
The Intellectual and Chinese Society

From Past to Present

The most profound achievement of the Chinese Communist Party after it took power in the 1949 revolution was the reordering of Chinese society according to the Marxian images of the party leadership, or political thinking based on a foreign system of thought. The success, which required persistent mobilization and organization of symbolic and material resources, reveals at once the intellectual prowess, political skills, and governing capacity of the Mao regime. Within a decade, the state literally reclassified hundreds of millions of people in a complex industrializing society as members of a relatively small number of predefined social classes and categories, such as capitalists, poor peasants, workers, rightists, and counterrevolutionaries. To borrow an insight from Sheila Fitzpatrick, the CCP created entirely new “collective social entities whose members had not previously had a common identity, status, or consciousness but acquired them through their experience” under the socialist state.¹

This book has offered an account of this CCP invention of Marxian classes and categories—off the beaten path. For the party leadership, intellectuals constitute a major segment of society with critical influence on both the socialist revolution and the transition to socialism. Yet, no previous study has illustrated how the party identified members of this population in practice, let alone with the same rigor as has been mustered to describe the appearance of landlords or other classes or categories of people under CCP rule. To be sure, the existing research on the intellectual and Chinese Communism is highly valuable. The scholarship has illustrated ideas and interests, institutions and organizations, conflict and cooperation, and other social and political experiences before and after 1949. By predefining intellectuals as critical thinkers, professional experts, or other social types, the scholarship nonetheless has obscured one of the most creative, productive, and transformative acts of the party—that is, its deployment of the intellectual as a classification of people.

To put this in broader analytical terms, the existing scholarship involves a double erasure of history. The accounts begin with concepts of intellectuals that first

appeared in Western Europe or the United States based on the works of Julien Benda, Karl Mannheim, Talcott Parsons, and other notable scholars.² Little consideration is given to the historical conditions that produced or supported the concepts, what Bourdieu would describe as the “classification struggles”³ that occurred inside as well as outside academia and determined how the intellectual was defined and apprehended. The accounts, instead, recombine the ingredients making up the concepts (that is, the social function, work responsibility, and moral performance of the individual) to grasp the intellectual under Chinese Communism. Reliance on such *a priori* definitions has resulted in the masking of a classification struggle that has no parallel in the history of Western Europe or the United States. From the early 1920s to the mid-1950s, *zhishifenzi* evolved from a little-known term, even within the CCP, to a primary social identity of many across state and society. Under Chinese Communism or, for that matter, in any historical context, the intellectual has no ontological existence prior to being defined by the political or academic elites. It is a classification of people deployed by such elites to organize society on paper or in practice. The existing literature on the intellectual and Chinese Communism obscures as much as illuminates the nature of their relations.

At the dawn of Chinese Communism, few people if any identified themselves or categorized others as intellectuals. The heated debate on the intellectual class and Chinese society during the May Fourth movement was similar to the one on *les intellectuels* and French society during the Dreyfus affair. Writers, college students, and other educated people, including leaders of the budding CCP, used their literary and analytical skills, access to newspapers and magazines, and understanding of different traditions of political thinking to advance their own view of the intellectual class, especially its role in the disorder and the renewal of Chinese society. After embracing Marxism and Leninism as their guiding political thought, the CCP elites redefined the intellectual class as part of the petty bourgeoisie as well as the most formidable ideological enemy of Chinese Communism. Before long, the leaders discontinued their use of the term “the intellectual class.” From then on, “intellectuals” became an integral component of the CCP schema of classes.

What happened thereafter with the intellectual and Chinese Communism is nothing short of historic. An apparatus in the Foucauldian sense, or a dispersed structure of programs, measures, and routines linked to the classification, arose and grew with the revolutionary project.⁴ The apparatus contained a multiplicity of elements: official announcements, instructions, statistics, and reports; regulations on recruitment, appointment, training, and compensation; revolutionary universities, mass campaigns, and political study classes; offices, meetings, and registration forms; films, plays, and newspaper headlines and articles; surveillance techniques and confessional protocols; and various forms of punishment as well as other discursive and organizational practices promoted, sanctioned, or condoned by the CCP. The apparatus was the cumulative result of “the prevalent influence

of a strategic objective”⁵ that persisted within the party leadership—or its resolve to exploit the knowledge and skills of intellectuals for Chinese Communism but curb the deleterious impact of their values, beliefs, and habits. Even at the peaks of its denunciation of the intellectual, the leadership did not abandon this objective informed by the Leninist approach to the building of a modern socialist society through class struggle. The leadership, instead, altered the content of its governance to fit its evolving priorities. The elements of the apparatus each played a role in shaping ways of thinking, seeing, feeling, and acting from the most didactic to the least transparent manner. The apparatus ultimately turned a diversity of people into “intellectuals” within local society, or class subjects purportedly possessing knowledge and skills as well as attributes such as vanity, materialism, and indiscipline.

In practice, fuzzy boundaries and unstable meanings were ubiquitous characteristics of the objectified population of intellectuals. The heterogeneous elements of the above apparatus developed unevenly across time and space due to many political, administrative, and pragmatic reasons. The elements shared relations from complementarity and interdependence to conflict and contradiction. Their existence created space for different interpretations of who the intellectuals were and what they represented at all levels of CCP governance. Even the party leadership repeatedly redefined the intellectual and its significance to Chinese Communism. No fewer than twelve types of people that appeared in the previous chapters were regarded as intellectuals within the local context: educated CCP leaders; educated party cadres; former workers or peasants who received formal education; novelists, playwrights, and other writers; scientists, professors, and other experts; schoolteachers, artists, and other professional workers; clerical and other office workers; former state officials, Guomindang organizers, and military and police officers with academic qualifications; college students; senior high school graduates; junior high school graduates; and individuals with some junior high education. The local boundaries of the category of intellectuals and its implications for the revolutionary project were complicated further by a protean culture of informal negotiation of social identity, as individuals identified or identifiable as such subjects adopted various tactics and strategies of self-refashioning to navigate between risks and opportunities.

Three notable events that occurred under the PRC capture the widely different implications for the individual resulting from the CCP’s deployment of the intellectual as a classification of people. Shortly before the state launched Thought Reform of Intellectuals in late 1951, Premier Zhou Enlai personally adopted the classification to convince professors and college students to embrace their own ideological reeducation. He stated that he was always striving to learn and embrace “the standpoint of the working class,” and that he wanted his audience to follow his example.⁶ In Zhou’s hands, the classification became a tool for political domination. During the 1957 Rectification Campaign, some professors and writers used

the intellectual as a badge of honor in contradistinction to the negative meanings officially inscribed on the marker. They emphasized their professional, political, and moral values to the state and attacked CCP cadres as oppressors of intellectuals and obstacles of socialist development. In her attackers' eyes, Bian Zhongyun, the dedicated educator and party cadre brutally murdered during the Cultural Revolution, was a bourgeois intellectual who had wormed her way into the party to do harm to Chinese Communism. For Bian and others, the classification morphed into a painful death sentence. Under the revolutionary project, the intellectual was a classification of people used for multiple purposes. The intellectual was never any particular type of person.

Once the CCP leadership pronounced "intellectuals" as an integral section of Chinese society, Chinese Communism developed prominently between two poles until its decline. The first pole featured the party seeking to extract and exploit the knowledge and skills of the educated, or efforts to build a modern socialist society. The other pole centered on the party controlling these people politically, or using class struggle as a method. The apparatus that objectified the intellectual thus always contained two clusters of principles and mechanisms, the proportions of which shifted with the leadership's priorities. Around one pole, the party assigned privileges, positions, and responsibilities to educated people and even provided them with social and political authority to induce their cooperation and support. It took over, established, and expanded systems of education to ensure the availability of intellectuals to Chinese Communism. Around the other pole, educated people were subject to criticism and denunciation, supervision and investigation, and ideological training and punishment. The party sought to control every establishment that required professional knowledge and skills to function. The goal was to discipline intellectuals to the extent of rooting out their corruptive impact on the revolutionary project.

The CCP's deployment of the intellectual as a classification of people therefore shaped Chinese Communism as a bureaucratic enterprise as much as the latter turned otherwise perfectly ordinary people into intellectuals to be used and abused in specific ways. The party increasingly exploited channels and resources to attack the values, ideas, and habits of intellectuals. Workplace supervision by party cadres, ideological reeducation, and mass surveillance were deemed necessary for preventing subversion of the revolutionary projects by intellectuals. Systems of classifications and structures of reward and punishment grew as the party leadership sought to handle each intellectual in government, industry, education, art, and other sectors in proper political, professional, and moral terms. In brief, the CCP imperative of controlling and utilizing intellectuals engendered methods of representation, reorganization, reeducation, and repression that eventually spread across the Chinese political economy.

The structure of domination thus emerged could not but influence social relations and individual calculus. Educated persons responded in myriad ways. No

common understanding of moral obligation, occupational responsibility, or political interest informed the reactions. The latter were often based on the discourse and practice established around the intellectual by the CCP, or how individuals situated themselves within its schema of classes and the local context of risks and opportunities. A cacophony of conduct surfaced. We have seen that well-educated party leaders exploited their revolutionary credentials and command of organizational resources to separate themselves from other educated people. As Mao rose to the top, he acted exactly like his predecessors and attacked other party leaders as unreliable intellectuals. At lower levels, party cadres likewise acted out the role of proletarian revolutionary to distance themselves from educated colleagues. Unemployed persons identified themselves as intellectuals in hopes of landing a job. Writers and scholars promoted themselves as trustworthy intellectuals when contesting state domination. Playwrights and artists produced or supported anti-intellectual propaganda that undercut their own prestige and even denounced favorable portrayals of intellectuals. College and secondary school students objected to the official condemnation of intellectuals, which they regarded as unreasonable, especially when that label was applied to them. These and other responses not only served to objectify the intellectual; they intensified the ruptures within the objectified population. The objectification of the intellectual under Chinese Communism had structural as well as cultural consequences.

Overall, this book has merely captured a thin slice of the mutual constitution of the intellectual and Chinese Communism, dynamics that spread across multiple levels of Chinese society for at least six decades. My intention has been to point out that seeing the intellectual as a classification of people allows us to delve further into the workings of the revolutionary project, because the classification was both an outcome and a driver of the project's organization. My analysis has been arranged to spotlight underexamined discursive and organizational practices of the CCP, the formation of local populations of intellectuals, and consequences for individuals, organizations, and Chinese society. Besides the themes and episodes covered here, many other questions await exploration, as the reader probably realizes by now. How did the intellectual classification take root and reconstitute authority and social relations in the countryside? How did the classification extend across industry, the military, and other sectors where professional as well as manual labor was important for operation? Did ethnic traditions modify how the classification was deployed in minority regions? How did educated and expropriated capitalists and newly educated workers position themselves in relation to the classification? How did the classification influence friendship, romance, and marriage? Not least, how did the deployment of the classification affect the Cultural Revolution and vice versa? If we accept that the intellectual as an embodied subject does not exist by virtue of any features possessed by the person, a host of original questions on politics and society under Chinese Communism can be raised. To address the questions, it is important to consider dynamics of representation,

methods of identification, and negotiations of social identity. The results would serve to deepen understanding of central and local governance, conflict and cooperation, and, in general, social life under the CCP, issues that have animated the literature on the intellectual and Chinese Communism in the first place.

The decline of Chinese Communism, especially its emphasis on class struggle, since the early 1980s has led to dramatic changes in Chinese society. The CCP regime has reinterpreted in unorthodox fashions how Marxism applies to China and abandoned, for all intents and purposes, Marxian systems of social classification. Megacities and conspicuous consumption, powerful Chinese multinationals and rapid technological growth, imposing government buildings, world-renowned universities, and global traveling officials, executives, and students have become unmistakable features of twenty-first-century China, as have rising social inequality, rampant official corruption, environmental degradation, urban slums, sex work, and mistreatment of migrants. Meanwhile, the population of educated Chinese continues to grow, thanks to state investment in higher education and professional development. Many of them have careers in the diverse, influential, and expanding private sector, and hence are free from the direct supervision of the state. Does the intellectual as a classification of people still matter in such a globalized China? Any satisfactory answer to this and other puzzles regarding the status and use of the classification and its impact on Chinese society would require a book-length response based on ethnographic, literary, and other kinds of research. In this concluding section of the book, I draw on readily available as well as recent examples to suggest that China's struggle to define the intellectual not only remains alive and well but still differs markedly from those occurring in Western Europe and the United States. The objectification of the intellectual in the last century has left behind a powerful legacy that affects ways of seeing, thinking, feeling, and acting on multiple levels.

Since the demise of Chinese Communism, the CCP leadership has continued to regard intellectuals as a major segment of Chinese society as well as assign a diversity of people to the social category. The leadership still subscribes to the Leninist imperative of utilizing and controlling intellectuals as a principle of official governance, even though the party has long since discarded class struggle as a method of rule. For the leadership, intellectuals are both vital assets and potent threats to China's social stability, economic growth, and international ascension. Official conduct therefore continues to objectify some into subjects widely recognized as intellectuals. In March 2017, for example, President Xi Jinping (1953–) reiterated the first half of the modified Leninist imperative during the meeting of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference. He stressed that China "needs the contribution of intellectuals to increase the power and wealth of the nation, to revitalize the Chinese race [*minzu zhenxing*], and to improve the well-being

of the Chinese people.” He lauded intellectuals as “the elites of society, the pillar of the nation, and the pride of the people.”⁷ For more than three decades, the state has been revising its incentive structures to reward professional knowledge and expertise, or those whom it considers intellectuals, with status, money, and authority. Shortly after Xi’s speech, *People’s Daily* added a supposedly inspirational special column titled “The Elegance and Refinement of Intellectuals” (*Zhishifenzi de fengcai*) to promote further to the nation the importance of such people. Within three months, the official organ featured the achievements of forty individuals and their roads to success. Thirty-eight are technical experts in the roles of university chancellors or deans, researchers in fields such as medicine, ecology, astrophysics, and agriculture, or engineers in aerospace, computer science, transportation, or other areas. Some of these people double as entrepreneurs. Featured, too, were the successes of a veteran primary school teacher and a classical music conductor.⁸ Moreover, the state continues to elect persons whom it deems to be notable and cooperative intellectuals to serve as CPPCC delegates.⁹

As with public adulation, prestigious appointment, and material rewards, state measures of control targeted at scientists, schoolteachers, and others based on the other half of the modified Leninist imperative also reproduce symbolic and social boundaries that serve to objectify these people as “intellectuals.” On one level, the state continues to deploy management by party cadres within research institutes, universities, and schools as well as newspapers, radio stations, and other establishments where intellectuals are said to cluster. An important official goal is to prevent the professional workers from using their status, knowledge, and authority to undermine official governance, especially through organizing and supporting oppositional movements. A few months after Xi Jinping praised intellectuals in the above speech, for example, the state instructed top universities to strengthen supervision of the teaching staff and their ideological education.¹⁰ Professors and instructors are regarded, like before, as usable but unreliable intellectuals. Under the supervision of the CCP Department of Propaganda, “offices for working with intellectuals outside the party” (*dangwai zhishifenzi gongzuochu*) have been established across the country. The offices organize policy- and theory-training classes and other activities for lawyers, engineers, journalists, and others to garner their cooperation with the state and compliance with its decisions. Furthermore, the state is determined to punish those whom it regards as wayward intellectuals with change of work responsibility, demotion, layoff, prosecution, and imprisonment because of their leadership in or support of protests or challenges against the state. Under the Xi regime, official prosecution and imprisonment of human rights lawyers and other political activists who expose official abuse and corruption have been on the rise.¹¹

The extent to which the CCP still perceives the intellectual as a serious threat to its rule was on full display during the last days of Liu Xiaobo, the former university lecturer who became the 2010 Nobel Peace Prize laureate because of his leadership

in democracy movements. During late spring of 2017, the state disclosed that Liu, who had been imprisoned since the late 2000s, had late-stage liver cancer, but prohibited him from receiving treatment abroad. It kept Liu under guard until he died and then orchestrated his funeral, cremation, and sea burial, all the while censoring news of his illness and death on domestic social media and news outlets.¹² For the Xi regime, it was not enough to silence the dying Liu and even hide his death. The regime has actively tried to remove everything about this intellectual it finds unacceptable from the national political consciousness. Baidu, the largest internet search engine in China, has been censoring news about Liu as well as his pictures and all of his writings even for overseas users. The remaining items about Liu on Baidu portray him as a highly educated man and a political criminal who worked to undermine the Chinese nation and who probably worked with the United States government to do so.¹³ For his ideas and activism, Liu is vilified by the state as a traitor who received from it magnanimous treatment at his death.

The CCP's reappropriation of the Leninist imperative of controlling and utilizing intellectuals after the decline of Chinese Communism reproduces the entrenched divide that educated party leaders have forged between themselves and the rest of the educated population. Chen Duxiu, Qu Qiubai, Mao Zedong, and other leaders exploited their positions and authority to consecrate themselves as genuine socialist revolutionaries, even though some of them only had temporary success. Since the 1980s, the party elites have been portraying themselves as architects and defenders of "socialism with Chinese characteristics" and identifying other educated people as intellectuals to be governed. The elites sometimes include party cadres with management authority on their side, precisely the kind of officials who expended much energy during the Mao era to present themselves as politically and morally superior to ordinary professional and white-collar workers. These symbolic boundaries, though as fuzzy and unstable as before, were reaffirmed by President Xi when he explained the appropriate relationship between the CCP and intellectuals. "Leading [party] cadres at various levels," he stated, should learn to "maintain contacts" and "become intimate friends and truthful friends" with "intellectuals." They should learn to "fully trust" these people and seek their "proposals and opinions" on important work and decisions. And they must welcome and adopt their well-intentioned criticism, forgive them for their erroneous views, and help them concentrate on their work.¹⁴

In other words, although the CCP regime no longer uses class struggle as a political-cum-analytical foundation to define and degrade the intellectual, the leadership still relies on the structural and functional assumptions of Marxism and Leninism as well as the experience of Chinese Communism to handle this subject. A heterogeneous population of educated people—in terms of training, occupation, income, politics, age, and other backgrounds—has thus reappeared in official discourse as a single social category, the intellectuals. These persons, some of whom have joined the party, are considered vital to national development;

their productivity and compliance have been and will be managed through praise, trust, and incentives as well as through assistance, supervision, and punishment. This official treatment of the intellectual is only somewhat different from or, more appropriately, an extension of the Yan'an method.

On the level of society, profound changes have occurred in the use of the intellectual as a classification of people since the 1980s. Thanks to state-sponsored political, market, educational, and other reforms, scholars and writers enjoy unprecedented latitude to invest the classification with moral and other meanings different from those promoted by the state under Chinese Communism and even afterward. During the last two decades, hundreds of books and thousands of articles on intellectuals were published. The enthusiasm of the writers and readers reflects the extent to which the intellectual has been objectified under the Mao regime; it also serves to reproduce the objectification with new symbolic boundaries. Some of the works discuss the origins of the term *zhishifenzi* and explore its connection to the French, Russian, and Confucian intellectual traditions. Some introduce influential Euro-American analyses of intellectuals, such as the work of Antonio Gramsci, Alvin Gouldner, Michel Foucault, Pierre Bourdieu, Zygmunt Bauman, and Russell Jacoby, each of whom promoted a different understanding of the subjects and their role in contemporary society. Some are translations of books written by these scholars or others. Many of the works combine elements from various analytical frameworks, explicitly or implicitly, to examine the lives of scholars and writers in twentieth-century China.¹⁵ In particular, researchers use biographical, statistical, literary, and organizational data to study educated people under CCP rule, including the political courage and ideas of those who stood up to the party, such as Wang Shiwei (1906–1947), who was executed by the Mao regime, and Hu Feng, who was imprisoned for two decades not long after the PRC was established.¹⁶

The scholarship has not only served to rescue the intellectual from the ignominy incurred under Chinese Communism; some of the works have challenged the ongoing official understanding of the subject. The best example is the notable debate on the public intellectual (*gonggong zhishifenzi*) that occurred during the early 2000s. Maurizio Marinelli has shown that scholars and writers combined ideas from Chinese intellectual traditions and Western accounts of intellectuals to examine how the concept of the public intellectual would apply to contemporary China.¹⁷ The debate reached its height when *Southern Personalities Weekly* (*Nanfang renwu zhoukan*), a popular magazine, selected, published, and celebrated a list of the fifty most influential Chinese public intellectuals. For the magazine, these individuals were not only professional experts who participated actively in public life and public debate; more importantly, they were “idealists” (*lixiang zhe*) with “critical spirits” whose work advanced “the onerous pursuit of social justice” (*daoyi*).¹⁸ Proponents of this and similar politically charged concepts of the public intellectual encountered the wrath of the state. *People's Daily* published a scathing

rebuttal that ignored the ideas and analyses the scholars and writers had drawn from Chinese history and philosophy to support their understanding of the public intellectual. The rebuttal, instead, stressed what it noted as the foreign, self-serving, and elitist nature of the notion. The author accused the proponents of seeking to “lure intellectuals on to an evil path” of working against the party and the Chinese people.¹⁹ The state then used censorship, detention, and blacklisting of scholars and writers as tactics to halt the debate.²⁰ Nonetheless, the debate on the public intellectual persists within academic circles, albeit in a muted form, and continues online.²¹

The struggle to define the intellectual in the last three decades, like the one that occurred under Chinese Communism, has a prominent linguistic dimension. As the state ended its Marxian emphasis on class struggle and use of related classifications of people, other terms denoting educated persons and populations reemerged from under the umbrella classification of *zhishifenzi*. Table 4 summarizes the usage of various terms in *People's Daily* at ten-year intervals since the death of Chairman Mao in 1976. Even as the number of articles has increased dramatically in the official organ, for instance, from roughly 1,200 articles in January 1976 to 4,000 articles in January 2003, the usage of *zhishifenzi* has continued to decline. Meanwhile, the words *xuezhè* (scholars) and *zhuanjia* (experts), both of which carry positive meanings of knowledge, status, and influence, have become very popular in the newspaper, thanks to the CCP's emphasis on economic growth, technological development, and higher education. Other terms referring to educated persons have also seen varying degrees of revival.

Some scholars and writers have even chosen to replace *zhishifenzi* in their writings altogether with a term rarely used in the past. The term, *zhishi ren*, which literally means persons with knowledge, is part of the Japanese language and, like *zhishifenzi*, can serve as a singular, plural, or collective noun. *Zhishi ren* has been used in various kinds of analysis of Chinese society and even research on other societies. Between 1997 and 2006, at least 60 journal and newspaper articles used *zhishi ren* in their titles. The number increased to 149 in the following decade.²² The term even appears occasionally in *People's Daily*.²³ Two of the early adopters offered an explanation of why they used *zhishi ren* instead of *zhishifenzi*. They argue correctly that the latter is a historically specific term, one that developed during China's transition to socialism. The term signals the inferior political and sometimes social status of the educated population. To these authors, it is therefore an obstacle to understanding that educated people have become the backbone of a “knowledge-based economy” that has since emerged on the Mainland.²⁴ More recently, another scholar has furnished a completely different reason for his switch to *zhishi ren* when writing about Chinese history. He associates the use of *zhishifenzi*, not with the Mao era or the project of Chinese Communism, but with the Dreyfus affair and the pursuit of social justice, the defense of human dignity, and other positive meanings embedded in the French term *les intellectuels*.

TABLE 4 Numbers of *People's Daily* Articles with Specific Terms for Educated Persons, 1976–2016

	1976	1986	1996	2006	2016
<i>Zhishifenzi</i> (intellectuals)	565	536	243	197	205
<i>Xuezhe</i> (scholars)	67	842	987	1,215	1,821
<i>Zhuanjia</i> (experts)	440	2,036	2,402	3,551	3,480
<i>Wenren</i> (literati)	48	71	76	79	134
<i>Wenhua ren</i> (cultural personnel)	4	16	28	31	79
<i>Dushu ren</i> (men of letters)	4	8	20	16	57

SOURCE: *People's Daily—Renmin Ribao (1946–Present)*.

He contends that premodern China did not have many *zhishifenzi* because its political and social environment did not promote the above critical qualities in the individual. Literati were merely *zhishi ren*, or educated men; they were *not* intellectuals.²⁵ Other scholars and writers who use *zhishi ren* in their works rarely explain this linguistic choice of theirs. Nonetheless, they, too, alter the use of *zhishifenzi* through removing the social classification from their analysis of Chinese and other societies.

Finally, it is not difficult to find scholars and writers who regard themselves as intellectuals and, at the same time, attack this category of people for what they have been doing since the decline of Chinese Communism. Unlike their peers, these scholars and writers apparently refuse to redefine intellectuals as a morally responsible or politically mistreated group of people or even as indispensable to China's development. Like the critics of the intellectual class during the May Fourth movement, they observe that greed and selfishness as well as political apathy and cowardice plague the population of intellectuals. Their complaints, like those that appeared a century ago, are indictments of what they see as a wretched state of Chinese politics, culture, and society. The state encourages professionalization and consumerism, condones economic inequality and corruption, and suppresses social activism and political dissent. Under these circumstances, many intellectuals seek to profit themselves first and foremost. The latest example of such attacks comes from a sensational essay, "Ten Symptoms of Depravity of Chinese Intellectuals," which has been reposted repeatedly on the internet since 2016.²⁶ An excerpt from a recent novel, the essay features virtually all of the criticisms previously leveled against the intellectual class almost a century ago. Intellectuals, especially those who are highly educated, brag about their advanced degrees, professional expertise, and individual talents. They emphasize that they are sensitive, principled, and compassionate. Some highlight their intellectual innovations, comprehension of cutting-edge research, or love and grasp of Chinese culture. As a matter of fact, the author claims, China's intellectuals generally lack honesty, sincerity, social conscience, and ability. They produce little scholarship of value

and add little understanding to anything, let alone Chinese culture. The author does not mention how CCP rule, past or present, contributes to this state of affairs. However, there is no mistaking that he thinks the regrettable behavior of intellectuals is an outcome of a system of governance that rewards precisely braggadocio, self-aggrandizement, and deceitfulness.

To sum up, the struggle to define the intellectual in twenty-first-century China involves, once again, official representation and identification of the subject as well as unofficial reinterpretations of what the intellectual represents, even though the content of each of these three dimensions has changed dramatically since the demise of Chinese Communism. The struggle continues to affect official governance, social identity, and political resistance. No one knows how far into the future the classification will continue to have critical impact on Chinese politics, culture, and society, let alone whether the classification will regain life-and-death implications or become once more a rallying cry against official domination and even CCP rule. Nor can anyone tell whether the future of the classification will converge with what has happened to its counterparts in Western Europe or the United States, that is, *zhishifenzi* becomes a multifarious concept deployed primarily within academic circles for analytical purposes. One thing is clear, though. The intellectual as a classification of people has traveled a distinct path in China since the CCP's founding. A century later, the impact of the classification on Chinese society is still quite visible.

