen; and, the truck was crushed ... A friend lent me 6,000 RMB (\$961.52) to open a convenient store. But people with money moved out and the people who stayed beyond don’t have any money. I do not even sell 1000 RMB (\$160.25) of goods a month. There are also more than ten convenient stores on the town’s two streets ... The government had a policy of assisting disaster victims by providing over 90 public welfare jobs (*gongyixing gangwei* 公益性岗位). Each person could earn 450 RMB (\$72.11) a month by performing tasks such as sweeping streets. Mine is the only family in town who lost relatives during the earthquake but I was denied a post. This was so unfair! I went to the County Labor Bureau and Petition Letter Office ... I forced the person at the Labor Bureau, who was unwilling at first, to let me look at the name list of people who were given these jobs. When I looked at the list, I saw the family name of even the head of the local hospital. I told them, ‘if you do not investigate this situation, I will immediately take my child and give him/her (gender of child is unclear from transcript) to the County Party Secretary so it will be his problem!!!’ (*wo mashang ba wo de wawa gei xianwei shuji song guoqu ,kan ta guan bu guan* 我马上把我的娃娃给县委书记送过去，看他管不管).⁵²³

After leaving the Labor Bureau, the Petition Letter Office refused to accept her claim according to the stipulation that they were not allowed to accept petitions related to the earthquake. The Petition Letter Office helped her call the Township Party secretary who explained to her that she was not offered a public welfare job because she ran her own business and already possessed an income source. She demanded an investigation of her financial situation by pleading “I am in debt (*qianzhang* 欠帐); I do not earn money from the story. I am a single woman who has to support two elderly people and two children.”⁵²⁴ In other parts of the transcript, she admits her “shame” over asking the

⁵²² Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011).

⁵²³ *Wenchuan dadizhen yizhounian zaiqu qunzhong fangtanlü* (Wenchuan Earthquake 1st Anniversary Disaster Masses Interview Transcripts) (2009), p. 191. Internal publication.

⁵²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 192.

state for help and justifies the decision based on the “unfairness” of the situation and as a desperate measure. The entire transcript is worth reading in full, as it also deals with a demolition compensation dispute carried over from before the earthquake, accusations of patronage networks, embezzlement of relief supplies, and an accumulating sense of bitterness. “The government today is extremely fake.”

This particular case is symptomatic of the contemporary moment in China’s countryside. It complexly weaves together all of the major themes of rural township politics: private loans to acquire the capital to engage in non-agricultural work; aspirations for upward mobility; the inability to survive financially without state support; recriminations over the “fairness” and opacity of policy implementation; power hierarchies and the relative futility of petitioning; and, ultimately, loss of regime legitimacy in the eyes of this one person.

Accounts like these offer an inverted reflection of macro-economic policies and trajectories. The individual narratives presented in detail above are linked together by the common theme of the inability to survive in a market economy and resultant expectation, dependence, and resentment toward the state. These are also global themes of peasants existing precariously at the margins of the global capitalist economy, in a painful limbo between partial inclusion and exclusion. In China, they are given the added ‘twist’ of a socialist legacy that authorizes claims to be made on the state to provide for the basic means of existence.

When local residents perceive the state as *wasting* money, labor, and resources on gratuitous face projects, their economic insecurity assumes the form of a political grievance. The controversy over Qingchuan’s plan to green the county seat Qiaozhuang 桥庄 is an example of how the Maoist doctrine of “serve the people” is turned against local state formalism.

ECOLOGICAL PARADISE OR WASTE OF MONEY?

After the earthquake struck on May 12, 2008, it took more than one year to formulate a reconstruction blue-print for the County Seat, which is anomalous in light of the central-level pressure to complete the reconstruction in under two years. The primary reason for the delay was the scientific evaluation that the “old area” (*lao qu* 老区) rested upon three active earthquake fault lines (*duanliedai* 断裂带) and was prone to landslides. This resulted in protracted and opaque bureaucratic negotiations concerning whether to move the county seat farther south to the city of Zhuyuan 竹园 or remain in Qiaozhuang.⁵²⁵

Under such uncertain circumstances, the Ningbo 宁波 Urban Planning Research Center from Zhejiang 浙江 Province in charge of designing the blueprint for the “new area” (*xin qu* 新区) refused to include in its plans the “old area” constructed prior to the earthquake. As time passed, it was tentatively decided to adapt the county seat’s original 2003 Detailed Comprehensive Plan (*kongzhixing xiang guihua* 控制性详规划). This was an unpalatable option, however, as the plan was out of date and did not conform to modern safety standards.

In June 2009, then Sichuan Province Party Secretary Liu Qibao 刘奇葆 issued the following directive: “create a comprehensive plan for the construction of Qiaozhuang and Zhuyuan; create a comprehensive plan for the construction of Qiaozhuang’s new and old areas.”⁵²⁶ This meant that Zhuyuan was to become the industrial center of Qingchuan and Qiaozhuang was to remain the administrative, cultural, tourist, and residential center. It also meant that the old area needed to be immediately incorporated into the overall plan for the County Seat. As a result, the Provincial-Level

⁵²⁵ *Wenchuan dadizhen yizhounian zaiqu qunzhong fangtanlü* (Wenchuan Earthquake 1st Anniversary Disaster Masses Interview Transcripts) (2009), p. 165. Internal publication.

⁵²⁶ Xu Kai, “Qingchuan quanli jiakuai xin xiancheng chongjian jianwen” (Qingchuan All-Out Acceleration of Reconstruction of New County Seat Information), *Fenghuang* (Phoenix News) (November 24, 2010) at http://news.ifeng.com/gundong/detail_2010_11/24/3214194_0.shtml (last accessed June 9, 2014).

Housing and Urban-Rural Construction Planning Office swiftly formulated a “revised plan” (*xiu bian* 修编).

Shortly after, in the name of public safety and disaster prevention (*birang* 避让), the county government issued a directive to demolish the buildings constructed on the fault lines and relocate the local residents (*chaiqiang* 拆迁) into the newly constructed residential settlements located at the periphery of the county-seat. According to Sichuan Provincial Housing and Urban-Rural Construction Office head planner Qiu Jian 邱建,

The revised plan of Qingchuan’s new county-seat has four defining features. It is people-oriented; safety is its priority; houses along the three earthquake fault zones and three landslide avoidance points must be entirely demolished; increase green space (*lihua* 绿化) and develop an ecological park city (*dazao shengtai yuanlin chengshi* 打造生态园林城市); excavate the essential properties of urban space (*wajue chengshi neihan* 挖掘城市内涵) and manifest the special characteristics of culture; increase cultural elements and raise the city’s aesthetic appreciation (*pinwei* 品味); respect nature, respect reality (*shiji* 实际); attach importance to improvement and upgrade and strive to build a safe, livable, ecological, cultural, and modern landscape (*shanshui yuanlin* 山水园林) county-seat.⁵²⁷

This passage breathlessly knots together discourses of safety, ecology, demolition and aesthetics. The violence of compulsory demolition is neatly erased by incorporation into the other semiotic elements.

The three fault lines were transformed into three “green zones” (*lihua dai* 绿化带).⁵²⁸ In place of the houses, trees were planted and over a dozen public parks were created. It is important to notice how ecological and aesthetic discourses converge in a tautological loop. Whatever is green is beautiful and whatever is beautiful is green. According to the provincial planner in charge of the project: “Narrow streets do not have any room for urban parks. Right now, when I look at the blueprint, I feel comfortable (*xianzai cong tu shang kan dao jiu hen shufu* 现在从图上看到就很舒服). After construction is complete, it will definitely look even more comfortable! (*jinhou jiancheng le kending geng*

⁵²⁷ Ibid.

⁵²⁸ Ibid.

shufu 今后建成了肯定更舒服). Everyday many people come to see the plan and think it is great. After they see it become reality, they will say it is very beautiful.”⁵²⁹ The aesthetic sensibilities of the speaker and imagined sensibilities of future residents and tourists form the underlying definition of ecology. It does not matter if the new parks genuinely benefit the environment and it matters less how the parks impact the lives of local residents – what matters is that they produce a pleasing sensation. According to Qingchuan County Party secretary Xiang Cide 向此德: “the county must be beautified”⁵³⁰ (*meihua xiancheng* 美化县城) for its application to become a national ranked AAAA status tourist destination. The similarities with Yingxiu are unmistakable.

Forestry Bureau Chief Li Mingjie 李明杰 firmly advocated the plan to green the county seat.⁵³¹ The logic he offered in support of it is a wonderful example of ideological alchemy.

Our bureau and the construction bureau are working inseparably close to accelerate the pace of the greening of the county seat. We optimized procedures ... that saved us 20 days for each greening project. By Chinese New Year, the county-seat will include 12 leisure parks (*xiuxian gongyuan* 休闲公园). Turning the 3 fault-zones into 3 green zones was an ingenious way of transforming harm into benefit (*hua hai wei li* 化害为利) and peril into safety (*zhuan wei wei an* 转危为安). There will be 40 square meters of green space per capita – rare both in the nation and province. After completion of construction, Qingchuan will rival Europe’s eco-cities and towns! ⁵³²

⁵²⁹ Ibid.

⁵³⁰ “Anzhao 4A ji jingqu shengji Qingchuan xiancheng” (According to 4A grade scenic area improve the Qingchuan’s county-seat), *Guangyuan xinwen* (Guangyuan News) (May 15, 2012) at <http://www.gysta.gov.cn/gyjmgzt/lybz/system/2012/05/15/000154483.html> (last accessed June 8, 2014).

⁵³¹ In March 2014 it was announced that Forestry Bureau Chief Li was under investigation for charges of disciplinary violations, corruption, and the acceptance of bribes. No further details were released. “Sichuan Guangyuan dui fubai ling rongren: qunian chachu 15 ming xianji ganbu” (Sichuan’s Guangyuan Shows Zero Tolerance For Corruption: Last Year 15 County-level Cadres Investigated) *Zhongguo xinwen wang* (China News Net) (March 11, 2014) at <http://www.nd.chinanews.com/News/xwdc/20140311/1682855.html> (last accessed June 8, 2014).

⁵³² Xu Kai, “Jiakuai xin xiancheng chongjian.”

The local residents I interviewed rejected this logic as formalism. A primary source of state-society tension in Qiaozhuang is the perceived waste, cost, and uselessness of the parks. “The parks are face projects (*mianzi gongcheng* 面子工程).”⁵³³ “No one likes the parks, 95% of ordinary people oppose (*fandui* 反对) the construction of parks.”⁵³⁴ “The government wasted a fortune to build parks and engage in ‘face projects’ and we cannot afford to rebuild our homes. We are still living in a temporary shelter. HOW IS THIS FAIR?”⁵³⁵ “The parks are empty because no one uses them.”⁵³⁶ Local residents also denounced as another face-project the construction of a memorial “wall of gratitude” (*gan'en qiangbi* 感恩墙壁) in the center of the city.⁵³⁷ An even deeper source of the tension is the violence of compulsory demolition.

Only one month after Sichuan Provincial Party secretary Liu’s visit in July 2009 the demolitions commenced. According to official statistics, 927,900 total square meters were demolished (80% of the total surface area of the county-seat).⁵³⁸ What these numbers indicate, and as was confirmed to me by a source within the county government, the demolished surface area was not limited to the demarcated old area alone.

Given the magnitude and sensitivity of the project, a demolition “supervision work group” (*dudao gongzuo zu* 督导工作组) composed of 220 cadres from the functional bureaus from Guangyuan 广元 city (administratively responsible for Qingchuan) and Qingchuan county were responsible for “propaganda, policy explanation work, assistance for the resolution of contradictions, concentrating strength to accelerate the demolition

⁵³³ Interview with local resident 77, Qingchuan, May 2013.

⁵³⁴ Interview with local resident 85, Qingchuan, May 2013.

⁵³⁵ Interview with local resident 69, Qingchuan, May 2013.

⁵³⁶ Interview with local resident 88, Qingchuan, May 2013.

⁵³⁷ Interviews with local residents 66, 71, 74 and 85, Qingchuan, May 2013.

⁵³⁸ Xu Kai, “Jiakuai xin xiancheng chongjian”; interview with Qingchuan X township deputy mayor, May 2013.

and relocation process, and distribution of tents to households.”⁵³⁹ In addition to the work group, a Qingchuan County-Seat Planning and Construction Leadership Small Group was also created. The demolition process was described in the media as a “military campaign” (*gongjian zhanyi* 攻坚战役).⁵⁴⁰

Contradictions start to emerge however within the official narrative. According to an article in *The Guangyuan Times*, by November 2010 the demolition and relocation was 94% complete, carried out “according to the law and in a harmonious fashion.”⁵⁴¹ However, on February 12, 2012 the Qingchuan Government’s official webpage reported a summary of the proceedings of a “county seat fault zone demolition work conference”⁵⁴² (*xiancheng chiqian chuqian gongzuo huiyi* 县城拆迁除迁工作会议) led by the Qingchuan National People’s Congress Deputy Director concerning the massive difficulties slowing down the implementation. The purpose of the meeting was to increase the “resolve,” “discipline,” and “management” of cadres undertaking the demolition process. Qingchuan County Party secretary Xiang was quoted during the meeting, “As long as our thinking does not slide, our methods will always be greater than our difficulties” (*zhiyao sixiang bu huapo, women de banfa zong bi kunnan duo* 只要思想不滑坡，我们的办法总比困难多).⁵⁴³ The conference stipulated three primary goals: (1) accelerate demolition pace; (2) resolve contradictions; and (3) conscientiously and with “great fanfare” engage in a model example of policy dissemination and propaganda (*zhengce xuanchuan* 政策宣传). This posting was later removed from the Qingchuan County government website.

⁵³⁹ Xu Kai, “Jiakuai xin xiancheng chongjian.”

⁵⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁴¹ Ibid.

⁵⁴² Qingchuanxian waixuan ban (Qingchuan County External Propaganda Office), “Wo xian kai xiancheng duanlie dai chaichu chiqian gongzuo huiyi” (County-Seat Fault-Zone Demolition Work Conference) (reported on February 15, 2012). Webpage has been subsequently removed.

⁵⁴³ Ibid.

When I interviewed the personal secretary of the county magistrate in May 2013, he informed me that: “all of the buildings were already demolished.”⁵⁴⁴ When I asked him if there were any protests or resistance, he denied any discontent on the grounds that “all of the residents accepted the objective ‘science’ behind the decision.”

During an interview later that week with the Deputy Magistrate of a nearby township who resides in the county seat, he confided that there were still several hundred “nail houses” (*dingzihu* 钉子户) – a term for people who continue to remain in their homes resisting demolition. He explained that the ‘delay’ resulted from the need to use “different resolution methods for different houses. For the houses with connections, their compensation rates are discreetly determined on an individual basis. The people without connections are screwed. But that’s the way things are, where there is sunshine, there are also shadows.”⁵⁴⁵ A local resident I interviewed described one of those ‘other’ methods as the employment of local crime networks to help with the demolition process and “resolve problems the government is unable to resolve.”⁵⁴⁶ There were reports of similar intimidation tactics in Mianzhu 绵竹 city.⁵⁴⁷ These findings also support the argument of Hurst, Liu, Liu, and Tao that local state reliance on mafia is prevalent in China’s underdeveloped regions.⁵⁴⁸

The next day I interviewed the proprietors of a few nail houses. They were dissatisfied because in their view the compensation offered by the government was too low and relocation destination too peripheral. All of the residents I interviewed stated that local county officials never once solicited their opinions on the reconstruction plan for the county seat. A motorcycle repair shop owner explained that the proposed

⁵⁴⁴ Interview with secretary of county mayor, Qingchuan, May 2013.

⁵⁴⁵ interview with Qingchuan township X deputy mayor, Qingchuan, May 2013.

⁵⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁷ Interview with NGO worker, Mianzhu, March 2012.

⁵⁴⁸ William Hurst, Mingxing Liu, Yongdong Liu, and Ran Tao, “Reassessing Collective Petitioning in Rural China: Civic Engagement, Extra-State Violence, and Regional Variation,” *Comparative Politics*, forthcoming Summer 2014.

relocation would adversely impact his business. “I don’t care too much about where I live – the important issue is my store-front (*pumian* 铺面). If we are moved to the periphery, how will we do business? Even here, the population is small and business is bad, don’t even mention what it would be like on the outskirts of the city!”⁵⁴⁹ A neighbor reproduced the narrative of the Deputy Mayor. “The government negotiates with each house directly on an individual basis. If you don’t have any ‘connections’, you don’t have any power.” Asked if her family organizes collectively with other nail-houses, she responded: “it is impossible because of the individualized process of the negotiations.”⁵⁵⁰ A few houses down, an elderly gentleman summarized the post-earthquake political economy as a cycle of “demolish, repair, demolish, repair, demolish, repair...” His wife sighed, “all of these parks and all of this demolition has absolutely nothing to do with improving people’s lives.”⁵⁵¹

One local resident filed a request with the county court to repeal the administrative ruling (*xingzheng caijue* 行政裁决) of the demolition because compensation was too low. The court denied his request on the grounds that many demolitions and relocations were already completed, thus, granting an individual appeal would disturb the work schedule of the reconstruction and potentially harm the public interest. To resolve the case, the court’s president and deputy-vice president on personally met with the claimant to explain the law and importance of the reconstruction process. Functional bureaus responsible for the demolition also contributed to the negotiations until the claimant “revoked some of his irrational requests” (*chahui qi yixie wuli de qingqiu* 撤回其一些无理的请求) and finally dropped the lawsuit.⁵⁵² This example conforms to broader

⁵⁴⁹ Interview with local nail house resident 1, Qingchuan, May 2013.

⁵⁵⁰ Interview with local nail house resident 2, Qingchuan, May 2013.

⁵⁵¹ Interview with husband and wife, Qingchuan, May 2013.

⁵⁵² “Fayuan li quan dingzihu zhu tui Qingchuan zaihou chongjian” (Court strenuously urges nailhouses to assist in pushing forward Qingchuan’s post-disaster reconstruction), *Meili Zhongguo* (Charismatic China) (October 24, 2013) at <http://ml.china.com.cn/guangyuan/zfbd/20131024/257195.html> (last accessed June 9, 2014).

tendencies in China to settle disputes in personalized mediation outside of the courtroom.⁵⁵³ Also, note the ‘Maoist’ format of the official case narrative – after admitting the ‘irrationality’ of his request, the plaintiff allegedly converted his views and “fully supported the reconstruction as well as expressed his gratitude to the county court for their contribution to the reconstruction work.” Although this person may indeed have been happier with an undisclosed but definitely higher compensation amount, that is not the relevant point. The point is the compulsion to discursively repair the damage to the public image of the demolition campaign.

Perhaps as a result of the ongoing nail-house encampments, perhaps as a product of intentional over-supply and inflated market prices, or a combination thereof, Qingchuan’s new area also contains vast swathes of empty apartments (*kong fang* 空房). The surface area of Qingchuan’s county seat “expanded 2, 3 times larger than it was before the earthquake . . . new roads are over 12 meters wide . . . the county seat is larger and even more beautiful.”⁵⁵⁴ The reporter of this story, however, subtly interjects a cynical tone. “Mayor Ma Hua 马花 of Guangyuan Municipality proudly introduced Qingchuan’s county seat as ‘a great leap of 20 year years’ . . . This reporter saw numerous brand new residential apartments that were as empty as anything (*kongkongyeru* 空空也如).”⁵⁵⁵ My latest research trip in July 2013 confirmed this description of numerous empty apartments. Again, the similarities with Dujiangyan and Yingxiu are unmistakable.

The greening of the county seat may originally have been a creative plan for how to deal with Qingchuan’s vulnerability to future natural disasters. Local residents

⁵⁵³ Kwai Hang Ng and Xin He, “Internal Contradictions of Judicial Mediation in China,” *Law & Social Inquiry* Vol. 39 No. 2 (Spring 2014), pp. 285-312.

⁵⁵⁴ Wu Yue, “Wenchuan zaiqu chongjian gao mianzi gongcheng: zhengfu dalou ‘zui chaobiao’” (Wenchuan Earthquake Zone Reconstruction Engages in Face Projects: Government Buildings that Exceed the Acceptable Limit” *Sohu* (May 11, 2012) at <http://news.sohu.com/20120511/n342984097.shtml> (last accessed June 9, 2014).

⁵⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

perceive in it signs of waste, aesthetic posturing, corruption and indifference to their wellbeing. These contradictory positions lack a common language that would be able to negotiate a mutual accommodation between state and society. Formalism's most pernicious and over the long term potentially regime destabilizing effect is this break down of trust.



Image 5.2 Photograph of a nail-house in Qingchuan's county seat.⁵⁵⁶

Political aesthetics of greening and tree planting also take root in the capillaries of rural space. During the post-earthquake reconstruction period, in a village adjacent to Qingchuan's county seat, the local party secretary recounts county regulations (*guiding* 规定) to achieve a specific 'natural' aesthetic. In addition to their reconstruction subsidy of 16,000-22,000 RMB (\$2,559.75 – 3,519.66) depending on household size, local residents were also provided with a 4000 RMB (\$639.93) "style re-modeling subsidy" (*fengmao gaizao butie* 风貌改造补贴) to purchase cast stones to adorn the façade of their homes.⁵⁵⁷ The

⁵⁵⁶ Image downloaded from this public forum:
<http://gyr.cn/forum.php?mod=viewthread&tid=19881>

⁵⁵⁷ *Wenchuan dadizhen yizhounian zaiqu qunzhong fangtanlue* (Wenchuan Earthquake 1st Anniversary Disaster Masses Interview Transcripts) (2009), p. 168. Internal publication.

literal translation of cast stones in Chinese is *wenhua shi* 文化石 “cultural stones.” This translation shifts the connotation of the stone. According to Baidu, China’s version Wikipedia, cultural stones “maintain a natural, original style ... keeping with people’s reverence of nature and the concept of returning to nature. As a result, people collectively refer this kind of stone as a ‘cultural stone.’ Using this kind of stone decoration creates a bright wall full of implicit cultural charm and natural atmosphere.”⁵⁵⁸ The aesthetics of the cultural stone is an ersatz embodiment of ecological civilization. The fact alone that this miniscule detail was a state priority during the reconstruction is evidence of how deeply political aesthetics saturates the body politic.

In a village belonging Qingchuan’s Hongguang 红光 township, village officials ordered residents to plant grass (*cao* 草) around their homes in order to beautify the village and meet the policy targets of increasing green space. Local villagers deemed the request uneconomical. As a result, they defied political pressure and planted an assortment of vegetables (*cai* 菜) instead. Eventually, the local state conceded to the voluntary selection of vegetables. In other earthquake areas however local villagers lost similar landscaping struggles. In a village in Pengzhou 彭州, villagers already planted vegetables but were forced to tear them up and plant grass in preparation for the visit of a higher level official. A local village cadre explained the decision in aesthetic terms. “Villagers are indifferent to hygiene. Vegetable fields are planted chaotically without any attention to tidiness. This has an extreme impact on what is pleasing to the eyes”⁵⁵⁹ (*cunmin bu zhongshi weisheng, caidi feichang luan, bu zuyi caidi de zhengjie, feichang yingxiang meiguan* 村民不重视卫生, 菜地非常乱, 不注意菜地的整洁, 非常影响美观). In retaliation, villagers sarcastically nicknamed this local cadre “swept clean” (*yi sao guang* 一扫光). These accounts reveal the aesthetic priorities of local officials who would rather present a tidy landscape of manicured grass than allow villagers to plant sideline crops from which

⁵⁵⁸ <http://baike.baidu.com/view/146488.htm>

⁵⁵⁹ Interview with local cadre, Pengzhou, March 2012.

they could earn money or use for subsistence. They are also further evidence in support of my argument that state-society relations in China are negotiated in mundane spaces that as political scientists we need to train our eyes to see. Persisting ‘unruly’ village habits in new urban space in Dujiangyan, complaints over leaking pipes in Yingxiu, and disputes over vegetable fields in Qingchuan and Pengzhou are examples of a Maoist state that has never stopped planning the details of rural life.

Planning however is a desire for control and not necessarily the exercise of it. Even though the post-earthquake reconstruction provided Qingchuan with a serious infrastructural facelift, it did not improve the basic economic situation and livelihoods of the peasantry. “Although the post-earthquake reconstruction advanced basic infrastructure, transportation, and other aspects quality by 20 years, the livelihood of ordinary people has not changed. We still have no money and the vast majority of us still needs to migrate for work.”⁵⁶⁰

CONCLUSION

The discourse of ecological civilization as a new mode of development might seem exciting and progressive – or, it might appear as a shabby euphemism for underdevelopment. It might inspire genuinely alternative approaches to thinking about the environment as a finite resource that needs to be conserved and protected – or, it might be yet another aesthetic performance in which the only object ‘protected’ is the Party’s image.

Qingchuan’s post-earthquake trajectory presents a mixed picture of ambitious state planning, limited implementation tools, and an increasing public revulsion for Party formalism. For the Party to successfully re-structure China’s rural economy, it will need to repair its governance tools and internal organizational structure as necessary pre-

⁵⁶⁰ Interview with local resident 92, Qingchuan County, June 2013.

requisites. Otherwise, it will remain trapped in the same dialectical loop between mass work and formalism, expenditure and disappointment.

Within this ambiguous context, ideology has a double valence that on the one hand is a positive aspect of the Maoist legacy – politics requires thought-work and propaganda no matter how ugly these terms appear to a liberal understanding. The denial of engaging in them does not mean that they are not practiced everyday. The CCP is organized around the Maoist principle that thought and development are intimately linked. On the other hand, thought-work also requires honesty and a commitment to “seeking truth from facts” (*shi shi qiu shi* 实事求是) – another CCP motto. When it strays from this point, it becomes a technique of oppression that alienates society. By sweeping inconvenient truths under the ideological rug, it attempts to maintain a consistency and coherency that it fundamentally lacks. When this happens, ideology is no longer policy implementation but the maintenance of a fiction. The ideology of ecological civilization is stretched between these two tendencies.

Ideology is not the stuffy and stale air breathed in Marxist-Leninist Institutes or hackneyed expressions in Party journals. The effects of ideological tension are observable in the intimate ways local disaster victims encountered the state, expressed their frustrations, and coped with their personal economic predicaments. When ideology drifts towards its simulacrum, for example in the building of excessive green space, the state’s credibility is worn thin. When local residents view state power and authority as sham performances and alchemical conversions, rather than the stewards of economic transitions they claim to be, the state’s ability to govern is not directly ‘contested’ as much as it is deflated.

Conclusion: Perforations

Methods are not ancillary considerations, but primary ones that demand critical self-reflexivity. The overarching methodological argument of this dissertation is that political epistemologies and discourses matter. Political understandings organize specific representations of the world. They give values to the parameters of politics in a time and place: what are politics today? What can politics accomplish? Who should be permitted to participate and who should not? Political understandings are not the epiphenomena of structures but their dialectical partners. The interaction of political understandings (both broad ideas and narrow discourses) with political institutions and economic structures generates friction that allows us to trace the lifecycle of a policy – why it was crafted, what it intended, and the outcomes it produced in a local context.

On a broader, theoretical level, meta-ideas and critical reflexive inquiry about *politics* is precisely our vocation as comparative political scientists. The search for parsimony, comparable structures, and puzzles, while necessary and illuminating, should not obscure the fact that concepts and assumptions underlie our inquiries. Research designs, methods, analyses, and conclusions are also grounded in epistemological understandings and contoured by both explicit and subterranean normative judgments. This does not hide in post-modern relativity or lapse into ‘culture’ as the explanation that occurs “if I have exhausted the justifications, I have reached bedrock and my spade is turned. Then I am inclined to say: ‘This is simply what I do.’”⁵⁶¹ Rather, when my spade hits the bedrock of my own understanding, maybe I have been digging in the wrong place. The aporetic moment when our concepts do not quite fit our findings does

⁵⁶¹ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe (Oxford, UK: Basil Blackwell, 1958), Proposition 216.

not spell defeat - it is the exciting moment of potentially discovering a new political landscape.

Future comparative analyses of the political understandings of different *regime-types* offer a wonderful opportunity for conceptual dislocation, translation, and re-generation. For example, comparing post-disaster reconstruction of both Hurricane Katrina and the Wenchuan earthquake could crisply bring into relief the different understandings – or logics of governmentality - of how a state should govern, what its citizens expect from it, and the strategies it uses for achieving those outcomes. The benefit of such a project would be to de-naturalize the framing effect American politics has on the study of comparative politics. In other words, politics would be posed as a *question* that resists closure in analytic models (this does not obviously dispense with modeling, hypotheses and familiar concepts as much as it loosens them up – think of it as a kind of analytic tickling).

Aside from opening up new ways of looking at and discussing politics, interpretive methods also hopefully prevent errors that arise from a parochial universality. The following passage from Wang Shaoguang identifies the risks of conceptual baggage:

Perhaps the most common prejudice in the West is the idea that the Chinese government has lost the consent of its people and its own legitimacy. The question of whether political power on any scale enjoys legitimacy should and can only be determined based on evidence. However, the method in which many Western scholars (and Chinese) conduct their research amounts to not much more than talking off the top of their heads. To such scholars, single party system such as the one employed by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in essence could never enjoy the consent of its people; its legitimacy (or lack of it) is self-evident.⁵⁶²

As I have consistently argued throughout the dissertation, contrary to mainstream assumptions, the expectations and demands for good governance in China are *extremely high*. This demand would be impossible to detect without first analyzing and taking seriously Communist Party discourse as social contract that frames state-society relations.

⁵⁶² Wang Shaoguang, “To ‘Fall in Line’ or to ‘Grab’: Thoughts on the Indigenization of Political Science,” *Journal of Chinese Political Science* Vol. 16 (2011), pp. 299-322.

The problem is not that the CCP has ‘never enjoyed the consent of its people’ (which produces a set of research designs and puzzles, such as why has China not democratized; under what conditions will civil society emerge in China; why would an authoritarian state actively solicit grassroots participation; why is the CCP so resilient). The question is as to what exactly the people expect of the CCP. That so many people were disappointed that the CCP *did not do enough* during the reconstruction to advance their material interests should make us pause over how we conceptualize and describe state-society relations in China. The erosion of trust occurred as a result of a *process*. Promised economic results failed to materialize, local state agents were perceived as wasting resources (either by investing in face projects or engaging in corruption) and, more broadly, arbitrarily abusing their power, and local residents felt ignored by state agents. These congealed experiences and memories invalidated the official narrative that the reconstruction was a miraculous success and was intended for them.

How then should we talk about state-society relations in China? I hesitate to use the term ‘gap’ because it implies fixed and coherent identities on both sides, and as a spatial metaphor obscures the temporal processes of its production.⁵⁶³ Instead, I suggest that the ‘gap’ between state and society is more like a series of micro perforations.⁵⁶⁴ To an untrained eye, they are hard to see because they are ‘non-eventful’ – that is, they do not necessarily lead to ‘actions’ such as the smashing of government buildings or occupation of major roadways. They are the product of the Party’s loss of credibility manifested in disaster victims’ everyday lives, deflated expectations, precarious economies, and repressed grievances. These perforations manifest themselves in the

⁵⁶³ “Instead of turning the distinction between the state and civil society into a historical universal enabling us to examine every concrete system, we may try to see in it a form of schematization peculiar to a particular technology of government.” Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France 1978-1979*, trans. Graham Burchell (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan 2008), p. 319.

⁵⁶⁴ The title of Marx’s “Grundrisse” in German translates into “rips in the ground.” I would like to thank Peter Mohanty for brining this to my attention.

observable instances of frustration in everyday life, such as poorly constructed infrastructure, accusations of unfairness and differential treatment, and contestation over landscaping. The problem is not that the state is intrinsically too invasive in society but *invasive in the wrong way* – it lends a clumsy, helping hand that clenches into a fist when it is not properly greeted. These intimate entanglements require new modes of description that take seriously the binding and fraying forces of ideology.

To capture in higher resolution the relationship between ideology and economic development in China also requires changing conceptual lenses. The CCP's political understanding does not accept the liberal conception of the political and economic as autonomous spheres. Consistent throughout PRC history, Party leaders view politics as responsible for economic success or failure. Even when the market mechanism is the primary vehicle for producing value and distributing wealth, it is embedded in a foundational logic of politics. Secondly, as my dissertation suggests, in many parts of rural China, markets are incomplete and, in Party discourse, “under construction” or in processes of “transformation.” Political understandings draft the blueprints of what that construction should look like and set into motion policies and processes – the transformations – for achieving its visions of the future. The argument that ‘politics is still in command’ of the economy finds expression in the vast scope and intricate layers of the Party's planning apparatus that was long ago believed to be obsolete. Thirdly, the CCP's political understandings do not necessarily lead to scientific knowledge and an increase of sovereign power over the economy. In the post-earthquake reconstruction, we saw evidence of how rational planning and developmental fiat led to a series of dead-ends and failed transformations.

Unfortunately, for the schizoid socialist state under late capitalism, there is no ‘right answer.’ It is strikingly clear that capitalism does not generate wealth for the majority of the world's population. It produces uneven geographies of capital

accumulation⁵⁶⁵, infrastructural development, waste, environmental depletion, vulnerability and differential access to the conditions that either sustain life or ‘let die.’⁵⁶⁶ Even in the places where it is ‘successful’, its success is built on the exploitation and minimal support for the survival of the large majority of workers. China’s glittering cities and commodity production in the Pearl River Delta would be impossible without the expendability of migrant workers.⁵⁶⁷ The worrying signs that production is shifting elsewhere in inverse relation to increasing worker rights and salaries are further confirmation of the fact that capitalism does not benefit the working class even when it is successful.

Analyses of political economy must include both structural and ethnographic dimensions. Without ‘viewing political economy from below’, we will repeat the same ignorance of discussing economic miracles, while the people who live them are languishing. Such one-sided approaches are not only analytically insufficient, but they also reproduce the ‘expert’ knowledges that reinforce and perpetuate the travesty.⁵⁶⁸

We should be surprised when capitalism is successful, rather than what we do now, which is to measure failure in relation to an ideal type of market performance. Returning to Sichuan and the post-earthquake reconstruction, at the risk of sounding fatalistic, we should not be scandalized that industrial enterprises are not scrambling to re-locate to Dujiangyan, or that tourists are not pouring money into Yingxiu’s local economy – in fact, it would be remarkable if they did. The PRC has the power to

⁵⁶⁵ David Harvey, *Spaces of Global Capitalism: A Theory of Uneven Geographical Development* (London, UK: Verso Book, 2006).

⁵⁶⁶ Tania Murray Li, “To Make Live or Let Die? Rural Dispossession and the Protection of Surplus Populations,” *Antipode* Vol. 41 (2009), pp. 66-93.

⁵⁶⁷ Pun Ngai and Lu Huilin, “Unfinished Proletarianization: Self, Anger, and Class Action among the Second Generation of Peasant-Workers in Present-Day China,” *Modern China* Vol. 36(5) 493-519.

⁵⁶⁸ I agree with Timothy Mitchell that, “expert knowledge works to format social relations, never simply to report or picture them.” Timothy Mitchell, *Rule of Experts: Egypt, Techno-Politics, Modernity* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press), p. 118.

shuffle flows of industries, resources, capital, and people to maintain the façade of a healthy economy, just as the US has the power to keep its citizens consuming through stimulative measures and the encouragement of debt, which also sustains belief in the semblance of economic rationality (remember, the bank bail-out was as much about ‘credibility’ as it was about ‘credit’).

Accessing the CCP’s political self-understanding is crucial for studying how China metabolizes, or doesn’t, the contradictions within late capitalist political economy. These are tensions that impact all states, regime-types, and “varieties of capitalism”⁵⁶⁹ and are of broad interest to comparative political science. As I have argued throughout the dissertation, the post-earthquake reconstruction attempted to resolve the contradiction through political means by rational planning, mobilizing cadres, militaristic Maoist rhetoric, and setting high work targets. The desire for a macro-economic shift to increase domestic consumption as a national buffer against the fluctuations of global demand for Chinese goods is another strategy for handling these contradictions – ironically faithful to the Maoist principle of “self-regeneration” (*ziligengsheng* 自力更生). Locally, the contradictions are given expression in the tensions between the Party’s socialist ends that are to be achieved through market means. The earthquake reconstruction revealed the inorganic and fragile connections between political power, markets, and social welfare.

Can a Maoist Party find a successful path to “rectification” and realignment of its own perceptions and cognition with reality that is both effective and less destabilizing than another Cultural Revolution? Evidence from my dissertation and recent events in Chinese politics provide reason for pessimism. Xi Jinping’s ongoing mass-line education campaign (April 2013 – present) and call for cadres to “look in the mirror, straighten their attire, take a bath, and seek remedies” is a return of the repressed contradictions of the

⁵⁶⁹ Peter A. Hall and David Soskice, *Varieties of Capitalism: The Institutional Foundations of Comparative Advantage* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2001).

Maoist legacy. Is internal Party rectification, however, enough to cure the Party of its pathologies? Contrary to political science arguments and models of the state that suggest these contradictions have been overcome, my dissertation has argued that they are deeply embedded in the Communist Party's political epistemology and institutional structure.

Appendices

APPENDIX 1 SELECTIVE LIST OF HIGH-PROFILE LEADERSHIP INSPECTION TOURS OF YINGXIU TOWNSHIP (9/2008 – 6/2010)⁵⁷⁰

9/23/2008: Dongguan Party Secretary Liu Zhigeng and Mayor Li Yuquan led a 58 person delegation of Party and Administrative officials to Yingxiu for On-the-Spot Investigation (kaocha 考察) bringing with them 100 million RMB (\$16.0 million) in project start-up capital.

10/26/2008: Politburo Standing Committee Member, State Council Vice Prime Minister Li Keqiang arrived in Yingxiu for On-the-Spot Investigation and to guide reconstruction work. “[The reconstruction] must gather the entire country’s design strength (quan guo de sheji liliang 全国的设计力量) in order to implement top quality planning, and guarantee iconic construction (biaozhi xing 标志性).”

12/29/2008: General Secretary of the Communist Party Hu Jintao conducted an investigation of Yingxiu’s Health Center ... [to acquire] on-site understanding of post-earthquake reconstruction, epidemic prevention, and the production and livelihood situation of the masses ... as well as express sympathy to the Dongguan Partner Assistance Reconstruction workers.

1/8/2009: Sichuan Provincial Party Secretary Liu Qibao arrived in Yingxiu on a tour expressing sympathy to the Guangdong Provincial Partner Assistance Reconstruction Work Group. He proposed that Yingxiu must be constructed as a modern anti-seismic museum and an example of disaster prevention and reduction.

⁵⁷⁰ Dongguanshi yuanjian Yingxiu gongzuo dashiji jingxuan (Dongguan Municipality Reconstruction Assistance Work Hand-Selected Record of Major Events), 2010.

5/12/2009: On the first anniversary commemorating the Wenchuan Earthquake, the earthquake epicenter of Yingxiu Township held a solemn ceremony. General Secretary Hu Jintao attended the commemoration and issued an important speech.

9/26/2009: Prime Minister Wen Jiabao arrived in Yingxiu to conduct on-site inspection of the construction work and express sympathy to Dongguan Partner Assistance workers.

12/2/2009: Politburo Committee Member, Guangdong Provincial Party Secretary Wang Yang arrived in Yingxiu to lead an inspection team of Party and government officials to inspect and guide Dongguan's Partner Assistance Reconstruction work.

1/2/2010: Politburo Committee Member and Organization Department Head Li Yuanchao arrived in Yingxiu to inspect and guide reconstruction work.

1/4/2010: Politburo Standing Committee Member, Politics and Law Bureau Secretary Zhou Yongkang arrived in Yingxiu to conduct an On-the-Spot Investigation of the reconstruction circumstances and express sympathy to cadres.

4/1/2010: Sichuan Governor Jiang Jufeng arrived in Yingxiu to inspect reconstruction work.

4/14/2010: Politburo Standing Committee Member, Discipline Inspection Committee Secretary He Guoqiang to supervise and monitor the reconstruction work, as well as express sympathy to Provincial Partner Assistance Reconstruction workers.

5/7/2010: Sichuan Provincial Party Secretary Liu Qibao, Sichuan Provincial Governor Jiang Jufeng attended a Sichuan Province Restoration and Reconstruction On-The-Spot Meeting; 650 representatives arrived in Yingxiu Township and were divided into two teams to conduct an on-site tour, inspection and study (shidi canguan kaocha 实地参观考察) of the results achieved at each stage of the reconstruction process.

5/22/2010: Politburo Standing Committee Member; Standing Committee of the National People's Congress Committee Head, Wu Bangguo arrived in Yingxiu to inspect

the Provincial Partner Assistance Reconstruction work, as well as pay a visit to the Dongguan Work Team.

6/25/2010: Politburo Standing Committee Member Li Changchun arrived in Yingxiu to inspect and guide the reconstruction work, visit the local cadres and masses, as well as the Dongguan Work Team. He requested the Work Team to convey his respects to the Dongguan Party Committee and Municipal Government.

APPENDIX 2 “11TH FIVE-YEAR” PLAN PRIMARY TARGET COMPLETION SITUATION

Target Index	2005 Reality	2010 Adjusted Goal	2010 Reality	“11 5th year Plan” annual rate of increase
County GDP (100 million Renminbi)	9.4	16	16	6.7
Per Capita GDP	4094	7312	7312	6.9
County Financial Budget Income (100 million Renminbi)	0.135	0.24	1.4154	60
Total Social Fixed Asset Investment (100 million Renminbi)	4.5977	12.44	83	78.7
Foreign Trade Export Total (10,000 USD)			100	
Proportion of Non-Publically Owned Economic Enterprises (%))	42. 4	50	52.6	3.8
Urbanization Rate (%)	18.3	32	22	0.7
Urban Resident Per Capita Disposable Income	5636	8000	11723	15.8
Village Resident Per Capita Pure Income	1922	3000	3871	15
Total Population (10,000 people)	24.8089	23.61	24.4	-3.3

Urban Unemployment Registration (%)	4	4.5	4	
Rural Labor Transformation into Non-Agricultural Employment (10,000 people)	5	5.5	5.6	2.3
Urban Worker Basic Old-Age Insurance (10,000 people)			6970	
Forest Coverage (%)	68	75	69.2	0.2
Work Unit GDP Energy Consumption (Relative Decrease in Tons of Coal Consumed)		8.28	12.0	
Industrial Solid Waste Disposal Comprehensive Use Rate (%)	25		35	7
Primary Pollutant Emissions, including:	0.1455	0.1120	0.1092	-5.6
Chemical Oxygen Demand (0.0170	0.0120	0.0110	-8.3
COD) (10,000 tons)	0.0886	0.0750	0.0528	-9.8
Ammonia Nitrogen (10,000 tons)				
Sulfur Dioxide (SO ₂) (10,000 tons)				
Arable Land Retained Capacity (10,000 hectares)	4.3		4.3	

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