

Reexamining the Intellectual and Chinese Communism

Bian Zhongyun (1916–1966) is notable in contemporary Chinese history for a ghastly reason. On August 5, 1966, this Beijing schoolteacher, a “bourgeois intellectual” according to the increasingly belligerent ideology of the state, became one of the first of many victims beaten to death by student Red Guards during the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976). Her ordeal had started weeks before with forms of severe humiliation and violent abuse once meted out to rural landlords expropriated under Chinese Communism, the revolutionary project initiated by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) when it was founded in the early 1920s. The torment culminated in a brutal beating that lasted between two and three hours, while onlookers were too fearful to intervene on her behalf. The irony in her murder is obvious in retrospect. Bian was an ardent supporter of Chinese Communism. She joined the party during the early 1940s while it was still waging revolution from the countryside, or daringly earlier than most others did. Upon graduating from college a few years later, she began to work full-time for the revolution. After the CCP seized power in 1949, she was assigned to teach at the girls’ secondary school attached to the Beijing Normal University, a privileged appointment insofar as schoolteachers were concerned. Located less than a mile from Zhongnanhai, where Chairman Mao and other party leaders worked, the campus was attended by their daughters and those of other senior officials. Thanks to her excellent work as an educator and a party cadre, Bian was promoted repeatedly. By the late 1950s, she had become the vice principal and the party secretary of the renowned campus. She met some of the leaders and even received words of appreciation from them for educating their daughters. On the eve of her demise, however, Bian was known to her attackers, among other things, as a “vanguard of

opposition to the party,” a “bastard of the capitalist class,” a “leader of black gangs” seeking to restore class exploitation, a “despotic dog,” and a “poisonous snake,” and by names circulating in the official media in support of a hunt of class enemies within state and society.¹

To objectify, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, is to express something abstract in a concrete form, identify a person with a stereotype, or degrade a person or a class of people to the status of an object.² As Chinese Communism grew, the intellectual became extraordinarily objectified in each of these manners. The CCP leadership drew on the political thought of Marx and Lenin to identify *intellectuals* as an integral part of the class structure and the political reality of Chinese society, along with *capitalists*, *poor peasants*, and other social categories. The leadership broadcast what it considered to be the class characteristics of intellectuals beneficial as well as harmful to the revolutionary project, or their previously acquired “petty-bourgeois” or “bourgeois” approaches or attitudes toward life. Through a myriad of activities in multiple areas of revolution and governance (such as propaganda, political training, economic reorganization, and workplace surveillance), the party turned notable as well as ordinary people into locally and even nationally recognized “intellectuals.” The affected, who were then used and abused in particular ways, included party leaders and state officials, scientists and artists, office workers and industrial technicians, military officers, college students, housewives, former workers, and others. Like Bian, some of them did not survive the objectification of the intellectual under Chinese Communism.

Even more remarkable is how rapidly the objectification of the intellectual spread across China after the 1949 revolution. *Zhishifenzi*, the Chinese equivalent of “intellectuals,” was a neologism of the early twentieth century with strong foreign roots. For more than two decades after its appearance, the term remained as one of many expressions used within literary and political circles to refer to educated persons or the educated population.³ The debate on the intellectual within those circles was not unlike what occurred then and later in other societies, as the relatively small number of interlocutors focused on defining what intellectuals were and their moral and political responsibilities to the nation. Shortly after the revolution, however, residents in urban areas could generally identify intellectuals within the local population with little difficulty, before such subjects were virtually locatable everywhere across the nation. Otherwise perfectly ordinary people considered themselves intellectuals and supported, accepted, or challenged official evaluations of their class characteristics. How did “intellectuals” evolve from an obscure expression to a term for readily identifiable subjects? How did individuals and organizations handle this objectification of the intellectual? What was the impact of the objectification on Chinese Communism?

To address these influential yet underexamined changes in Chinese society, this book begins with an unconventional conception of the intellectual—that is, as a classification of people used across different cultures since the late nineteenth

century for political control, social analysis, moral intervention, status struggle, or other purposes. Research has typically defined intellectuals as “persons with advanced educations, producers or transmitters of culture or ideas, or members of either category who engage in public issues.”⁴ The definitions have anchored insightful studies of the impact of such people on revolution, modernization, democratization, and other historic processes. Within research on twentieth-century communisms, however, the use of the definitions has obscured what, precisely, was distinct about the intellectual under such systems of rule. For the communist regimes constituted a rare breed in global political history that relied on Marxian thought to define, identify, and govern individuals and populations formally as “intellectuals.” In the epigraph of this book, Michel Foucault speaks of the intellectual as a fictional yet recognizable person as well as raw material for orchestrating punishment and assaults. He asks us to reconsider what the intellectual is. He probably had in mind the ferociousness with which “intellectuals” were attacked during the Cultural Revolution, if not also the widespread denunciation, reeducation, and persecution of those identified as such under the Soviet Union and elsewhere.⁵ This book takes Foucault’s crisp insight on the intellectual to an analytically logical conclusion, one that recounts the rise of the classification under Chinese Communism and how the process devolved toward fatal outcomes on a mass scale.

This book is therefore about social classification and its consequences under Chinese Communism. How the CCP or other communist regimes categorized individuals, families, and occupations based on Marx’s understanding of class struggle, or established what Christopher Browning and Lewis Siegelbaum call “frameworks for social engineering,” has long invited analysis of the dynamics.⁶ Overall, the studies focus on what I call conception, administration, reorganization, and negotiation, or more concretely the origins and meanings of the classifications, the execution of classification campaigns, the reconfiguration of local society, and the tactics and strategies used by individuals to deal with their own classification and those of others.⁷ I extend this analytical tradition in two distinct directions. First, this book uses a diachronic study that involves multiple sites as a method to illustrate the rise of the intellectual as a classification of people under Chinese Communism, or how ordinary people were objectified as “intellectuals.” That is, I treat the study of the intellectual as the study of social classification, because little is known about how the CCP or other regimes deployed this central marker in Marxian ideology in their reclassification of the general population when compared with “landlord,” “rich peasant,” or other labels. Second, this book describes the impact of the party’s use of the intellectual classification on Chinese Communism, that is, the institutions and practices as well as outlooks and feelings that flourished. I am interested in how the classification’s deployment affected social and political life, similar to what others have illustrated with respect to the spread of “capitalist” and other labels under communist regimes. From the

beginning to the end of Chinese Communism, the intellectual was arguably the most important, most ambiguous, and thus most intriguing classification adopted by the party to reinterpret, reorganize, and reinvent China.

The following section explains the analytical framework that I have assembled to examine anew the relations between the intellectual and Chinese Communism. I rely on insights from studies of social classification, including those related to communist societies. Because the ruling regimes of such societies can be “best construed as mutations of a single genus” formed on the basis of Marxian ideology,⁸ the framework is appropriate for exploring the intellectual classification under other communist systems, although their political and other characteristics must be taken into account. Readers who wish to skip specialized debates on classification and communism are welcome to skip the discussion. I then summarize the central argument of this book, namely that the intellectual and Chinese Communism were mutually constitutive. As the revolutionary project expanded, a mixture of discursive, organizational, and interpersonal practice transformed the intellectual into a major classification of people. As the number of “intellectuals” multiplied under the project, top-down programs and measures designed to address their conflicting presence flourished and shaped official governance, workplace structures, social relations, and individual consciousness. The final section explains my strategies for investigating this interlocking development of the intellectual and Chinese Communism. I discuss the themes and arguments of the following chapters and stress that an abundance of events, organizations, and people as well as ideas, interests, and motives were involved in what was a multi-layered and contentious process.

AN INSTITUTIONAL-CONSTRUCTIVIST APPROACH

Studies of the intellectual and Chinese Communism, a major subfield of research on Chinese society, tend to treat their relations primarily as being between people and regime. Three lines of inquiry are especially prominent. On the level of elite politics, emphasis is given either to how CCP leaders as intellectuals developed and promoted Chinese Communism or challenged its direction, or to the political, ideological, and aesthetic choices the leaders made at various junctures of the revolutionary project. In terms of organization, the emphasis is on how the party mobilized and dominated writers, scientists, and others *qua* intellectuals, using propaganda, privilege, and punishment to further revolutionary goals. With respect to political reactions, the accounts have described active support of the party as well as calculated accommodation, public dissent, and other behavior on the part of intellectuals and have traced these responses to Confucian tradition, professional ethics, contemporaneous social movements, and other sources. Such scholarship furnishes an invaluable window into Chinese Communism through illuminating ideas and controversies, rivalries and alliances, institutions

and practices, and public and private experiences that made up the project.⁹ Like the broader interdisciplinary literature on intellectuals, however, the accounts as a whole portray their central subject as little more than a population of relatively educated people.

My approach to reexamining the intellectual and Chinese Communism is built upon a distinct tradition of social inquiry that runs from French sociologist Emile Durkheim to Michel Foucault and Pierre Bourdieu and, more broadly, to the study of racial, ethnic, and gender classification across sociology, history, and other disciplines. Accounts in this tradition purposefully refrain from using official, folk, or other preexisting conceptions of groups or peoples as the analytical point of departure. The studies, instead, focus on the relations of power and the work of classification underlying the shared belief that a certain group exists due to its own properties and on why a particular system of partitioning and grasping the social world is adopted in the first place. Some of the accounts document resultant changes in the values, interests, and behavior of individuals or organizations. The scholarship reveals social structures, relations, and practices otherwise unaccounted for and analyzes how they serve to produce or reproduce the social order.¹⁰ Historian Sheila Fitzpatrick has advanced this analytical tradition in the study of twentieth-century communisms as much as anyone else, through her research on the rise of categories of people based on Marxian ideology (e.g., rich peasants and petty bourgeoisie) in Lenin's and Stalin's Russia as "a matter of classification" orchestrated by the state, and on "self-reinventions" as individuals coped with unprecedented patterns of risk and opportunity.¹¹

A small number of studies have highlighted the intellectual as a social classification. Historians have recovered dynamics that engendered the classification in France during the 1890s, or amid the Dreyfus affair regarding whether a Jewish army captain had been wrongly convicted of treason. Although the term *intellectuel* antedated the affair, it only entered into common usage then as a classification of people. Novelists, artists, lawyers, scientists, politicians, and students used the term to refer to themselves or to insult others. They supported their views by building upon entrenched assumptions about social differences and by probing or alluding to heated political issues. State support of higher education, freedom of the press, and print capitalism sustained a network of journals and salons that served to introduce the classification to a broad audience, along with intense arguments about French society. As a result, the classification acquired meanings and symbolisms that had little to do with issues of fairness and justice in the legal system. The narratives and imageries associated with the intellectual included incorruptible masculinity, hysterical femininity, and subhuman personality as well as poignant references to declining national health, military failure, crowd psychology, and social disorder.¹² A new social type, however inchoate its features were, entered the French popular consciousness. Other scholars have examined the intellectual in Europe, Russia, and elsewhere as a form of "self-definitions,"¹³ a

“cultural myth,”¹⁴ “a relationship of attribution,”¹⁵ and “a weapon in the intellectual field,”¹⁶ or a social classification for establishing identity, claiming difference, gaining authority, or achieving other purposes.

In this book I regard the intellectual as a classification of people deployed by the CCP for the purposes of remaking Chinese society, a marker of the class location of the individual based on the Marxian ideology of the party. I define *institutions* broadly as rules and regulations as well as regular and regulated practices found under Chinese Communism. This is necessary for capturing the wide range of patterned activities that served to normalize the classification while being affected by its normalization. Examples of the institutions were top-level announcements and instructions, state policies and programs, official reports and statistics, literary works and cinematic productions, and recurring patterns of social association and individual conduct. In other words, the first half of my analytical approach emphasizes the institutions of classification that objectified the intellectual and their institutional consequences for Chinese Communism. In comparison, the constructivist half of my approach highlights the values, ideas, and meanings as well as the symbolisms and boundaries associated with the intellectual classification. Where did they come from and how did they change across time and space? How did they inform the use of the classification? I also draw attention to the thoughts, interests, and calculations of individuals and organizations as they responded to the objectification of the intellectual, or the impact of those views on the revolutionary project. In short, the second half of my approach takes the political, moral, and demographic interpretations of the intellectual and their implications as an object of analysis.

My analytical approach is therefore set up to address both the objective and subjective dimensions of the objectification of the intellectual under Chinese Communism. This objectification was part of the reordering of Chinese society by the CCP elites according to their images, or their progressive and spectacular reduction of the massive population of an industrializing society into a relatively small number of social categories based on Marxian thought. The objectification presupposed, as well as engendered, decisive changes in social structures, dispositions, and behavior. More concretely, my investigation proceeds along three distinct axes: official representation of the intellectual, local identification of the subject, and informal negotiation of the classification. There are three reasons behind these choices. First, official representation, local identification, and informal negotiation are major themes in the research on social classification; they have been shown to be vital to understanding this ubiquitous process. Second, research on social classification under communist rule has spotlighted each of the activities when illustrating the local formation of landlords and other Marxian categories of people. Third, existing studies of the intellectual and Chinese Communism have largely bracketed these activities from analysis, through treating the intellectual as one or another type of person.

Official Representation of the Intellectual

Representation, as Stuart Hall has noted, is the use of “signs and symbols” to “stand for” concepts, ideas, and feelings, a central process in the production and reproduction of shared understandings.¹⁷ Political regimes and other establishments (e.g., churches, universities, professional associations), Pierre Bourdieu indicates, commonly exploit their legitimacy, authority, and resources to represent people, things, and events—on behalf of their own dominance. Their representations influence the way people see, think, feel, and act, partly because of the already accepted and unequal “relations of meaning and communication” between the establishments and those whom they govern, lead, or serve.¹⁸ Bourdieu calls this “power of constructing reality” held by the establishments “symbolic power,”¹⁹ the exercise of which can “make appear as natural, inevitable, and thus apolitical, that which is a product of historical struggle and human invention.”²⁰ The systems of social classification of the establishments signal how they assign attributes and differences to people and organizations, allocate roles and authority, and develop methods of governance. The classifications and their underlying values and meanings tend to extend across textual, visual, oral, architectural, and other substrates. Bourdieu stresses that no establishment, however organized or admired, has complete control over the reception of its representations or over how society is imagined or acted upon. To have the accounts or classifications accepted as true or valid, they must be “backed up by the order of things,”²¹ that is, they must reflect existing viewpoints or resonate with social conditions already experienced to be real or accurate. To paraphrase Bourdieu, representations alone do not produce shared beliefs; any agreement with the representations happens within the relations between those who exercise symbolic power and those who submit to it.²²

From the beginning, representations of Chinese society by the CCP were as challenging as they were necessary to the development of Chinese Communism. Not only was the party’s vision of remaking China based on Marxism, a foreign ideology that claims society is composed of antagonistic classes of people; the vision also turned the contemporary understanding of status and prestige upside down. The party leadership considered those industrial workers and other manual laborers who were disadvantaged, deprived, and therefore often disparaged to be the most noble and valuable section of the Chinese population. Research has addressed how the CCP discourse of class struggle spread, through stressing the leadership’s political, literary, and aesthetic ingenuity in combining history with ideology, narrative with emotion, and socialist ideals with traditional thought.²³ The scholarship delves into the broader context under which the representations spread, or the twentieth-century ecology of war and revolution that nurtured Chinese Communism,²⁴ as well as how the party used theater, cinema, and other channels to promote its views.²⁵ Building on these works, the first layer of my analysis focuses on what I call the methods, milieux, and mechanisms of the CCP’s representation of the intellectual. How did the party elites combine historical,

cultural, and other symbolic resources with Marxist theory to define and redefine the intellectual? How did existing political and social conditions influence the conceptions? And how did the party deploy offices and people and utilize the media and other channels to publicize its understanding of the subject?

In other words, I illustrate how the CCP integrated words and things to represent the intellectual, or the tactics of symbolic power deployed by the party. In her book on the Chinese socialist revolution, Elizabeth Perry suggests that *cultural positioning* conducted by the party leaders, or their “strategic deployment of a range of symbolic resources (religion, ritual, rhetoric, dress, drama, art, and so on) for purposes of political persuasion,” was critical to the uprising’s success.²⁶ From early on, the leaders skillfully appropriated traditional and other values, mores, and practices as means to rally support from underprivileged and other populations. This book extends the investigation of cultural positioning of the CCP elites to their representations of the intellectual, or how they synthesized intellectual assumptions, political sentiments, and social analyses as well as mobilized institutions and organizations to promote a Marxian view of the subject. The fact that the party ultimately succeeded in constituting people who occupied distant social spaces, or who had little similarity or interaction with one another, as comparable subjects identified locally and nationally as intellectuals warrants an examination of the role of official representation in this historic achievement.

Local Identification of the Subject

By local identification, I mean what Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper call *external identification*, or “the formalized, codified, and objectified system of categorization” developed by powerful establishments for governance or management purposes.²⁷ Research has made great strides during the recent decades in illustrating the workings of local identification, which is vital to any influential system of social classification. Local identification is often led by bureaucratic organizations with full-time officials, experts, and staff. These persons conduct documentation, assessment, and other investigative tasks. They separate otherwise continuous populations into discrete social categories, through registration, certification, enrollment, or other acts of differentiation.²⁸ Such work of bureaucracy supports division of labor, partition of space, allocation of privilege, imposition of restrictions, and other practices that reinforce recognition of the delineated categories. To use a pair of well-known concepts, authoritative establishments often successfully convert the *symbolic boundaries* that they use to divide a population conceptually into various sections to readily perceptible *social boundaries* that separate those sections in everyday life.²⁹ Sooner or later, the scholarship indicates, members of the various sections thus produced will develop values, interests, and habits corresponding to their unequal experiences because of the inequality enforced by the establishments. Such thinking and behavior will in turn reinforce the prescribed divisions further.³⁰

Chinese Communism ultimately evolved into a nationwide project of local identification: the CCP turned virtually everyone into a legible subject based on Marxian thought. Research has stressed this process and its consequences. During land reform campaigns, official documentation of property ownership and family connections, public announcements of land partition, and carefully planned spectacles of class struggle were channels through which party cadres and villagers learned the assigned class and political statuses of families and individuals. The emergence of “landlords” and other visible categories of people led to new forms of structure, behavior, and mentality that reinforced the introduced taxonomy, for example, the formation of “poor peasant associations” and the removal from party cells of those whom the local authorities regarded as undesirable elements.³¹ Yet other than the broad picture of its classification schemes, exactly how the party turned city and town residents into identifiable class subjects remains murky. At the same time, research has alluded to institutional changes that both presupposed and reinforced the differentiation of such populations into capitalists, workers, and other Marxian categories, changes such as the expropriation of private enterprises, class-based enrollment in colleges, punishment of “counterrevolutionaries,” and attitudinal changes in the matters of spousal selection and social association.³² Specific events, for instance what the party called the thought reform of intellectuals, could not but lead to local identification of such subjects.³³

The second layer of my analysis highlights the mechanisms and outcomes of local identification of “intellectuals” under the CCP. Compared to the landlord and other classifications of the party, the intellectual was conceptually elastic. The leadership frequently noted that intellectuals were part of the petty bourgeoisie, whose members focused on their own achievement and the welfare of their family. It stated that some intellectuals embraced the values and ideas of the exploiting classes, others endured hardships identical to those suffered by workers, and a small number were pioneers in advancing Chinese Communism. The classification, furthermore, was deployed across urban and rural areas, along the occupational hierarchy, and inside and outside the party. What were the official measures, procedures, and arrangements that served to distinguish “intellectuals” from other kinds of class subjects? Who were the people identified as intellectuals, and what did they have in common? What were the local practices and conditions that reinforced the local identification of the subjects? In short, I illustrate how the CCP representation of the intellectual was translated into formal methods of counting and accounting as well as informal institutions of categorization, or local instruments that produced and reproduced visible “intellectuals.”

Informal Negotiation of the Classification

In their seminal work on social classification, Geoffrey Bowker and Susan Leigh Star state that no system of categorization, however established or elaborate, provides “total coverage of the world it describes.”³⁴ Spaces and crevices of ambiguity

and indeterminacy are inevitable for conceptual, organizational, and other reasons. This is especially true with the categorization of people. Individuals possess many attributes as well as change or grow, and hence do not always fit into predefined systems of classification. Standards and criteria of classification often involve ambiguities and even contradictions and are periodically revised by the authorities. Frontline agents of classification do not interpret or apply the standards or criteria uniformly, due to differences in their training, interests, and other factors. The agents work around, alter, or ignore guidelines and even introduce their own measurements. As a result, they sometimes classify people with similar characteristics differently and sometimes place those with different traits in the same category. Furthermore, as Brubaker and his colleagues have observed, “the categorized themselves are chronic categorizers.”³⁵ Individuals usually recognize the potential consequences of classification for their own well-being and those of others. They deploy “self-interested strategies of symbolic manipulation” to influence how they are categorized.³⁶ They use the classifications to characterize and comprehend friends, colleagues, and others in ways that reproduce, revise, or contest official use of the markers. In practice, “classification systems from different worlds meet, adjust, fracture, or merge.”³⁷

Research on Chinese Communism has highlighted the variability, capriciousness, and individual manipulation of official classification. In a study of land reform in a village, Edward Friedman and his colleagues found that assignment of class labels to families and individuals occurred three separate times because of policy change as well as unevenly across the area. Official reliance on local consultation and memory and the presence of favoritism and political strife engendered challenges to the assignments, as they often contradicted local understandings of fairness and justice.³⁸ Xiaojun Zhang discovered in his research on another village that party cadres sometimes omitted the distinction between two official markers, and sometimes created their own labels to fit their understanding of the class location of the individual.³⁹ Evidence is available on self-reinventions as means of coping with safety, career, and other concerns. Physical relocation, job change, alteration of appearance, concealment of background, self-criticism, and vocal cooperation were common, though not foolproof, tactics to fend off onerous labels.⁴⁰ Ip and Perry have shown separately that even CCP leaders were not immune to the implications of the Marxian classifications that they had introduced. These otherwise privileged men employed physical, narrative, and other strategies to craft images conducive to the maintenance of their own authority within what they proclaimed to be a proletarian revolution.⁴¹

My third layer of analysis focuses on the myriad ways in which CCP leaders and cadres as well as ordinary people negotiated the intellectual classification. Under Chinese Communism, every relatively educated person confronted a predicament at some point in a typical day because of the meanings and symbolisms that the party inscribed upon the intellectual and other markers in its schema

of classes—or how to navigate this fateful grid of classification given their own background and the social location they occupied. On the one hand, I emphasize the conceptual ambiguities embedded in the CCP's understanding of the intellectual and challenges associated with the official identification of the subject, or gaps and pathways in which the affected persons could navigate. On the other hand, I highlight the tactics and strategies used by these individuals to deal with what they saw as risks and opportunities. Put differently, existing accounts on how party leaders, professors, artists, and others qua intellectuals supported, accepted, or resisted Chinese Communism have captured merely a small slice of their conduct of political negotiation, which quickly became an everyday performance of a class or a political identity vital to achieving authority, mobility, security, or other purposes valued by the individual.

In a nutshell, my institutional-constructivist approach brings together two main threads of research on Chinese Communism. Studies of intellectuals have illustrated the behavior of writers, schoolteachers, and others, but not how they were incorporated into the intellectual category of the party. Accounts of social classification have described dynamics surrounding the local appearance of landlords, counterrevolutionaries, and other subjects, but not of intellectuals. My synthesis stresses the institutions that objectified the intellectual and ways of seeing, thinking, feeling, and acting that followed. The approach promises an original account of the intellectual and Chinese Communism as well as a deepened understanding of the CCP's remaking of China.

THE ARGUMENT

This book contends that the intellectual and Chinese Communism were mutually constitutive. That is, the revolutionary project turned the intellectual into a primary classification of people as much as its deployment shaped how the project was organized and hence experienced. To put this in even stronger terms, one cannot fully understand either Chinese Communism or the intellectual without understanding their impact on each other. Entirely intertwined were their origins, extension, and even decline. This book hence contains two analytical movements, as it were. The first movement illustrates how the revolutionary project produced and altered the meanings, symbolisms, and boundaries that constituted the classification as well as its extension to various levels of Chinese society. The other movement describes how the deployment of the classification transformed authority relations, organizational structures, social identities, and individual conduct, or the impact of the objectification of the intellectual on Chinese Communism.

Reinterpreting the intellectual

My account begins with the May Fourth movement of the early 1920s, the heady days in Chinese politics when a variety of political activists grappled with foreign

encroachment, warlord rule, mass poverty, and other national crises. The term *zhishifenzi* had yet to enter political debate, let alone the vernacular. The leadership of the newly founded CCP would skillfully recombine assumptions, arguments, and sentiments from three influential discourses to support its interpretation of the intellectual. The first of these discourses was the traditional understanding of social hierarchy, which saw the level of education and type of vocation of the individual as natural bases of social division. The second discourse was the heated contemporary debate on reform and revolution, which promoted the political participation of educated people but blamed their self-centeredness, apathy, and cowardice for the crises mentioned above. The third of those discourses was the spreading Marxist-Leninist view of class struggle, which suggested that scientists, accountants, technicians, and other white-collar or skilled personnel constituted a population of intellectuals between the exploiting and the exploited classes in modern societies. Once *zhishifenzi* entered the CCP lexicon, possession of formal learning, a self-centered personality, and resistance to revolutionary change became core meanings of the term. Together with “capitalist,” “landlord,” and other markers, the intellectual became a major component of the Marxian system of social classification of the party.

As Chinese Communism expanded, the organizational programs and measures of the CCP extended the intellectual classification to the local level, while newspapers, meetings, reports, and other events and arrangements organized by the party promoted its interpretation of China’s class structure. Two types of programs and measures, in particular, penetrated a widening sphere of activities even as the leadership’s understanding of “intellectuals” fluctuated. The first type was aimed at harnessing the knowledge and skills of these persons for economic development, educational growth, political propaganda, and other purposes of organization. The other type sought to curb the harmful influence of these individuals on the revolutionary project or rein in their “petty-bourgeois” and “bourgeois” approaches to life and politics. The programs and measures involved many kinds of bureaucratic routines with classification effects, such as promulgation of instructions and regulations, verification of qualifications, recruitment and appointment, assignment of responsibilities, stipulation of rights and privileges, political reeducation, investigation and supervision, punishment, and compilation of reports. The activities produced an increasingly dense web of texts, signs, and cues that promoted the intellectual as a classification of people, on top of the impact of official propaganda. In other words, the discourse and practice generated meanings and boundaries that indicated to party cadres and ordinary people alike who the intellectuals were in Chinese society and their supposed beliefs, habits, and dispositions.

Like landlords and other official categories of people that appeared under Chinese Communism, the population of intellectuals thus formed had persistently fuzzy boundaries. Conceptually, the intellectual was but one of the classifications deployed by the CCP to pinpoint the location of the individual in a predefined

social order. Some of those classifiable as intellectuals were identifiable, too, as other types of class subject (e.g., landlords or workers). How the party defined the intellectual, moreover, changed over time. Politically, the classification was a tool of domination from the beginning. Educated party leaders and cadres exploited their revolutionary authority to promote and even consecrate themselves as part of the working class and cast less powerful persons as unreliable intellectuals. In this regard, CCP leaders differed from Marx, Lenin, and other leaders of communist movements who had fewer reservations in seeing themselves as revolutionaries as well as intellectuals.⁴² Organizationally, the party's agenda of harnessing the knowledge and skills of intellectuals and guarding against their negative influence constantly extended the classification to otherwise unaffected populations. In the end, every relatively educated person was classifiable as an intellectual.

A sea change of individual behavior further destabilized the boundaries of the population of intellectuals that emerged under Chinese Communism. For safety, career, or other reasons, many of those affected by the intellectual classification actively negotiated their social identity. They changed jobs, concocted stories, manipulated rules, and acted differently to cope with the positive and negative implications of the classification. They presented themselves as intellectuals with a particular political leaning or as another kind of class subject altogether, especially in front of the party authorities. The tactics and strategies of these persons varied with their backgrounds, situations, and goals, and so did the outcomes. Some benefited from the positive meanings of the classification and largely escaped the harm of the negatives ones. Some admitted to being intellectuals but found ways to protect and even improve their lives and livelihoods. Some escaped the classification by playing up their other qualifications or backgrounds. Some straddled between classifications (e.g., "intellectual" and "worker") and used each to their advantage. Some went from intellectuals to counterrevolutionaries and endured labor or prison sentences. Some, like Bian Zhongyun, lost their lives.

Reexamining Chinese Communism

If the first analytical movement of this book reveals the ontological transformation of the intellectual from a little-known expression adopted by the CCP to a primary social identity of many under the People's Republic of China (PRC), the second movement shows how the metamorphosis affected the collective and individual experience of Chinese Communism. To be sure, the party's deployment of "capitalist," "landlord," and other classifications from the same Marxian analysis of China led to organizational endeavors that altered life dramatically, such as the nationalization of industry after the 1949 revolution as well as rural land reform and campaigns against "counterrevolutionaries." Yet, the deployment of the intellectual classification was distinct on three registers. Politically, the leadership regarded intellectuals as class subjects par excellence that were both assets and liabilities of the revolutionary project, even though official assessment of this

population fluctuated periodically. Spatially, the leadership believed that intellectuals existed throughout state and society and held influential positions across industrial production, scientific research, secondary education, popular entertainment, and, more generally, the entire system of production and reproduction. Organizationally, the leadership was determined to develop China economically and therefore could not remove these persons completely from their posts regardless of their real or imagined threats to the project, unlike how the party dispensed with the “capitalists” or “landlords.” In brief, once the party defined professors, factory managers, journalists, and others as intellectuals, their incorporation into Chinese Communism became a persistent challenge.

The CCP’s efforts to harness the rational, constructive, and essential knowledge and expertise of “intellectuals” and to defend against their corruptive, contagious, and endless threats became a principal *raison d’être* of Chinese Communism. However the party leadership represented intellectuals—as utterly incorrigible, ideologically rectifiable, or, most of the time, somewhere in between—corresponding revolutionary paradigms, policies, and programs followed. Indeed, every major shift of the direction of the revolutionary project came after a top-down reinterpretation of the intellectual or a revision of the meanings and symbolisms that the leadership inscribed upon the classification. The turn from urban revolution to rural insurgency during the late 1920s captured a powerful rejection of the previous view that intellectuals were critical to the success of Chinese Communism. In contrast, the Yan’an phase (1937–1948) of the project epitomized the leadership’s determination to involve as well as reeducate such people. After 1949, the leadership turned the Yan’an approach to intellectuals into a foundation for building a socialist and industrialized China. Before the Great Leap Forward of the late 1950s, the leadership had called into question again the value of intellectuals to the revolutionary project. Official denunciations of such subjects intensified further before the Cultural Revolution scorched the nation.

More concretely, once the intellectual emerged as a classification of people of the CCP, the imagined subject became a fulcrum of revolutionary practice, a basis on which the symbolic power and administrative capability of the party developed. On the ideological front, political rhetoric, narratives, and theories based on Marxist thought flourished. The party elites promoted the political and moral superiority of Chinese Communism and of themselves by tirelessly discrediting worldviews and ideas they attributed to “intellectuals” as well as the lifestyles and behavior of such persons. Their critiques took on traditional philosophies and all kinds of contemporary political thought (e.g., constitutionalism, social democracy, anarchism) and political and organizational practices traceable to these ideas. The critiques also targeted what Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci called “common sense,” or popular values and beliefs considered antithetical to the socialist revolution.⁴³ On the organizational front, an ever-growing system of governing approaches and programs as well as administrative measures and

routines appeared, because of the constant effort of the elites to dictate the involvement of “intellectuals” in the revolutionary project. A variety of tasks multiplied wherever such subjects were located, especially those related to classification (e.g., documentation, investigation, identification), mobilization (e.g., propaganda, meetings, networking), reeducation (e.g., study class, self-criticism, evaluation), and supervision (e.g., appointment, reporting, discipline).

The extent to which the CCP deployment of the intellectual classification engendered intense ideological and organizational activities is revealed fully in three intertwined institutions that emerged before the party seized power and thrived afterward: workplace management by party cadres, ideological reeducation, and mass surveillance. To the party leadership, the knowledge and skills possessed by intellectuals and their enviable status and prestige enabled them to wield influence disproportionate to the size of their population, not to mention provide support to the exploiting classes and their political representatives. The advantages also permitted the intellectuals to move across sectors and space with relative ease, and to articulate defense of their beliefs and even challenge the party’s views, policies, and measures. Wherever intellectuals clustered under Chinese Communism (e.g., schools, publishing houses, research institutes), management by trained party cadres was considered vital to maintaining official control and tackling any sabotage or subversion of the project. Ideological reeducation emerged as indispensable to curbing the negative influence of the “petty-bourgeois” and “bourgeois” habits and dispositions of intellectuals. And mass surveillance was ultimately adopted, because meticulous investigation, observation, and documentation would reveal the strengths and weaknesses of these persons and thus how each one of them should be incorporated into the project. Each of the institutions produced procedures, processes, and posts that shaped authority structures and organizational behavior and therefore life under Chinese Communism. Each served to reproduce a ruling population of party cadres and a dominated population of intellectuals, notwithstanding the fuzzy boundaries between these two types of people.

The CCP deployment of the intellectual classification had another major impact on Chinese Communism: it supplied heretofore unavailable rationales and vocabulary for those who otherwise occupied different social and physical space (e.g., reputed professors, regional officials, company clerks, college students, local artists) to develop oppositional collective identities. The ideological, organizational, and interpersonal minefields that these persons were forced to navigate, or their shared experience of how the party defined, degraded, and dominated them, created “an objective potentiality of unity.”⁴⁴ They interpreted their subjugation with various kinds of political thinking, besides the values and ideas promoted by the party. Some challenged the conduct of the party and its cadres and even the direction of the revolutionary project. However short-lived or disparate were the protests and however tragic the results, the complaints and grievances as well as the proposals and suggestions had a potential audience as broad and dispersed

as the extent to which the party had constructed the category of intellectuals. In other words, the success of Chinese Communism transformed the treacherous intellectuals initially prowling on paper to an ever-growing population of real and potential adversaries of the project. For the party elites, the project had to be reconstituted repeatedly to stamp out the perfidy. The upheavals of Chinese Communism were inseparable from its objectification of the intellectual.

OVERVIEW OF THE BOOK

This book examines the mutual constitution of the intellectual and Chinese Communism from the early 1920s to the end of 1964, that is, from the time right after the CCP's founding when the classification was about to appear to the period shortly before the Cultural Revolution became the official priority of the revolutionary project. Even with these boundaries, it is impossible to produce any exhaustive account of the dynamics, which progressively spread across virtually every aspect of political and social life. The following chapters feature critical pathways and episodes for grasping how the intellectual was objectified and the consequences. This alone requires a multipronged journey that inspects *inter alia* political discourses, revolutionary strategies, rural activities, work arrangements, state registrations, organized protests, cinematic productions, and individual conduct, thus an analysis that reveals the multiplicity of the elements underlying the objectification as well as the breadth and depth of its impact. My account is based on many kinds of empirical material, including official declarations of the CCP and speeches of its leaders; policy statements, directives, reports, and statistics from various offices under the party; articles from newspapers, magazines, and specialized journals; films and plays; personal testimonies and biographies; and existing scholarly analyses. If the resulting picture makes sense, it is not because the thousands of pieces of evidence are uniformly accurate or reliable, as they were originally gathered or interpreted by a variety of people under different and sometimes unknown circumstances. Rather, it is because the gestalt recovers a historic feature of Chinese Communism, the objectification of the intellectual, the consequences of which for Chinese politics, society, and culture are still visible today, almost forty years after the project started to decline.

Put another way, this book illuminates the politics, policies, and practices that preceded the abuses during the Cultural Revolution against those who were decried as "bourgeois intellectuals" and against those among them who had allegedly morphed into enemies of the people. How that mass movement extended the objectification of the intellectual, how the objectification continued to affect the constitution of Chinese Communism, and how the classification and the project evolved after the Cultural Revolution deserve a separate study.

Two additional caveats before we move on. First, when *the intellectual* or *intellectuals* appear in this book, they do not denote any kind of persons that I have

in mind. The appearances, instead, demonstrate that the terms have been used in multiple ways by the CCP, party authorities, and others and that they have flexible political, moral, and demographic meanings tied to the politics, interests, and circumstances in question. Second, my argument that the intellectual and Chinese Communism were mutually constitutive does not imply that their impact on each another was uniform across space, especially after the CCP gained sovereign control over China. Not only did the objectification of the intellectual vary spatially, but individuals and organizations responded to the objectification with different combinations of what symbolic and material resources they could muster. In other words, a tapestry of discourse and practice made up the relations between the classification and the project.

The next chapter describes the origins of the term *zhishifenzi* and its appropriation by early CCP elites as a classification of people, or “a revolution in the order of words” that preceded “revolutions in the order of things.”⁴⁵ My focus is on a poignant debate about “the intellectual class” (*zhishi jieji*) that permeated urban political and literary circles during the early 1920s, at the height of the iconoclasm of the May Fourth movement, which redefined the relations of Chinese society with tradition and knowledge and hence politics and revolution. The debate centered on an alleged lack of political courage and moral integrity of members of the intellectual class, and its need to overcome such weaknesses if China was to be saved from foreign occupation, economic backwardness, and other crises. The ontological presuppositions, ethical assessments, and political sentiments underlying the powerful condemnations of the intellectual class would become foundations on which the CCP elites conceptualized the intellectual. I show that after the Communist International sponsored by the Soviet Union intervened in the building of the party in China, party leaders, who had participated in the debate and considered themselves part of the intellectual class, reinterpreted their relations to this population with a Marxian analysis. The intellectual class reappeared as the main ideological enemy of Chinese Communism, while the leaders began to depict themselves as proletarian revolutionaries. The leaders therefore created an insurmountable division under the project, which they believed reflected their relations to other educated people in Chinese society. Soon to be labeled “intellectuals,” these people would become the Other, and thus threats to Chinese Communism.

Chapter 3 takes up another critical juncture in the mutual constitution of the intellectual and Chinese Communism. The setting is Yan’an, the rural town in northwestern China in which Mao and others set up the headquarters of the CCP during the late 1930s, and from which the party would wage its eventually successful takeover of China. Armed with the modified view that intellectuals, though untrustworthy, were vital to the revolutionary project because of their possession of knowledge and skills, the leadership recruited a heterogeneous population of educated people to the remote town. Ensuing establishment of organizations,

allocation of responsibilities, and division of space produced and reproduced social boundaries that bolstered the official representation of the newcomers as a distinct population of “intellectuals.” Workplace management by party cadres, ideological reeducation, and mass surveillance intensified and reinforced the portrayal of these intellectuals as inferior class subjects. I stress that negotiations of the intellectual classification flourished. Educated party leaders and cadres, not to mention the newcomers, altered their conduct and appearance to minimize real or potential stigmatization. Their responses not only strengthened the leadership’s critical representation of intellectuals, but also muddied the boundaries of this objectified category of people.

In chapter 4 I illustrate the spread of the intellectual classification in post-revolutionary Shanghai and the concurrent extension of the symbolic power and administrative capacity of the newly found socialist state. My focus is an early 1950s official drive to register “unemployed intellectuals.” The state wanted to reduce unemployment through harnessing unused knowledge and skills for national reconstruction purposes. The registration drive involved the establishment of procedures and mechanisms for identifying candidates; the formation of local offices and training of resident teams for promotional, documentation, and other tasks; and the mobilization of hundreds of trade and other associations for certification assistance, as well as placement efforts. The event became a collective exercise through which the state educated officials and ordinary people alike about its Marxian understanding of the intellectual and how to use the classification in everyday life. Meanwhile, recent discriminatory recruitments and dismissals by the state and other job losses pushed former government officials and military officers, as well as others with dubious records from the official perspective, to sign up as unemployed intellectuals in large numbers, sometimes even through fraudulent means. As the drive proceeded, official surveillance intensified within the city and across the establishments required to offer work or training to unemployed intellectuals. For the state, the registration became another instance that confirmed intellectuals as being unreliable subjects when it came to advancing Chinese Communism.

Chapter 5 focuses on the central role that the postrevolutionary workplace played in objectifying the intellectual and the kinds of social relations and organizational culture that arose as a result. The locus of analysis is the secondary education profession in Shanghai, a sector officially declared to be filled with unreliable intellectuals. Progressively intense domination of the sector by CCP cadres, through their official assignment to authoritative positions, created an abundance of textual, verbal, and physical cues that cast the faculty and staff precisely as such subjects. The domination enabled the state to collect sufficient information to distinguish each of the “intellectuals” as a class subject with particular habits and dispositions as well as separate them into different subtypes for political and professional purposes. I stress that the cadres, most of whom were educated and

thus had been treated by colleagues and superiors as intellectuals, exploited their authority to promote themselves as proletarian revolutionaries. They shifted the moral burden that they had carried under Chinese Communism to those whom they now ruled. Their treatment of ordinary faculty and staff members involved disrespect, disregard, and distancing. For the faculty and staff, learning their own class identity dictated by the state entailed fear and anxiety, resentment and resistance, and maneuvers to cope with threats to their safety and livelihood. At the workplace level, I conclude, the mutual constitution of the intellectual and Chinese Communism led to schisms, grievances, and political disaffection.

Tensions and frictions stemming from the objectification of the intellectual under Chinese Communism came to a head during the 1957 Rectification Campaign, when the state urged professors, scientists, and others whom it regarded as intellectuals to evaluate its performance. Chapter 6 discusses three major perspectives on the intellectual and Chinese Communism that appeared, each of which confirms that they had become inseparable in political thinking inside and outside the state. Scholars, writers, and other social notables saw a faltering socialist project because of the ineptitude of party cadres. They built upon the Confucian literati tradition, defined themselves as intellectuals, and called for a broad involvement of people like themselves in decision-making. College students used Marxist and other political ideas to launch an even more intense attack against Chinese Communism. They disputed the official view of class struggle and socialist development in China, and wanted intellectuals like themselves to lead the revolutionary project away from CCP domination. When the state hit back, it proposed to expand the pool of usable and reliable intellectuals by supporting the work of professional workers and the training of college students and by deepening their ideological reeducation. The state wanted to extend professional education to select factory workers and other manual laborers and turn them into engineers and other kinds of skilled personnel. I emphasize that none of these efforts to redefine the intellectual and Chinese Communism became reality. The project, instead, took a dark turn when the party denigrated the intellectual further.

Chapter 7 uses theater and cinema production to illustrate the mutual constitution of the intellectual and Chinese Communism from 1958 to 1964. To legitimize the Great Leap Forward (1958–1960), the ambitious production campaign that discarded scientific reason and rational planning, the state widened its attack against “intellectuals” and their knowledge and skills. The making of the famous musical drama *Third Sister Liu* reveals how the state mobilized local populations to create, circulate, and consume degrading ideas and images about intellectuals, all the while relying on educated party cadres, scriptwriters, and other professional workers to organize and promote the anti-intellectual propaganda. Behind the musical’s success, the rift between the cadres and the professional workers deepened, as the former used the production to attack the latter even though both populations were denigrated by it. I then turn to the notable film *Early Spring in February* to

highlight the struggle to redefine the intellectual after the Leap's failure. While some party leaders mobilized people, symbols, and other resources to depict educated people in a favorable light, or invested positive meanings into the intellectual classification, others did the opposite. The film challenged the Leap's disparagement of intellectuals, but became a target of attack nationwide. Although audience reactions suggest that college students and others were confused by the official denunciations, another layer of virulent ideas, idioms, and imageries about intellectuals saturated the nation shortly before the onset of the Cultural Revolution.

The final chapter summarizes the mutual constitution of the intellectual and Chinese Communism from the 1920s to the early 1960s. I emphasize that my analytical approach can help recover critical but underexamined aspects of social classification, bureaucratic organization, political division, social interaction, and individual calculus under the CCP. Fascinating questions about the classification and the revolutionary project await exploration. In the second half of the chapter, I turn to the highly visible legacy of the objectification of the intellectual under Chinese Communism. Since the 1980s, the CCP has abandoned Marxism and Leninism, but not their functional and structural assumptions about intellectuals. Official propaganda and governance continue to objectify the intellectual into a usable subject and a political threat for China's development as well as to revive the kinds of divisions among educated people that first emerged under Chinese Communism. Meanwhile, political relaxation and economic liberalization have prompted scholars and writers to reinterpret the intellectual in various ways. The twenty-first-century Chinese struggle to define the intellectual, unlike those in other countries, permeates state and society.