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## 阶级感情

## Class Feeling

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It is a truism that the Communist Revolution that convulsed Chinese society in the twentieth century effected radical transformations not only in the realm of political economy, but also in the realm of consciousness, beginning with the Chinese language itself. The revolution invented a lexicon that midwived a new worldview and a new way of organising social relationships. As the century drew to a close and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) retreated from radical politics, this lexicon—also known as Mao-speak—quietly exited public discourse. Among the vanished lingo of the Mao era is ‘class feeling’ (*jiejī gānqíng*). To a millennial in China today, it may well be Martian-speak. What is class feeling?

Like all things Maoist, class feeling needs to be grasped dialectically. On the one hand, it is comradely love for brothers and sisters from one’s class. It is a horizontal, fraternal feeling that extends equally to all members of the proletariat, but finds its most intense and sublime expression in the love for the supreme leader, Mao Zedong. On the other hand, it is hatred and resentment for the class enemy, usually belonging to the former propertied classes. The Party was well aware that neither feeling came naturally to the broad masses. Specifically, it had to contend with three rivals: kin loyalty, romantic love, and pity for the down and out. Much of the socialist-era cultural production was geared toward combatting the powerful hold of these competing sentiments and engineering a new structure of feeling that elsewhere I have called the ‘socialist grammar of emotion.’<sup>1</sup> Underlying this new grammar of emotion was a utilitarian ethics that forthrightly rejected bourgeois humanism. Good and evil were defined entirely with reference to whatever served to further class struggle and the dictatorship of the proletariat (see Russo’s essay in the present volume). Ends always justified the means and substantive goals always outweighed procedural niceties. In what follows, I invoke three examples

from the socialist 'red classics' repertoire, as well as a documentary account of land reforms to illustrate how class feeling was alternatively pitted against or grafted onto moral sentiments that the Party deemed passé, philistine, or reactionary.

### *Beyond Biological Ties*

'The Red Lantern' (*hongdeng ji*) is one of the eight 'revolutionary model operas' (*geming yangbanxi*) personally shepherded and curated by Mao's wife, Jiang Qing. The plot centres on a communist cell's effort to deliver an encrypted message to anti-Japanese guerrilla fighters while evading enemy detection and pursuit. The core member of the cell is Li Yuhe who poses as a railway worker. He lives with his mother Granny Li and daughter Li Tiemei. When he is betrayed by a turncoat and arrested, Granny Li consoles the grieving Tiemei with an account of their family history. It turns out that the three of them are not blood relations at all and were instead brought under one roof by Yuhe after each was left behind by their martyred kin. Having adopted Granny's surname, they form a fictive family-cum-underground cell united by unswerving devotion to the communist cause. Between them there are recognisably familial feelings, such as Tiemei's filial love for her father and Granny's tender affection for Tiemei. But these feelings spring from shared political zeal and commitment, not elemental instincts. They are voluntary, reciprocal, and egalitarian, thereby belonging to the realm of freedom, not the realm of necessity. They rest on respect, not submission; they recognise authority, but abjure tyranny; they inspire sacrifice, not subjection. These are the basic ingredients of class feeling. As such, it is imperceptibly injected into the domestic sphere, in effect displacing kin-based sentiments from their centrality in Chinese moral life. Biological ties were rendered optional, and comradesly fealty was the only prerequisite for family life under socialism. The corollary is that when a family member erred politically or was exposed as a hidden enemy, there should be nothing that stood in the way of casting him or her out of the bosom of the family, via the scripted act of 'making a clean break' (*huaqing jixian*).

If the family as the quintessential realm of necessity can be made a voluntary political unit, then love and marriage, a hybrid of freedom and necessity, are considerably more susceptible to the conquest of class feeling. Romantic love, especially when motivated by sexual attraction, is a horizontal feeling that rivals class feeling in intensity and yet runs a nearly opposite course. Instead of being diffuse and infinitely expandable, it is concentrated and exclusive; instead of honouring shared and publicly celebrated ideals, it is driven by inchoate yearnings and private urges; instead of being amenable to top-down direction, it is obdurate and can be utterly deaf to reason and material principles; instead of looking outward (toward comrades) and upward (toward the supreme leader), it is oriented inward (toward each other) and downward (toward the progeny). At the same time, insofar as it is capable of inspiring the ultimate sacrifice—the giving of life itself—it threatens to displace class feeling from supremacy; and insofar as it seeks fulfilment in sexual union, ideally sanctioned by marriage, it threatens to dislodge the lovers from the fraternal collective, engross them in the business of reproduction, and return them to the traditional realm of necessity. The offspring born of their union would have to be indoctrinated from scratch and inducted into the fraternal order amid all the uncertainties attendant to such an undertaking.

The Party responded to this challenge by coopting a narrative formula popular in the Republican era called 'revolution-plus-romance' (*geming jia lian'ai*) that typically sends a disappointed lover to the battleground as a mechanism for healing and redemption. The socialist version demands a more synchronous melding of the twin pursuits, in that the lovers must be brought together by political passion rather than erotic attraction in the first place. One of them, at the very least, must clearly embody the communist spirit, so that the other falls in love as much with a person with idiosyncratic traits as with an abstract, lofty ideal.<sup>2</sup> Such is the premise of Yang Mo's celebrated novel *Song of Youth* (*qingchun zhi ge*, 1958). When the heroine Lin Daojing chooses the communist fighter Lu Jiachuan over the bourgeois intellectual Yu Yongze, she is also choosing communism over capitalism and aligning herself with the historically inevitable. Freedom and necessity are reconfigured to render romantic love almost perfectly compatible with class feeling.

### *Turning Over*

Note that in these stories revolutionary couples rarely settle down to domestic life, to preoccupy themselves with rice porridge and diapers. This is because, as an insurance against the danger of love nests breaking up the fraternal collective, communist love stories are wont to kill off the object of love once the heroine is sufficiently proselytised and can stand on her own as a bona fide communist acolyte. Thus Lu Jiachuan is martyred mid-plot, so is Hong Changqing, the love interest of Wu Qionghua in *The Red Detachment of Women* (*hongse niangzi jun*), another revolutionary model opera.<sup>3</sup> The latter work is equally memorable for its archvillain Nan Batian, an evil landlord and local tyrant who is the target of Qionghua's raging hatred and revenge attempts. The plotline of a former slave girl who 'turns over' (*fanshen*) by joining the Communist Revolution and learns to sublimate her private vengeance into the collective enterprise of class struggle is the tried-and-true antidote to the third obstacle to fostering class feeling: sympathy or pity for the weak and helpless. Once the former exploiting classes are dispossessed, disenfranchised, and subjected to the dictatorship of the proletariat, they have the potential to elicit pity in their pathetic state, especially if they happen to be one's neighbours, relatives, colleagues, or teachers. The liturgical drama of *fanshen* ensures that one does not feel sorry for them by keeping alive memories of their ruthlessness in the bad old days.

*Fanshen* is a communal ritual, street theatre, and people's tribunal all rolled into one.<sup>4</sup> It is fundamentally a participatory melodrama that cleaves the world into good and evil, virtue and vice, victim and victimiser. No one is a mere spectator: everyone has to play a part, on either side. *Fanshen* dramaturgy consists of narrating past pain and suffering ('speaking bitterness' or *suku*; see also Javed's essay in the present volume), pinpointing and confronting the human author of that suffering, accusing and denouncing in unison, and sentencing and sometimes executing the villain at the finale. The denouement of all *fanshen* drama is an ecstatic state of purity, liberation, and rebirth. It sutures individual peasants into the collective by inscribing contingent, heterogeneous grievances and miseries with overarching ideological significance and absorbing them into a grand narrative of injustice and redemption. The ideal socialist subject is thus not an individual with a private vendetta, but a crusader with a mission,

burning with rage and hatred against all enemies of the people. This wrathful class subject will not be in danger of wavering or relenting, having completely jettisoned the bourgeois notion of universal humanity. In his/her eyes, across the friend/enemy (*diwo*) line there can only be a demon, vermin, or malignant tumour, not a vulnerable human being (see Dutton's essay in the present volume). Lei Feng, the paragon soldier canonised for his selfless service ethic and uncompromising love and hate (*aizeng fenming*), gives the most poetic gloss to what it means to have class feeling in his diary: 'One ought to treat comrades with spring warmth ... and to treat enemies with wintry severity.'

### *Class Feeling and Worldliness*

Red classics like those mentioned above are still beloved by a broad spectrum of audiences in contemporary China, and are periodically revived on stage and screen. How is it then that class feeling seems to have become thoroughly illegible? For this we need to seek not just psychological, but also institutional explanations. In the Mao era, by way of a class-based public goods provision regime, the 'mass line' and all-pervasive propaganda apparatuses (see Lin Chun's essay in the present volume), the CCP was able to build powerful institutional scaffolds to support and sustain class feeling and class solidarity against all odds.<sup>5</sup> But once these scaffolds fell away as the Party shifted its priority from class struggle to economic development, class feeling lost its armature and yielded to structures of feeling that meshed better with both traditional family-centred values and the resurrected market economy and consumer society. But the reason that the Party even succeeded at all in fostering a transcendent structure of feeling that held its ground against the countervailing forces of kin attachment, romantic love, and humanist compassion is because it managed to subtend it with tribal forms of feeling, particularly cryptonationalist ones, while also repudiating and supplanting them. Observers have been taken aback by the ferocious eruption of nationalist fervour in the post-Mao decades, but they should not be.

Preternaturally cognisant of the difficulty of forging strong emotional bonds on the basis of objective economic interests, the Party grounded class identity in a quasi-racialised typology of friend/enemy through the system of 'class designations' (*chengfen*) that were patrilineally heritable (see Yi Xiaocuo's essay in the present volume). An iconography (posters, sculptures, exhibits, picture books, films) and a dramaturgy (model operas, *fanshen* rituals, mass rallies) were then mobilised to exaggerate and intensify the us/them difference at a visceral level (see Ho's essay in the present volume).<sup>6</sup> In particular, the Party made abundant use of the political drama of *fanshen* to fuse private sentiments and experiences into abiding hatred for the class enemy and boundless gratitude for the saviour, so that no one loved or hated without a reason, as Mao intoned.<sup>7</sup> Instead of relying exclusively on the rational and the calculating faculties, the Party tapped into the spontaneous and primordial depths of mass psychology and succeeded in rallying the broad masses to its millenarian vision. Without this brilliant emotion work and the groundswell of popular support it produced, Mao's rag-tag army could not have defeated the far better financed and equipped Nationalist forces, nor could his regime have hurtled the newly minted People's Republic through one tumultuous campaign after another without fundamentally vitiating its own legitimacy.<sup>8</sup>

William Hinton, the American chronicler of the land reform movement in which communist cadres led landless peasants to overturn landlord domination and exploitation, posed the puzzle of what motivated the activists to fight on when there was little material gain for them:

My own reaction to the Party Day meeting was one of wonder—wonder at the perseverance of these people, especially the stubborn perseverance of the local men. What kept them working under such conditions? Why didn't they give up and go home? Certainly it had nothing to do with money. Right there in the middle of the meeting the county clerk had come around to ask them to sign their monthly vouchers. I knew exactly what each received for his work . . . . At home on the land they could easily earn more. No, they had no material incentive to be cadres. Nor was their chosen road a path of glory. Only a stubborn devotion to the cause of *fanshen* made sense as a motive. I had never known men who consistently put principle above self-interest as these men appeared to do.<sup>9</sup>

A few pages later, the remarks of Secretary Chèn of Lucheng county at another meeting suggested a fuller answer:

He swept the room with a long glance and looked straight into the eyes of one man after another. 'I want to ask you a question,' he said, warming up for battle. 'Why do we live in this world? Is it just to eat and sleep and lead a worthless life? That is the landlord and rich peasant point of view. They want to enjoy life, waste food and clothes, and beget children. But a Communist works not only for his own life. He has offered everything to the service of his class. *If he finds one poor brother still suffering from hunger and cold, he has not done his duty.* Anyone who is concerned only with himself lacks the fundamental standards necessary for a Party member. Right now several comrades are thinking, "Life is easier at home. Why not leave this work and go home?" But think it over. Who led your *fanshen*? From where did the "fruits" come? *Such thinking is typical of those who have forgotten their class.* A good Communist, whenever he meets personal difficulties, thinks of others' difficulties. If you haven't understood that during the purification meetings, you should understand it now. If you want to go home, you can go home. But give some thought to your future. Where is the man so benighted he no longer has any political needs? *Anyone who has no political demands cannot be said to be fully alive.* Even the most abject villager is upset when he cannot join the Poor Peasants' League. But you Communist Party members, have you no political demands?' [Emphasis added].

As the Party secretary puts it plainly, man does not live by bread alone, and there is such a thing as 'political needs,' or what Hannah Arendt calls 'worldliness'—that is, the ability to act in the world among one's peers as a free agent, a *political* being, beyond one's private existence in the realm of necessity.<sup>10</sup> This is fundamental to the

meaning of being human ('fully alive'). However, the Party's campaign-style politics ultimately warped the realm of freedom and action by clothing it in the language of devotion and selfless service, failing to recognise that the opposite of selfishness was not altruism, but worldliness. The upshot is that no one was above the suspicion of self-interest, hence the repeated crackdowns on corruption, graft, embezzlement, and treason during the most heady and idealistic period of communist rule. If initially class feeling thrived on the longing to distinguish oneself and make a difference in the world, in grafting itself onto tribal feelings and resorting to a racialist logic, it ultimately smothered worldliness, thus feeding into post-Mao disillusionment and weariness of politics.

There is a great deal we can learn from the CCP's experiment in class feeling and class politics. At best it provides a historical lesson on how to mount a social movement: appeals to the pocket can only go so far if the heart is not stirred. Liberal democracy is rightly distrustful of mass mobilisation built on tribal feelings, and strains to balance identity politics with the Habermasian model of rational communicative action. But it risks losing the masses to demagoguery that promises something far more visceral and seductive and galvanising—something akin to the religious experience of transcendence (see Davies's essay in the present volume). Relying solely on material interests leaves ample room for populist agitators who know how to stoke righteous resentment against all manner of outsiders. We are now daily rattled by the aftershocks of a right-wing triumph of mobilisation in the wake of decades of liberal disengagement from substantive questions of sentiments and values. It is what Wang Hui has forcefully critiqued as the 'depoliticisation of politics.'<sup>11</sup> The question that haunts the progressive among us is this: is politics possible without passion? Can we have class solidarity without class feeling?

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