Popular Culture and the Political Mobilization of Guangdong Elites in Modern China and the Chinese Diaspora, 1839-1911

by

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B.A., Lingnan University, 2017

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Abstract

From 1839 to 1911, Guangdong elites, including Qing officials in the province, local gentry, native intellectuals, and so on, made full use of popular culture for political mobilization of the populace. This study examines the relationships of these Guangdong elites with both the Qing state and the common folks in China and the Chinese diaspora from the new perspective of popular culture. To be specific, Guangdong elites of different backgrounds mobilized the populace in the province to resist the British invasion of Qing China during the Opium War, to revolt against the Qing court during the Taiping Rebellion across southern China, and to push for the pro-Qing reforms or anti-Qing revolutionary movements among domestic and overseas Chinese. In this process, popular culture materials like ballads, operas, and comics provided a critical propaganda tool for Guangdong elites to cooperate with, compete with, or confront the Qing government while influencing the common folks. Meanwhile, the populace also expressed their assent, dissent, and adaptation to the elite political mobilization, by creating eulogistic or satiric ballads and tales, or by selecting, adapting, and transmitting certain popular culture materials politicized by Guangdong elites.

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Introduction

From the Opium War to the 1911 Revolution, China underwent turbulent changes, which often started from Guangdong province, especially from the mobilization of social and political elites of this province. This thesis will examine the political mobilization of these Guangdong elites around the Opium War (1839-42), the Taiping Rebellion (1851-64), and the late Qing reforms and revolutionary movements until 1911 from the new perspective of popular culture. Given Canton's status as the only port open to foreign trade before the Opium War and Guangdong's proximity to Macao (occupied by Portugal since the 16th century) and Hong Kong (occupied by Britain after 1842), the province was exposed to western culture more extensively than other parts of China. Furthermore, Guangdong was the home province of most Chinese immigrants in the New World. Scholars like Chen Xujing even assert that southern culture of China, including Guangdong culture, was more progressive than northern culture largely due to its openness to foreign nations and civilizations.[1] Therefore, although Guangdong's frontier location had historically been insignificant in terms of domestic politics, it became a center of political changes in modern Chinese history partly as a result of the influence of the West on its culture and politics, including its popular culture and elite politics.[2]

As Liang Qichao, a leading late Qing reformer from Guangdong province, commented, Guangdong had failed to produce many figures who could influence the whole country in premodern time, but the condition completely changed in the nineteenth century.[3] During the late

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[1] Chen Xujing, "Nanbei wenhua guan" (The view of southern and northern cultures), *Lingnan xuebao* 3 (1934): 78-82.

[2] Zhao Libin, "Nanfang wenhua shiyexia de Guangdong jindai zhengzhi yu geming: Yi Chen Xujing de lunshu wei zhongxin" (The politics and revolution in modern Guangdong in the 'view of southern culture': On the basis of Chen Xujing's arguments), *Zhongshan daxue xuebao* 3 (2004): 2.

[3] Zhao, "Nanfang wenhua shiyexia de Guangdong jindai zhengzhi yu geming," 2.

Qing period, many prominent political elites either came from Guangdong or acted in Guangdong. In the First Opium War, Lin Zexu launched his anti-opium campaign in Guangdong and had a great influence among Guangdong gentry. In particular, ninety-two (88.5%) out of 104 major leaders of the Taiping Rebellion, such as Hong Xiuquan and Feng Yunshan, came from Liangguang, namely Guangdong and Guangxi provinces.[4] After China's humiliating failure in the Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895), leading reformers like Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao as well as revolutionary leaders like Sun Yat-sen who strived for China's political modernization inside and outside China were also from Guangdong.

Given their great influence on China's modern history, Guangdong political elites have always attracted scholarly attention. However, most studies center around their political activities at the national level. By contrast, through the lens of popular culture and political mobilization, this study will examine the relationships of Guangdong elites with both the Qing state and the common folks. With most people in remote villages remaining illiterate, literate Chinese usually dwelled in cities and towns. According to E.S. Rawski, among the urban Chinese population, only about 30-40% of men and about 2-10% of women had basic literacy in the 19th century.[5] As Ou-fan Lee and Andrew J. Nathan indicate, the size of periodical readers was around 1% of the Chinese population in the late Qing period.[6] In other words, the modern media of newspaper, whose comprehension always requires more than basic literacy, could hardly reach the common folks. This thesis will especially explore how Guangdong elites of diverse backgrounds used

[4] Wang Jiping et al., *Wanqing rencai dili fenbu yanjiu, 1840-1912* (A study on the geographical distribution of the talents in the late Qing dynasty, 1840-1912) (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2012), 210.

[5] Li, *Qingmo de xiaceng shehui qimeng yundong, 1901~1910* (Late Qing enlightenment movements for lower-class society, 1901-1910) (Taipei: Zhongyang yanjiusuo jindaishi yanjiusuo, 1998), 21.

[6] Leo Ou-fan Lee and Andrew J. Nathan, "The Beginnings of Mass Culture: Journalism and Fiction in the Late Ch'ing and Beyond," in *Popular Culture in Late Imperial China*, eds. David Johnson, Andrew Nathan, and Evelyn Rawski (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 373.

traditional popular culture forms like Cantonese ballads, operas, and tales to mobilize the populace into pro-Qing wars and reforms, or into anti-Qing rebellions and revolutions. In terms of the concept of popular culture, while many scholars romanticize it as non-elite culture, they still reveal that popular culture is more or less linked to elite influence.

Published in 1985, *Popular Culture in Late Imperial China* is one of the earliest studies on the subject in Chinese studies. In the "Preface" of the collection, its editors, David Johnson, Andrew Nathan, and Evelyn Rawski argue that popular culture is a useful concept for historians to redress some distortions in elitist history and to complement mainstream academic discourses on traditional China.[7] Although such a statement tends to highlight popular culture as non-elite or folk culture, several articles in the collection actually confirm that late imperial Chinese popular culture was hardly dissociated from elite influence. The authority and the elites would impose their ideologies upon popular culture. Meanwhile, commoners also appropriated orthodox culture for their use. For example, although the local authority and the elites propagated the cult of Goddess Tianhou (Heavenly Queen) as a symbol of peace and stability for social order, coastal people welcomed it as a spiritual tranquilizer to placate their real-life worries about risky maritime activities, as James Watson contends.[8]

In *The Origin of the Boxer Uprising*, Joseph Esherick regards popular culture as religious rituals and other folk customs distinct from "book knowledge and literary cultivation (书本知识和文学修养)."[9] However, his book still shows that popular culture was not detached from the elites. It stresses that Shandong peasants had a tradition of practicing martial arts for health, and

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[7] David Johnson, Andrew Nathan, and Evelyn Rawski, "Preface," *Popular Culture in Late Imperial China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), ix.
[8] Watson, "Standardizing the Gods," 292-324.
[9] Joseph Esherick did not clarify the concept of popular culture in the original English version of his book, but did so in his "Zhongwenban qianyan" (Preface for the Chinese version), in *Yihetuan yundong de qiyuan* (The Origins of the Boxer Uprising), trans. Zhang Junyi and Wang Dong (Nanjing: Jiangsu renmin chubanshe, 1998), 9.

the tradition was linked to heterodox religious magic claiming invulnerable bodies.[10] As a result, the Boxer Uprising erupted in the Southwest corner of Shandong, and its participants claimed "invulnerability to swords and bullets." Nevertheless, the peasants were organized with the support from the Qing court, some officials and especially local elites, who focused the rebels' hatred mainly on foreigners and Christians.[11] Therefore, although folk customs and traditions could be used for popular resistance against the elites and the state, these popular cultural forms were also manipulated by the elites and the Qing government for their interests.

Thus, in this thesis, popular culture simply means the culture popular among the common folks during 1839-1911, which could be created by either the elites or the populace, or both of them. As Wang Di cites Antonia Gramsci, the concept of popular culture has three forms. First, it is populace's culture—the populace create the culture for themselves. Second, it is the culture created by the elites for the populace. Third, it is the culture in popularity, though it is not created by the populace or for the populace.[12] Rather than choosing among the three forms of popular culture, this thesis proposes that all the three forms are valid within relevant contexts, and that popular culture is more or less linked to elite influence, but certain culture would not have been popular if it had not reflected popular interests and demands. In other words, studying history with the concept of popular culture can help reveal the power relations between the elites and the populace, even if it cannot help write history solely from the perspective of the common folks.

Although the concept of popular culture can help reveal elite-populace relationships, scholars still use the concept differently. As Wang Di suggests, studying popular culture can help

[10] Joseph Esherick, *The Origins of the Boxer Uprising* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 38-67.
[11] Esherick, *The Origins of the Boxer Uprising*, 68-331.
[12] Wang Di, "Dazhong wenhua yanjiu yu jindai Zhongguo shehui" (Popular culture studies and modern Chinese society), in *Lishi yanjiu* 5 (1999): 175.

historians observe the daily experiences and mentalities of the populace through a microscopic lens, but it may also investigate the elites, the authority, and significant political movements that had affected popular lives.[13] In contrast, Chen Zhongping instead advocates using network analyses to examine popular culture, which will offer a telescopic lens to observe the multiform relationships between heroic figures and common people.[14] In other words, Wang focuses on how the populace could be "influenced by" the elites, while Chen concentrates on how the elites "interacted with" the populace. The former focuses primarily on popular lives and secondarily on elite-populace relationships, while the latter chiefly concentrates on the interaction between the elites and the populace in the context of popular culture.

To be clear, how to define "elite" in the context of modern Chinese history is controversial, and this issue is entangled with another term, "gentry." It is beyond doubt that retired officials were in the gentry class, but whether in-service officials and out-of-office scholars should be counted as gentry has been under heated debates. Some early scholars like Fei Xiaotong exclude both groups from the concept of gentry. Nevertheless, later historians like Qu Tongzu have a broader definition of gentry, classifying late Qing elites as official-gentry and scholar-gentry. The former includes retired and in-service officials, while the latter includes out-of-office or lower-ranking scholars.[15] Since the 1970s and 1980s, western scholars started to use the concept of "elite" to replace "gentry" when discussing the local power system. Philip Kuhn further refines Qu and other scholars' classification of gentry, categorizing late Qing elites into national, provincial, and local elites according to their sphere of influence. In general, national and provincial elites were

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[13] Wang Di, "Xinwenhuashi weiguanshi he dazhong wenhuashi" (New cultural history, micro-history, and popular culture history), in *Jindaishi yanjiu* 1 (2009): 139.

[14] Chen Zhongping, "Jindai Zhongguo dazhongwenhua lishi yanjiu de huigu yu fansi" (Review and reflection on the historical research on modern Chinese popular culture), in *Jiangnan shehui lishi pinglun* 13 (2018): 326.

[15] You Yuhao, "Jindai shishen yanjiu de huigu yu zhanwang" (Retrospect and prospect of modern gentry research), in *Shixue lilun yanjiu* 4 (2011): 102.

official-gentry, while local elites were scholar-gentry—a definition still centering around scholar titles.[16] But historians like Joseph Esherick instead propose that "local elite" should be a broader concept, which comprises functional elites like notable merchants, bandit leaders, and other influential figures in addition to holders of scholar titles.[17]

The concept of "elite" is closely linked to the definition of "popular culture." Chen's article defines popular culture as the culture that is popular in a region or society, or that becomes popular under elite-populace interactions. In particular, Chen stresses that local elites were the major creators of popular culture because it was hard for the illiterate populace to preserve and spread most ballads and tales they created, and because local elites were closer to the populace compared to national and provincial elites.[18] This thesis basically follows Chen's definition of popular culture, but it covers Guangdong-related elites as a whole, no matter whether they were local elites from the province or high officials serving there, although its focus is on social elites of Guangdong origin who acted outside the Qing government and on their interactive relations with both the populace and the state.

This thesis merges Kuhn's and Esherick's definitions of elites, incorporating figures with and without scholar titles who could deeply impact the society into not only local elites but also provincial and national elites. In this thesis, Guangdong-related elites include national elites like Lin Zexu (governor general of Liangguang) and Luo Bingzhang (high official from Guangdong), provincial elites like Yu Baochun (Canton Prefect), and local elites like Zhang Weiping (retired official) as well as He Yucheng (gentry-scholar). These officials and scholars earned their elite

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[16] Xu Maoming, "Mingqing yilai xiangshen shenshi yu shishen zhu gainian bianxi" (Analysis of concepts like *xiangshen*, *shenshi*, and *shishen* since the Ming and Qing dyansties), in *Suzhou daxue xuebao* 1 (2003): 100.
[17] You, "Jindai shishen yanjiu de huigu yu zhanwang," 100.
[18] Chen, "Jindai Zhongguo dazhongwenhua lishi yanjiu de huigu yu fansi," 326.

status through the Qing imperial exams, and in turn, helped fortify the Qing state and persuade the Guangdong populace to resist British invasion during the Opium War. My thesis also discusses frustrated scholars like Hong Xiuquan, Feng Yunshan, and Hong Rengan who failed to pass the prefectural level of civil service exams and should thus be excluded from the elite circle under the Qing system. However, they rose up to wage a civil war against the Qing state and founded the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom, hereby climbing to the elite circle to make an impact across South China. In addition, this thesis covers reformers and revolutionaries who were somewhere between traditional scholars and modern intellectuals when the system of the Qing imperial exams was declining and finally perished in 1905. While they built their reputation across China and among the Chinese diaspora largely by embracing modern knowledge, they had more or less received traditional education. A few of them like Liang Qichao passed the civil service exams. More people like Ou Jujia repeated failures in the exams. Many others had at least entered old-style private schools, such as Chen Shaobai. In those years towards 1911, they moved from pursuing official positions to pushing for political modernization outside the Qing court.

In particular, this thesis will examine the use of popular culture by these Guangdong-related elites to mobilize the common folks to support or oppose the Qing government from 1839 to 1911. To be specific, this thesis will discuss how Guangdong elites helped the Qing government oppose the British in the Opium War, rebelled against the Qing state in the Taiping Rebellion, and promoted anti-conservative reforms and anti-Qing revolutions until 1911, as well as the responses of the populace to elite mobilization of these pro-Qing or anti-Qing political movements.

In general, the existing literature on how Guangdong elites used popular culture for propaganda concentrates on the period after the late nineteenth century when the new popular media of newspapers were more broadly used by political leaders to spread traditional popular

culture forms like ballads and operas. Hence, scholarly work on the political use of popular culture during the reforms and revolutions until 1911 is relatively richer than that during the Opium War and the Taiping Rebellion. Curiously, academic research on the popular culture regarding the Taiping Rebellion is commonplace but insufficient. There is a huge number of folktales and ballads about the rebellion collected by scholars in the People's Republic of China, but most scholars examine them as supplementary evidence to prove the great support of the populace for the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom.[19]

Li Xiaoti has done a pioneering study on how late Qing intellectuals used popular culture to influence the lower-class society and their relations with the Qing government between 1901 and 1910. Li investigates the functions of popular culture resources like vernacular newspapers, speeches, and operas in social and political mobilization, such as anti-footbinding movements, fundraisings for natural disasters, boycotts against foreign goods, and promotion of patriotism and nationalism. As Li concludes, despite being initiated by social elites, these movements were expanded and institutionalized by the government.[20] His conclusion simplifies the relationships between social elites and officials because they did not always stand in the same line to enlighten the populace. For instance, while revolutionaries promoted nationalist ideas, it was unlikely for Qing officials to offer subsequent support. Moreover, Li argues that late Qing China was "an age of enlightenment" by intellectuals rather than "an enlightened age" of the populace.[21] This

[19] For example: *Taiping tianguo minjian guoshi geyao lunwen ji* (Collected papers on the folklore and ballads of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom) (1992) is an early instance of studying the Taiping Rebellion based on popular culture materials. Contributors to this volume mainly study these ballads and folktales to show how Taiping leaders positioned themselves as allies of the populace through vernacular cultural materials and how the populace appreciated Taiping leaders like Hong Xiuquan and Shi Dakai—the only critique they have is the "superstitious" elements in those materials that deify Taiping leaders. Folktales and ballads indicating popular distrust of Taiping leaders largely remain untouched.

[20] Li, *Qingmo de xiaceng shehui qimeng yundong*, 215.

[21] Li, *Qingmo de xiaceng shehui qimeng yundong*, 214-215.

argument simplifies elite-populace relationships since how the populace responded to those enlightenment movements led by social elites and supported by Qing officials is largely absent from Li's discussion.

To supplement historical research with literary analysis, Xian Yuqing wrote three articles about the political functions of late Qing *yue-ou* (Cantonese ballads). As Xian argues, *yue-ou* transcended love stories and were increasingly politicized since the First Opium War, and people consciously and extensively used *yue-ou* as a propaganda tool during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In particular, *yue-ou* can offer insights into some central themes in late Qing history, especially China's anti-imperialist and anti-feudal struggles as well as reformist and revolutionary movements.[22] Influenced by Marxist ideology, Xian argues that the Qing court, with its corrupt officials and incapable armies, was the feudal regime that always clashed with the Chinese population. Reformers were more backward than revolutionaries because their pro-Qing attitudes were detached from the real demands of the populace.[23] Despite her simplistic interpretation, Xian collected many Cantonese operas from archives in the Sun Yat-sen Library of Guangdong Province, putting them in her articles and arranging them by topics. This collection can contribute to my thesis with precious primary sources, especially the texts of Cantonese operas in the second and third parts of her articles.

Although Cheng Meibao's work deals with the interplay of Guangdong culture and national identity since the late Qing period rather than the interactions between the elites and the populace, its third chapter still sheds lights on the roles of Guangdong dialectal works in educating the common folks. As Cheng argues, the Qing court would occasionally use Guangdong dialectal

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[22] Xian Yuqing, "Yueou yu wanqing zhengzhi 1" (Cantonese ballads and late Qing politics, part 1), in *Lingnan wenshi* 1 (1983): 27, 29, 32-33.
[23] Xian, "Yueou 1," 29-32.

expressions for primary education, military training, and other political purposes, but Qing officials generally cherished classical Chinese. By contrast, western missionaries, progressive social elites, and anti-Qing activists were more open to using local dialects like Cantonese, Chaozhou and Hakka speeches in textbooks, operas, and ballads to spread their ideas and challenge the authority.[24] In addition, Cheng points out that dialectal literary works were unfit for widespread circulation because they were comprehensible only within certain local areas. But given the fact that Guangdong people had a tradition of migration, Guangdong dialectal works were able to spread to Shanghai, Hong Kong, Southeast Asia, and North America.[25] Despite all these insightful findings, Cheng's chapter is merely a general narrative of how Guangdong elites used Guangdong dialectal works to spread Christian gospels, nationalism and other ideas to the populace. Since the complexity of elite-populace interaction is not the focus of Cheng's book, it fails to include a detailed discussion of how those ideas carried by Guangdong dialectal works mobilized the populace to take part in political movements like the Taiping Rebellion.

Li Wanwei also examines the influence of Guangdong dialectal literature on Cantonese elite politics. Her book indicates that while early Cantonese writing was basically classical Chinese with an addition of a few local colloquial words, many late Qing Cantonese writers deliberately vernacularized their topics and colloquialized their expressions with a hope that their writing could be adapted into speeches and performances for the populace.[26] As Li argues, Guangdong political elites like Zheng Guangdong and Chen Zibao used Cantonese ballads, children's textbooks, and so on to enlighten the populace with ideas like nationalism and militarism, although this utilitarian

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[24] Cheng Meibao, *Diyu wenhua yu guojia rentong: Wanqing yilai Guangdong wenhuaguan de xingcheng* (Regional culture and national identity: Formation of the cultural outlook of Guangdong since the late Qing period) (Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 2006), 155-162.

[25] Cheng, *Diyu wenhua yu guojia rentong*, 133.

[26] Li Wanwei, *Qingmo minchu de yueyu shuxie* (Cantonese writing during the late Qing and early Republican era) (Hong Kong: Sanlian shudian, 2017), 8-9.

purpose was achieved at the expense of literary aesthetics. Moreover, Li asserts that comic spirits characterized early Cantonese works because the contemporary always regarded Cantonese as a vulgar language of the common folks. Therefore, when Guangdong political elites incorporated Cantonese colloquial expressions into their literary creations, they satirized and challenged the established authority of traditional customs, foreign imperialists or the Manchu court.[27]

Overall, Li indicates that using Cantonese colloquialism for missionary work, education, and propaganda revealed the attempts of Guangdong elites to align with the populace and turn them against the authority. But because Li stresses linguistics over history, it is apparent that she ignores or simplifies the power relations between different elite figures. For example, Li mentions two pieces of preaching fiction in her fourth chapter, one by a Christian missionary and another by a Confucian instructor, but she analyzes the two novels one by one and compares them chiefly from the perspective of linguistic techniques. Since both novels emerged in the 1870s, right after the Taiping Rebellion, there might be competitions between Christian missionaries and Confucian instructors in Guangdong. As the Qing court could not ban Christian missionary activities, the Confucian scholar's fiction probably served to fortify the authority of Confucianism in lower-class society by using local dialects for preaching.

Xia Xiaohong's articles on several Cantonese writers and political elites like Liao Entao, Liang Qichao, and Ou Jujia will also provide guidance for my thesis. Xia's articles have revealed the intellectual complexities of these Guangdong political elites, but the only interaction between the elites and the populace mentioned in Xia articles is an assumption that the Literary Revolution proposed by Liang aiming to enlighten people with new ideas in vernacular literature would naturally take effect in reality. Nonetheless, Xia does not discuss how these political elites' literary

[27] Li, *Yueu shuxie*, 314-15, 318-19.

works reached the common folks and played actual roles in historical events, possibly because she focuses on literary analyses rather than historical research.

In addition to the Chinese publications mentioned above, Guanhua Wang's English monograph on the anti-American boycott around 1905 includes a chapter about the political use of ballads, plays, and posters in the movement. A portion of the chapter examines the mobilizing effect of those popular cultural forms in Guangdong.[28] But overall, English publications that use popular culture sources to examine the interactions of Guangdong elites with the populace and the Qing state from 1839 to 1911 are rare.

In brief, my thesis will discuss how Guangdong political elites, including Qing officials in the province and especially social elites such as local gentry, used popular culture like Cantonese songs, operas, and folk proverbs to mobilize the populace to join their political campaigns and interacted with the Qing court from 1839 to 1911. Chapter 1 will center around the Opium War (1839-1942) to discuss how local elites cooperated with Qing officials and used popular culture to mobilize mass resistances against British intrusion in Guangdong. Chapter 2 will focus on the Taiping Rebellion (1851-64), examining how its major leaders like Hong Xiuquan and Feng Yunshan turned from aspirants of civil services for the Qing government into agitators of pseudo-Christian popular culture for a nationwide rebellion against the Qing state. Chapter 3 will scrutinize reformist and revolutionary movements (the 1890s-1910s), exploring the efforts by their respective leaders in creating new popular culture resources in their pro-Qing or anti-Qing political movements inside China and across the global Chinese diaspora. In this thesis, while the term, "the populace," mainly includes domestic Chinese, especially those in cities, towns and nearby villages,

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[28] Guanhua Wang, *In Search of Justice: The 1905-1906 Chinese Anti-American Boycott* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Asia Center, 2001), 160-177.

in the first and second chapters, it is broadened to incorporate the Chinese diaspora in the third chapter. This thesis uses the term, "the Chinese diaspora," instead of "Chinese migrants" to stress global connections, treating the Chinese diaspora, just like Zhongping Chen defines, as "the Chinese dispersion across cultural and national borders, and the dispersed Chinese with interactive links to their homeland, hostlands and co-ethnic groups."[29] It helps highlight the increasingly trans-regional and cross-cultural feature in the mobilization activities of Guangdong elites from 1839 to 1911, namely the process of how Guangdong elites of diverse backgrounds rose to impact the local population of Guangdong, then exerted their influence upon the populace across South China, and finally entered the global arena to build links with overseas Chinese.

[29] Zhongping Chen, "Kang Youwei's Activities in Canada and the Reformist Movement Among the Global Chinese Diaspora, 1899–1909," in *Twentieth-Century China* 1 (2014): 5.

Chapter 1
Guangdong Elites, Popular Culture and Political Mobilization around the Opium War

The Opium War (1839-1842) ended with China's defeat by Britain and marked the outset of the Chinese modern era. As Chinese Marxist historians' analysis of class struggle stresses, reactionary feudal officials of the Qing dynasty failed to understand the power of people in defeating foreign imperialists, thus causing the defeat of China.[1] However, as will be shown, Qing officials in Guangdong and other elites in the province were involved in mobilizing the anti-British sentiments of the common folks. Local Chinese people made active responses to the elites' political mobilization against opium and British invasion. Such elite-populace interactions reflected cultural xenophobia to some extent, but it also resulted in the earliest propaganda for anti-imperialist nationalism.

By investigating how Guangdong elites used popular culture for political mobilization during the First Opium War, this chapter will discuss the relationships of Guangdong elites and commoners in the face of British aggression in the 1830s and 1840s. When Guangdong elites disseminated political information through popular cultural forms, the populace followed the propaganda and spread the politicized materials in some cases, but they also rejected the official propaganda by creating satiric songs.

In this chapter, the term "Guangdong elites" refers to the Qing officials serving in Guangdong like Lin Zexu, those from the province, such as Luo Bingzhang, as well as the local gentry like Zhang Weiping. In the 1830s and 1840s, Guangdong officials gave the local gentry much political power in the anti-opium and anti-British propaganda. The gentry expressed their political concern and even led local militias, thus emerging as active political leaders. As Kaori

[1] Hu Sheng, *Cong Yapian zhanzheng dao Wusi yundong* (From the Opium War to the May Fourth Movement), (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1982), vol. 1, 65-75.

Abe argues, since the Opium War distracted the attention of Guangdong officials, they had little control over Guangdong public opinion in response to British propaganda. Instead, the local gentry took the role in mobilizing the anti-British sentiments of the populace.[2] However, this chapter proposes that it would have been more difficult for the gentry to sustain their political propaganda if they had lacked official support. In particular, this chapter argues that Guangdong elites, including the gentry and officials, mobilized the anti-British sentiments of the populace through popular culture in the 1830s and 1840s by stigmatizing opium, criticizing Chinese traitors, and constructing the Sanyuanli victory.

Stigmatizing Opium through Popular Culture Mobilization

The propaganda battles between China and Britain started even before the First Opium War, but the active Chinese response to the British propaganda in Guangdong happened after the arrival of Lin Zexu and his anti-opium campaign. Public opinion about opium was complicated in the nineteenth century. Some British officials opposed the war because they disapproved the "vicious and demoralizing traffic" of opium.[3] Nonetheless, most British politicians regarded opium as normal trading goods similar to textiles.[4] Before the war, many Chinese did not regard opium as a moral taboo, since it had historically been a medicine and recreational luxury. However, in the 1830s, Lin implemented his anti-opium propaganda with the help of the local gentry in an attempt to make smoking and trading opium a moral defect. Meanwhile, the populace was not always compliant with the official propaganda. While some officials stressed moral judgment of opium, the common folks also spread satiric songs to expose official hypocrisy or defend private interests in the trade.

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[2] Kaori Abe, "The Anglo-Chinese Propaganda Battles: British, Qing and Cantonese Intellectuals and the Opium War in Canton," in *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society Hong Kong Branch* 56 (2016): 173-74, 185.

[3] Hosea Morse, *The International Relations of the Chinese Empire* (Shanghai: Kelly & Walsh, 1910), vol. 1, 253.

[4] Julia Lovell, *The Opium War: Drugs, Dreams, and the Making of China* (London, UK: Picador, 2011), 19.

In the 1830s, the British in Canton tried to communicate with the Chinese populace on the eve of the Opium War. British missionaries like Robert Morrison had complied missionary booklets in vernacular Cantonese and a Cantonese dialect dictionary for the East India Company.[5] These missionaries and merchants from Britain also helped British officials publish pamphlets and notices to resist the stigmatization of their image. Some Chinese like Liang Fa offered translation help for the British. Foreign-run newspapers like *Dongxiyang meiyue tongjizhuan* (*Eastern Western Monthly Magazine*) (1833) published Chinese-language content in Canton, disseminating political, commercial, and other information to the Chinese. In 1834, the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge in China was founded to "prepare and publish, in a cheap form, plain and easy treatises in the Chinese language," and its members circulated the treatises by hands, as Chinese booksellers were worried about official punishment.[6]

Compared with the British, Guangdong officials lacked their propaganda newspapers. In Canton, foreign-owned newspapers like *Canton Register* (1827-) and *Chinese Repository* (1832-) had emerged before the Opium War. Lin recruited translators to check these newspapers to gather intelligence, but he did not use newspapers for social mobilization.[7] For Lin and his assistants, these foreign-own newspapers were "similar to *tang-bao*," namely official reports for the Qing court.[8] They thus regarded these foreign "*tang-bao*" as an information tool for officials rather than a device to link up officials and the populace. In fact, Chinese-run newspapers did not appear in Canton until the 1870s.

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[5] Li Wanwei, *Qingmo minchu de yueyu shuxie* (Cantonese writing during the late Qing and early Republican era) (Hong Kong: Sanlian shudian, 2011), 26-8.

[6] Abe, "The Anglo-Chinese Propaganda Battles," 176-178.

[7] Qi Sihe, Lin Shuhui, and Shou Jiyu eds., *Yapian zhanzheng* (The Opium War) (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 2000), vol. 6, 258.

[8] Ge Gongzhen, *Zhongguo baoxue shi* (A history of Chinese journalism), vol. 49 of *Minguo congshu dierbian* (Republican book series, part II), ed. *Minguo congshu* bianji weiyuanhui (Editorial board of *Minguo congshu*) (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian, 1990), 97-99.

Instead, Guangdong officials relied on traditional means to influence the populace. Lin extended his investigation of opium smugglers and smokers through an information network based on various strata of people. He investigated possible informants like servants working for foreign merchants, and even made an inquiry into the opium issue through a provincial examination for over 600 Confucian students from three academies: Yuexiu, Yuehua, and Yangcheng.[9] The exam questions asked students about opium distributing centers, retailers, problems of previous anti-opium policies, and possible methods to eradicate opium.[10] Moreover, Lin was supported by the local gentry like Zhang Weiping to identify opium smokers and smugglers among the populace. He established an unofficial anti-opium headquarter at Dafo Temple and used it as a communication center for officials and the gentry to mobilize more people to join the anti-opium campaign.[11] On the one hand, this approach gave the gentry too much power and led to unjust cases when eradicating opium, since the gentry used the power to attack their personal enemies.[12]

On the other hand, through use of popular culture to influence public opinion, Guangdong officials and the gentry turned smoking and smuggling opium into an ethical problem. For example, before 1839, though opium appeared in vernacular novels, it did not serve as a factor in the main plots. In *Jingfu xinshu* (New book alarming the rich), a novel narrating the corruption in officialdom in the early nineteenth century, opium only served to describe social customs. The author had kept a vigilant eye on opium, but the descriptive tone was not fully critical. After 1839, more novels relating to opium emerged, and certain anti-opium literature was deliberately created by local elites. In their narratives, opium, associated with prostitution and gambling, became a

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[9] Lin Zexu, *Lin Zexu ji* (Collected works by Lin Zexu) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1985), vol. 4, 122.

[10] Qi et al., *Yapian zhanzheng*, vol. 6, 13.

[11] Guangdong sheng wenshi yanjiusuo (Guangdong provincial institute of literature and history research) eds., *Sanyuanli renmin kangying douzheng shiliao* (Historical sources of the anti-British struggles of the Sanyuanli people) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1978), 3

[12] Frederic Wakeman Jr., "The Canton Trade and the Opium War," in *The Cambridge History of China*, ed. John K. Fairbank (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1978), vol. 10, 163-212. doi:10.1017/CHOL9780521214476.005.

cause of physical, financial, and moral problems. Storytellers further disseminated the evil image of opium to the populace. They told stories by using Cantonese colloquial words that were more accessible to audiences.[13] This was a Cantonese art called "jianggu," a dialectal word for "telling stories." Moreover, the evil image of opium was related to foreigners. For instance, the Chaozhou Prefect, Huang Jiqing, either imitated a folk song style, or collected a song from the folks but edited the song before placing it into his collection of *yuefu* (Chinese poems in folk song styles). Historically, *yuefu* was a style of "good" songs collected and elaborated by official music bureaus, which was to be performed in important events like festivals. The song is entitled "Yingsu zhang" (Miasma of opium):

> Holding opium pipes from day to night,
> With opium people lose dietary appetite.
> A piece of land values thousands of proceeds,
> A little opium exhausts one-year material needs,
> Addicts will shed tears, run at the nose, and finally decease.
> Alas! The poppy in the field can be weeded,
> But how can we contain the opium that foreigners shipped?[14]

The song points out that rejecting foreign import of opium was a crucial solution to its eradication. It stresses opium's negative impacts on people themselves more than how opium would harm the country—it was easier to arouse people's worries for themselves and their families.

Moreover, an opera entitled "Diandi gui (Devil Dent)," written in a critical tone, spread the anti-British sentiments to the populace by shaping a shameless image of those British opium smugglers represented by Lancelot Dent:

> I'm Devil Dent, now trapped in *hong*,
> And suffering solitude alone.
> Following the Queen's instruction, I always had opium shipped,
> But I didn't foresee China's new law, which banned opium trade.
> I've declared my goods at the custom, so I can take back nothing.
> Chinese officials and soldiers always monitor me for everything.
> …

[13] Guangzhou tushuguan (Guangzhou library), "Yueyu shuoshu" (Storytelling in Cantonese), *Guangzhou shizhi* (Canton gazetteer), accessed November 25, 2017, http://www.gzlib.gov.cn/ctwhys/51297.jhtml

[14] Quoted from: A Ying, *Yapian zhanzheng wenxueji* (Literary works about the Opium War) (Beijing: Guji chubanshe, 1957), vol. 1, 197. The Chinese text of the song is: "竹筒呼吸连昏晓，渴可代饮饥可饱。块土价值数万钱，终岁但供一口烟……眼垂泪，鼻出涕，一息奄奄死相继。田中罂粟尚可拔，番舶来时那可遏？"

I admire the Iron-headed who had far-sight.
He had returned to our home country overnight.
Leaving all the duties to me, he is an expert in sleights.
If I've ever perceived today's situation,
I wouldn't have approached him for communication,
So I wouldn't have stayed in this prison with frustration.[15]

In the opera, Dent is portrayed as a shameless smuggler refusing to repent after his unlawful act but trying to escape from punishment. This *yue-ou* reflects Dent's great loss in Lin Zexu's anti-opium campaign in Guangdong. As part of the campaign, Lin ordered all foreign merchants to surrender their opium in three days. Informed of Lin's order, Charles Elliot, the Chief Superintendent of British Trade, attempted to help all British merchants withdraw and opposed the confiscation of opium. However, Lin arrested Dent to prevent him from leaving Canton. As a result, Dent had no choice but to hand over all the opium he owned, and Lin destroyed it at Humen in 1939. In addition, the *yue-ou* mentions "the Iron-headed," which refers to another British merchant called William Jardine. Jardine was in charge of Creek Hong and engaged in opium smuggling.[16] The nickname of "the Iron-headed" came from a story popular in Canton. Angry about Jardine, the Canton populace hit his head with a club, but Jardine remained calm as if he was unhurt.[17] This nickname highlights how the populace detested the presence of the British.

However, the Guangdong populace was divisive: some might detest opium, but others like compradors benefited from opium trade. Spreading lampoons, some locals attacked Lin Zexu for arresting opium traders and stigmatized him for taking bribes from the traders.[18] Similarly, Guangdong elites were also divisive. John E. Bingham, a lieutenant who experienced the Opium War, commented that Chinese officials always criticized the British for bullying China but concealed their own faults. For instance, some Guangdong officials pretended to be moral models

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[15] The Chinese text is: "颠地鬼, 自心烦, 被困洋行见影单。为奉狼主听差, 把鸦片带惯, **点**想天朝新例, 禁得非凡。货已报关, 难以复返; 个的文官武将, **系咁**虎视眈眈。……堪羡铁头真好慧眼, 居然收账把本国回还。知道**佢**机谋百出都系非常惯, 卸落工程**俾**过我担。早知到今日事情, **唔**好同**佢**往返; 免致身投禁地、好似铁壁铜关。" The text is archived in Sun Yat-sen Library of Guangdong Province. Please see: Xian, "Yueou 1," 27.

[16] Maggie Keswick eds., *The Thistle and the Jade* (Hong Kong: Francis Lincoln Publishing, 2008), 18.

[17] Keswick, *The Thistle and the Jade*, 18.

[18] Arthur Waley, *The Opium War Through Chinese Eyes* (London, UK: Routledge, 2005), 87.

by writing anti-opium proposals to the throne but received bribes from British merchants who wished to sell opium in Guangdong. Other officials even consumed opium themselves. Deng Tingzhen, the governor general of Liangguang before Lin, was allegedly the most powerful opium smuggler.[19] Bingham's charge is debatable. S.W. Williams implies that Deng's son—not Deng himself—was the opium smuggler.[20] While some studies discuss Deng's initial support of opium trade, there is no evidence he was a smuggler.[21] Bingham also recorded a ballad, and indicated that the Canton population composed the ballad and then put the lyrics on the wall of the governor-general office to satirize Deng:

> Where Yue's lands are broad, yet poor;
> The venerable Tang holds sway;
> His bailiffs knock at every door,
> And drag both good and bad away!
> O Tang! If from the drug you'd set us free,
> Yourself would soon a prisoner be.[22]

Given Bingham's service as a British commander in the war, he might have fabricated the song to stigmatize Deng, an influential anti-opium official in Guangdong. However, if the song was authentic, there are two ways to interpret the lyrics. First, the satire of Deng's hypocrisy might be sincere. As Lin and his supporters demonized the image of opium, even Guangdong officials involved in opium trade would not openly defend opium. Instead, they would join the critics of opium to exonerate themselves from misdeeds. Second, the satiric song was born out of personal spite: since many Canton people benefited from being poppy planters or opium traders, they wanted revenge against anti-opium officials like Deng. Overall, under both circumstances, the

[19] Qi et al., *Yapian zhanzheng*, vol. 5, 14.

[20] S.W. Williams, *The Middle Kingdom: A Survey of the Geography, Government, Literature, Social Life, Arts, & History of the Chinese Empire and its Inhabitants* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1901), vol. 2, 493.

[21] For example: Li Chunli, "Deng Tingzhen yu jinyan yundong" (Deng Tingzhen and anti-opium campaign), in *Ninbo daxue xuebao* 1 (1986): 97-101; Lin Youneng, "Deng Tingzhen yu Guangdong jinyan" (Deng Tingzhen and the anti-opium campaign in Guangdong), in *Kaifang shidai* 5 (1985): 56-58.

[22] The original Chinese text has been lost. For more details of the English version, please see: John Elliot Bingham, *Narrative of the Expedition to China: From the Commencement of the War to Its Termination in 1842; with Sketches of the Manners and Customs of that Singular and Hither Almost Unknown Country* (London, UK: H. Colbum, 1843), vol. 1, 23. https://archive.org/details/narrativeexpedi01binggoog

lyrics show how the Guangdong populace used the ballad to express their anger or revenge against Guangdong officials instead of passively accepting the anti-opium propaganda. If found to be genuine, the song would prove the ability of the common folks to use their means of expression to challenge official power.

The Pro-hawk and Anti-dove Propaganda in the War

After the Opium War happened in 1839, the Qing officialdom was divided by the hawks and the doves, with the former represented by Lin Zexu and the latter represented by Qishan and Yishan. Lin's reputation largely came from his implementation of anti-opium policies and proposal of military struggles with the British, while Qishan and Yishan were notorious after they negotiated the Treaty of Chuanbi (1840) and the Treaty of Canton (1841) with the British. Guangdong elites played a crucial role in stigmatizing the dovish faction and mobilizing the anti-British sentiments of the populace. With his fame in the officialdom and literati circle of South China, Lin Zexu clashed with doves like Qishan over foreign policies, spreading legends of southern coastal people's heroic struggles against foreign pirates like the Japanese marauders during the sixteenth century. The British invaders were thus narrated as ordinary pirates who were as manageable as previous maritime marauders, which obscured the military strength of the British troops. After Lin was dismissed, a protest against the news of Qishan's cession of Hong Kong to Britain erupted in Canton, led by a group of the gentry like Deng Chun who had been elevated by Lin in the anti-opium campaign.[23] It was popular for Guangdong elites to criticize the doves for their treacherous surrenders, to praise the hawks for their unswerving loyalty, and to condemn the collaboration between Chinese traitors and British invaders in persecuting the patriotic hawks like Lin. This kind of propaganda also resonated among the populace during the war in Guangdong province.

[23] James Polachek, *The Inner Opium War* (Cambridge, Mass.: Council on East Asian Studies, 1992), 150, 158.

Lu Song, an intellectual who experienced the unrest during the Opium War, wrote, "We find foxes everywhere but nowhere for tigers…Who can despise their own death? Who can kill the devils?"[24] In this poem, Lu compared the dovish traitors to "foxes," the hawkish patriots to "tigers," and the British who tore up the peace of China to "the devils." Critiquing the doves who favored appeasement as traitors, the hawks portrayed themselves as patriots defending China from the threat of opium and British aggression. The "traitors" were responsible for China's defeat in the war—the emperor and the country had no faults. This interpretation was a refusal to recognize how weak China was, and its proponents regarded China's defeat as an accident.[25] On the other hand, many "traitors" pursued appeasement because they understood the gap between Chinese and British military forces.[26] In fact, neither war nor appeasement could save China from decline if the Chinese had neither information about the outside nor knowledge of self-improvement.[27] However, as xenophobia was intensified by the Opium War and a series of anti-British ballads and operas, the sympathy for the hawks and the discontent with the doves who capitulated in their anti-British struggles also accumulated in popular minds.

Before the Opium War, *yue-ou* (Cantonese ballads) emerged and spread across Guangdong. It was a new type of Cantonese opera which incorporated dialectal words and proverbs into beautiful songs. In *yue-ou*, Cantonese dialectal words and colloquial expressions appear frequently, such as "dim" (点, how), "hai gam" (系咁, always), "keoi" (佢, he/she), "mat" (乜, what), and "ng hou" (唔好, don't). As Xian Yuqing argues, compared with other Cantonese operas, *yue-ou* allowed an active exploration of new topics of the times to criticize political

[24] Quoted from: A Ying, *Yapian zhanzheng wenxueji*, vol. 1, 143. The Chinese text is: "今但有狐哪有虎……谁能轻一死，乃与鬼相争？"
[25] Immanuel C. Y. Hsü, *The Rise of Modern China* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 193.
[26] Jiang Tingfu, *Zhongguo jindaishi* (The modern history of China) (Changsha: Yuelu shushe, 1999), 38.
[27] Mao Haijian, *Tianchao de bengkui: Yapian zhanzheng zai yanjiu* (The collapse of the heavenly dynasty: A restudy of the Opium War) (Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 1995), 89.

problems and social evils.[28] It was during the Opium War that the topics of *yue-ou* changed from love stories to politics and news.

Facing great pressure from British troops in 1840, the Qing court replaced hawkish Lin with Qishan, a figure of the dovish faction. Qishan made peace with Elliot by ceding Hong Kong Island. Later, Yishan, a Manchu general, replaced Qishan to take charge of the military affairs in Guangdong. Another *yue-ou*, "Song Lin zhijun (Eulogy of Governor Lin)," expresses the aversion to the doves and the sympathy for Lin:

> How stupid you are!
> Why are you struggling to be a loyal official?
> Though you're loyal,
> Are you working under an emperor who is judicial?
> One can be an official when society is well-governed,
> But one should retreat from their career when society is ill-governed.
> The treacherous officials are plotting schemes,
> So will the foreigners be punished?
> …
> Look! Other people won promotion,
> Though he lost battles and wasted six million silver profusion.
> Removed from your position when approaching success,
> You're just like Yue Fei suffering the same failure without bless.[29]

With its indignant tone, "Song Lin zhijun" depicts the tragedy of how the treacherous doves suppressed the patriotic hawks, submitted to the British forces, and begged for appeasement that outraged the Guangdong populace. Superficially, this *yue-ou* satirizes Lin Zexin's stubborn insistence to continue fighting the British. Essentially, it conveys the public discontent with Lin's demotion and popular gratitude for his patriotism. The *yue-ou* compares Lin to Yue Fei, a famous Han general who demanded unbending wars against the Jurchen during the Song Dynasty, thus elevating Lin to the status of a national hero. Moreover, the unnamed "other people" in the opera refers to Yishan, a Manchu officer who failed to defend Canton but was promoted after the war. "Six million silver" refers to a condition accepted by Yishan: after successive defeats, Yishan

[28] Xian, "Yueou 1," 26.
[29] Quoted from: Xian, "Yueou 1," 27. The Chinese text is: "你真正笨, 做乜苦苦要做忠臣。纵然忠烈, 有几个明君。有道正好做官, 无道要隐, 奸臣用计, 重办乜夷人? ……你睇人地做官重有连升品, 战而无计用了六百万余银。好比你系岳飞同佢一样饮恨, 将近成功调佢转身。"

asked the Canton Prefect, Yu Baochun, to negotiate with the British and signed the Treaty of Canton. One stipulation of the peace treaty was that China had to pay the British six million silver dollars as indemnity, which irritated the Guangdong populace.[30]

This *yue-ou* reveals the influence of the hawks' political propaganda in mobilizing popular resistance to the British and the Chinese doves. Although the aforementioned *yue-ou* is anonymous, the surviving copies of the lyrics contain many misspellings [different characters of the same or similar pronunciation], such as *yapian* (鸦片, opium) and *yapian* (丫片, opium), which suggest that the copier[s] might come from the lower classes.[31] In other words, these *yue-ou* were not circulated only among literati. Even the lower classes got the chance to enjoy the performances of those politicized operas, which allowed them to transcribe and further spread the operas. In terms of writing skill, "Song Lin zhijun" combines first-person and second-person expressions to convey explicit emotion, thus shortening the distance between the authors and audiences of the operas. Therefore, the populace would easily grasp the plight of Lin.

As the local gentry in Guangdong erected Lin Zexu, a figure with moral excellence but unfortune experience, as a heroic symbol of the hawks, the Guangdong populace also spread ballads to satirize the doves for their cowardice and incompetence. For instance, the populace circulated a song,

> As devils are everywhere,
> Quickly somebodies are running away.
> By white gem and blue feather,
> Their identity is betrayed.[32]

"Devils" refer to foreigners, and "white gem and blue feather" refer to the decorations on the caps of lower-ranking officials. This song satirizes the daunted Qing officials in the Opium War. Moreover, the Canton populace was critical of the incompetence of Yang Fang, a Qing general

[30] Guangzhou shi difangzhi bianzuan weiyuanhui (Guangzhou gazetteer compilation committee), *Guangzhou shizhi* (Guangzhou gazetteer) (Guangzhou: Guangzhou chubanshe, 1995), vol. 13, 130-31.
[31] Li, *Qingmo minchu de yueyu shuxie*, 129.
[32] Quoted from: Qi et al., *Yapian zhanzheng*, vol. 3, 1-27. The Chinese text is: "鬼子来，跑得快；有白顶、蓝翎带。"

under Yishan in the war against the British. Shocked by British firearms, Yang believed the British used witchcraft to power their cannons. He wrote, "Foreign cannons always hit my troops, but my cannons could hardly hit foreign troops. How could the British make it? There should be witchcraft attached to their cannons." To offset this witchcraft, Yang took the advice of a witch and collected women's faeces all over Canton, placing it in front of British cannons.[33] He surmised the "strength" of the male-dominated British troops and their firearms could be offset by women's faeces since both women and faeces represented negative force like "weakness" in folk beliefs. A song during the time satirized Yang's ridiculousness: "Collecting faeces is an exceptional strategy [to defeat the British], and thereafter stink fills the air of Canton. [Yang] Fang is a true valiant dishonouring his officer title…"[34]

Constructing the Sanyuanli Victory for Patriotic Propaganda

The negative image of dovish officials was reinforced not only by the patriotic image of hawkish officials as mentioned above, but also by the righteous image of the populace as discussed below. The righteous image of the Guangdong populace was glorified in the Sanyuanli Incident. On 29-31 May 1841, the militiamen of Sanyuanli and nearby villages besieged the British troops in Canton, leading to armed conflicts between the two sides.[35] British commanders warned Prefect Yu Baochun of possible wars if the militiamen kept besieging the British troops, but Yu replied that it was beyond official control.[36] Fearing military escalation, Yu ordered Nanhai and Panyu counties' magistrates to persuade the villagers to stop fighting.[37] As the British troops withdrew

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[33] Qi et al., *Yapian zhanzheng*, vol. 6, 32, 33.

[34] Quoted from: A Ying, *Yapian zhanzheng*, vol. 1, 205. The Chinese text is: "粪桶尚言施妙计，秽声传遍粤城中。芳名果敢愧封侯……"

[35] Guangdong sheng wenshi yanjiusuo (Guangdong provincial institute of literature and history research, GPILHR hereafter) eds., *Sanyuanli renmin kangying douzheng shiliao* (Historical sources of the anti-British struggles of the Sanyuanli people) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1978), 1-3.

[36] Frederic E. Wakeman, *Strangers at The Gate: Social Disorder in South China, 1839- 1861* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966), 19.

[37] GPILHR eds., *Sanyuanli renmin*, 39.

from the Sifang Fort on 1 June 1841, the villagers finally gave up further actions. As Mao Haijian points out, most Chinese accounts regarding the Sanyuanli Incident are not authentic records of history, but merely proof of the political propaganda by various forces.[38]

The propaganda depicting this incident emboldened the populace. As the Opium War broke out, a folk song depicted how weak Qing officials were before foreigners: "People are afraid of officials. Officials are afraid of foreigners." However, the common folks recomposed the song after the incident: "Officials are afraid of foreigners. Foreigners are afraid of people."[39] The new lyrics reflect the willpower of the Sanyuanli people in fighting the British. It reveals a shift away from the official narrative of treacherous Guangdong people, such as Yishan's opinion that "watching over people is more crucial than watching over enemies."[40] In fact, the celebration of the Sanyuanli victory showed the cooperation of Guangdong officials like Luo Bingzhang and the gentry like Zhang Weiping in mobilizing popular resentment against the British.

The propaganda composed in the aftermath of the Sanyuanli Incident resulted in public misconceptions surrounding the incident. After the incident, the political activists among the Guangdong gentry composed a number of anti-British proclamations, such as *Quanyue yimin gongxi* (Declaration by all the Guangdong Righteous), and spread them to the populace in the form of posters. In terms of content, these posters condemned Yu Baochun for his appeasement and propagated that the local militias were capable of defeating the British troops if Yu did not disband them.[41] The popular resentment against Yu was so strong that once in a provincial civil service examination hosted by Yu, a large number of students attacked him as a traitor and refused to attend the examination. In fact, the "dovish" and "treacherous" Yu had assisted Lin Zexun in

[38] Mao, *Yapian zhanzheng zai yanjiu*, 301.
[39] Quoted from: GPILHR, *Sanyuanli renmin*, 307. The Chinese texts of the two lines are: "百姓怕官，官怕洋人" and "官怕洋人，洋人怕百姓."
[40] GPILHR eds., *Sanyuanli renmin*, 11.
[41] GPILHR eds., *Sanyuanli renmin*, 77-79, 83, 88, 93-97.

several battles against the British and successfully defended Kwun Chung six times in 1839.[42] As for language style, the text in the posters includes colloquial features. As written in *Jinzhong baoguo quanyue yimin yu yingyi xi* (Declaration by the loyal righteous in Guangdong to British barbarians), "Our righteous people are your grandfather … If we donate ten pennies per person for weapons and warships, we can easily eliminate you, British barbarians!"[43] The phrase "our righteous people are your grandfather" was a slang expression that had double implications. First, such colloquial words could be used to communicate with the populace. Second, refined essays were the media to communicate with civilized people rather than with British barbarians, so using slang words conveyed the attempts of the gentry to disparage the British like Elliot and Dent and to elevate the righteous image of the Sanyuanli people. According to the gentry, small posters were spread across Guangdong, and large posters were spread to other provinces. The major authors of these declarations were the gentry like He Dageng, a militia leader and a former assistant to Lin. One declaration also attached a note at the end: anyone attempting to destroy the posters would be identified as traitors; people noticing any treacherous act were responsible to reveal that to the government.[44] This note implies the possibility of the Guangdong government's tacit support for some gentry in circulating those unofficial declarations against the British.

While the propaganda work had initially been undertaken by the gentry, they soon received official support. In one instance, Guangdong officials organized a banquet at Dafo Temple after the Sanyuanli Incident to praise the authors and disseminators of the anti-British posters.[45] The authors of "Sanyuanli deng xiang kangying changhong" (Anti-British notice at Sanyuanli and other Villages) attended the banquet. "*Chang-hong* (long red [paper])" was a type of public notice used by Guangdong people, usually written on a long stripe of red paper and in vernacular

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[42] Lin, *Lin Zexu ji*, vol. 2, 797-8.
[43] GPILHR eds., *Sanyuanli renmin*, 90.
[44] GPILHR eds., *Sanyuanli renmin*, 95.
[45] Abe, "The Anglo-Chinese Propaganda Battles," 183-4.

language. Most guests at the banquet were rural gentry from Panyu and Nanhai. For instance, He Yucheng, a scholar from Panyu, had mobilized the local militias in the Sanyuanli Incident.[46] In all, Guangdong officials cooperated closely with the local gentry to propagate the Sanyuanli victory.

Even if Guangdong officials had not been involved in the initial propaganda after the Sanyuanli Incident, they did help spread the story of the Sanyuanli victory beyond Guangdong. Yan Botao, an official from Lianping County, recorded that after the Sanyuanli Incident, many Guangdong villagers were spreading anti-British oaths through secret copies and verbal dissemination. He stated that Guangdong people were not traitors and could be wisely used, and the anti-British oaths proved the valiant spirit of these villagers despite their coarse usage of slang expression. Yan wrote a memorial to the throne, suggesting that other cities could model after the Guangdong case of mobilizing local militias.[47] Moreover, Luo Bingzhang, an official from Hua County, argued that "the British can defeat Chinese troops, but not Chinese civilians," and that "both British invaders and Chinese traitors will be eliminated if Chinese troops and civilians are in the same line."[48] Luo distributed his collection of popular ballads about the Sanyuanli victory to his friends in Beijing. Inspired by the ballads, poets in Beijing created new works to celebrate the victory.[49]

Interestingly, praising righteous people over daunted officials reversed the normal social order that had long placed officials as superior to commoners. Factional rivalries in officialdom resulted in an alliance across social classes: the hawks and valiant people against the British and the doves. This transcended the simple analytical category of class struggles. The folk song below does not depict the Opium War in chronological order. With homophonic characters at the

[46] GPILHR eds., *Sanyuanli renmin*, 78-79.
[47] GPILHR eds., *Sanyuanli renmin*, 114-6.
[48] Qi et al., *Yapian zhanzheng*, vol. 4, 619.
[49] Polachek, *The Inner Opium War*, 166-67, 177.

beginning of some sentences, the lyric below describes the events of the Opium War with sentences from number one to ten:

> **One** cannon fired loudly;
> **E**lliot ("E" sounds like "Two" in Cantonese) approached Canton and made inroads.
> **San**-yuan-li (literally, "Neighborhood of Three Elements") people fought the war;
> **Si**-fang (literally, "Four Sides") Fort was blown up.
> **Wu** Ziyuan ("Wu" sounds like "Five" in Cantonese) lent a loan;
> **Six** million silver dollars were paid for appeasement;
> **Seven** *qian* and two *fen* (units of weight of Qing China) of sliver could exchange a silver dollar (foreign currency).
> **Eight**-thousand-*jin* (a unit of weight) cannons were unfired;
> **Lasting** (sounds like "Nine" in Cantonese) slackness between combats;
> **Ten**-tenths loss of the battle. [50]

The underlying message is clear: to be a responsible and moral Chinese, one should fight the British rather than seek appeasement. The song expresses the anger against Yishan and Yu Baochun as they disbanded the righteous Sanyuanli militias.[51]

By propagating the Sanyuanli Incident, the gentry increased their political influence over the populace, while the hawkish officials suppressed the dovish faction in political propaganda, if not in political reality. As will be presented below, when the hawkish gentry and officials constructed the Sanyuanli victory to provoke the anti-British sentiments of the common folks, their plain but indignant narratives presented two important features. First, the celebration of the Sanyuanli victory overstated the strength of the Sanyuanli people and portrayed the British as easily conquerable. It seemed that with valiancy and determination even the least armed people could defeat the well-equipped British army. Liang Xinfang, a scholar from Panyu, wrote,

> At Niulangang people from thirteen villages swore an oath out of grouse.
> Never turned back. Never retreated. They were so united without care for life or death.[52]

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[50] Quoted from: A Ying, *Yapian zhanzheng wenxueji*, vol. 1, 248. The Chinese text is: "一(one)声炮响，义 (sounds like "二 two")律埋城。三(three)元里打仗，四(four)方炮台打烂。 伍(sounds like "五 five")紫垣顶上，六(six)百万讲和，七(seven)钱二兑足。八(eight)千斤未烧。久久(sounds like "九 nine") 打下。十(ten)足输晒。"

[51] GPILHR eds., *Sanyuanli renmin*, 162.

[52] Quoted from: GPILHR eds., *Sanyuanli renmin*, 294. The Chinese text is: "十三乡人皆不平，牛栏冈变愤义盟，计不返顾不旋踵，联络一心忘死生……"

Elevating those brave Sanyuanli villagers also dishonored Qing generals and soldiers. Cai Tiaohua, a scholar from Dongguan, satirized Yishan as a powerful cat in front of Chinese people but a timid rat or caught fish before the British:

> Cannons rumbled,
> And people grumbled.
> With millions of soldiers,
> The General was besieged by the Red-haired (the British) as fish in nets,
> And the cat in Canton became a rat.
> Sanyuanli people weren't stronger than the millions of soldiers.
> But why could the ragtag succeed when being irritated?[53]

A direct result of stressing the valiant behavior of the Sanyuanli villagers was the exaggerated death toll of the British troops. According to Julia Lovell, the highest recorded death toll reaches 750.[54] But more likely, the incident resulted in 5~7 British deaths.[55] In other words, the incident had a limited impact on the British. It thus explained why British proclamations written after the Sanyuanli Incident seldom referred to the event. Instead, British officials were busy attempting to reduce anti-British sentiment in China, so they could attract more people to Hong Kong as workers.[56] However, since the British ignored the Sanyuanli Incident, it offered much space for the Chinese to celebrate the victory freely.

Second, another narrative feature was that Guangdong officials were inclined to describe the incident as an anti-British action organized by the peasants themselves. Describing the incident as an unofficial act prevented the British from using the excuse to wage wars for the involvement of Chinese officials in the incident. Unlike the first narrative feature that stressed the valiant actions

[53] Quoted from: GPILHR eds., *Sanyuanli renmin*, 292. The Chinese text is: "炮声隆隆，号声呜呜。将军坐拥十万众，红毛困之鱼在罛，广州城中猫变鼯。…… [三元]里之民，非有强于十万骑。…… 何为乌合众，一怒反得志？"

[54] Lovell, *The Opium War*, 160.

[55] Mao Haijian lists the death tolls from multiple Chinese and English sources: 10 British deaths, according to Yishan, a Manchu officer during the Opium War; over 100 British deaths, stated by Wang Tinglan, a judicial commissioner in Guangdong; over 200 British were killed, claimed by Lin Fuxiang, a head of local militia. By contrast, V.H. Gough, a British Army officer stated that only 5 British were killed; W.H. Medhurst, a translator to George Elliot, indicated that 7 British were killed; and J.E. Bingham, a lieutenant in the Opium War, asserted that only 1 British was killed. For more details, please see: Mao, *Yapian zhanzheng zai yanjiu*, 295-300.

[56] Abe, "The Anglo-Chinese Propaganda Battles," 184.

of the Sanyuanli people, the second strategy highlighted their loyalty. This reaffirmed Luo Bingzhang's argument that Guangdong people could be wisely used to defend the land: valiant Guangdong people would not threaten the Qing court because they were loyal. This challenged Yishan and other generals' view that Guangdong people were traitors. Many Guangdong officials like Zhang Weiping attributed the incident to British misconduct that damaged the homes and fields of the Sanyuanli villagers and thus led to their voluntary resistance against the British:

> As Sanyuanli gives a thundering sign,
> Thousands of people rush to gather.
> Righteousness produces anger and anger produces valiancy,
> Villagers cooperate to destroy their strong enemies.
> Before a war drum gives order,
> Villagers strive to protect families and fields.
> Even women unite themselves as fighters;
> Powerful weapons can merely be coulters.[57]

Similar to the poem, many Chinese records like local gazetteers and official memorials noted that British soldiers destroyed tombs, looted grains, and raped women in the countryside, which outraged the local people.[58] As for British records, Bingham noted that an officer dug several tombs to see how the Chinese embalmed dead bodies when visiting a temple.[59] The British troops also collected food from local villages, putting notices on the door of cooperative households, but uncooperative households would suffer incessant harassments.[60] J.F. Davis admitted that some British soldiers had raped local women.[61] Even if these British misconducts had not occurred, Guangdong officials would still need to make the populace believe that they had. Accordingly, the Sanyuanli Incident could be remembered as a voluntary action out of local resentment against British misconducts.

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[57] Quoted from: GPILHR, *Sanyuanli renmin*, 291. The Chinese text is: "三元里前声若雷，千众万众同时来，因义生愤愤生勇，乡民合力强徒摧。家室田庐须保卫，不待鼓声群作气，妇女齐心亦健儿，犁锄在手皆兵器。"

[58] GPILHR, *Sanyuanli renmin*, 1-316.

[59] John Elliot Bingham, *Narrative of the Expedition to China: From the Commencement of the War to Its Termination in 1842; with Sketches of the Manners and Customs of that Singular and Hither Almost Unknown Country* (London, UK: H. Colbum, 1843), vol. 1, 231-232. https://archive.org/details/narrativeexpedi01binggoog

[60] Arthur Waley, *The Opium War through Chinese Eyes* (London, UK: Allen & Unwin, 1958), 109-196.

[61] Wakeman, *Strangers at the Gate*, 16-17.

Nonetheless, as some historians like P.W. Fay, Mao Haijian and Frederic Wakeman argue, the Sanyuanli Incident was not organized by the villagers themselves; instead, the gentry instigated the villagers and led the action.[62] Fay even suspects that it was Guangdong officials like Yu who asked the gentry to organize those villagers.[63] Following official support for local militias, the local gentry contacted village schools and secret societies to prepare for the attack on the British troops.[64] Wang Shaoguan, a former official, organized militias from six villages in Panyu. Liang Tingnan, a former adviser to Lin Zexu, united twelve village schools to form a defense system.[65] They spread posters regarding rumors of British misconduct and spurious aggressive British edicts.[66] Finally, they organized thousands of villagers and asked them to swear a blood oath to defend their villages; each village had its name inscribed in a banner with the characters, "righteous people."[67] Therefore, the Sanyuanli Incident was not free of any influence from the local gentry and officials. Instead, it was a result of the political strategy to link personal grievances against British misconduct with national interests against British troops.

In brief, supported by Guangdong officials, the local gentry constructed the story of the Sanyuanli victory and spread it across Guangdong and even to other parts of China, thus mobilizing more people to follow the model of the Sanyuanli villagers who bravely fought the British. After the incident, mobilizing local militias became more popular across China, especially in coastal areas. Even the common folks tended to believe in their power. After the Sanyuanli Incident, a painting illustrating the defeat of the British was circulated at Sanyuanli and a few other villages. The text below is attached to the painting.[68]

> From the white cloud hills,

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[62] Peter W. Fay, *The Opium War 1840-1842* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1975), 302; Wakeman, *Strangers at the Gate*, 2-3; Mao, *Yapian zhanzheng zai yanjiu*, 308-309.
[63] Fay, *The Opium War 1840-1842*, 302.
[64] Mao, *Yapian zhanzheng zai yanjiu*, 307-309.
[65] Wakeman, *Strangers at the Gate*, 39.
[66] Abe, "The Anglo-Chinese Propaganda Battles," 186.
[67] Fay, *The Opium War 1840-1842*, 299.
[68] GPILHR eds., *Sanyuanli renmin*, 292-3.

The Heavenly Lord poured down his rain,
And many hundred devilish barbarians
Were by it utterly annihilated.
The head of one was thrust into a cage,
It was their great chief Bremer.
At this their courage and hearts became as water,
Routed, they threw off their clothes and fled.
Our people rousing their martial valor,
From all places cut off retreat,
And the whole crew were clean swept away.
The devil-ships all fled
Far beyond the Tiger's gate.[69]

It is ironic that although China was defeated by the British in real military confrontation, the deity-like Sanyuanli people "subjugated" the devilish British troops in stories and legends, and in the propaganda led by the hawkish gentry and officials in Guangdong. The song depicts the villagers' victory in the Sanyuanli Incident as religious magic. Since "the Heavenly Lord poured down his rain" during the incident and thus made British firearms inoperative, the villagers' use of stone and wooden weapons in their fights with the British seemed less ridiculous. The song also implies that the British invasion of Guangdong was unjust and deserved to be "punished" by "the Heavenly Lord," so the villagers' attack upon the British was undoubtedly just. Moreover, the song highlights that the commander-in-chief of the British forces in China, Gordon Bremer, was beheaded in the Sanyuanli Incident, which glorifies the victory of the Chinese side to an extreme extent. In reality, Bremer was in India when the Sanyuanli Incident happened.[70]

Despite all that, the power of the populace was not a complete illusion, magic, or something that only existed in propaganda. The Sanyuanli Incident was merely the prelude to a series of popular struggles against foreigners in Guangdong. After the Treaty of Nanking was signed, British diplomats and merchants demanded to enter Canton, but their entry was refused by the locals. In 1842, 1845 and 1849, Canton experienced British military aggression three times, but

[69] The original text in Chinese is lost. For the whole translation by John E. Bingham, please see: John Elliot Bingham, *Narrative of the Expedition to China: From the Commencement of the War to Its Termination in 1842; with Sketches of the Manners and Customs of that Singular and Hither Almost Unknown Country* (London: H. Colbum, 1843), vol. 2, 173-4. https://archive.org/details/narrativeexpedi00binggoog

[70] Mao, *Yapian zhanzheng zai yanjiu*, 298.

the Canton populace responded with unceasing resistance. For instance, wool textile and cotton yarn merchants in the city suspended their trade with British merchants. A local merchant organized a group of militiamen: some were voluntary Canton residents while others were sent by different shops; each small shop sent one person, each medium shop sent two persons, and each large shop sent three persons; any shop refused to do so should donate funds instead. A scholar suggested splashing the British with hot water and porridge once they approached the city gates of Canton. Jiuyao neighborhood put up a notice, telling all residents to prepare sticks at their homes in case of any British presence; Daxin neighborhood proposed a plan, urging each resident to donate funds for the urban defense. According to Liang Tingnan, hundreds of the Canton population went on patrol near the Pearl River from day to night.[71] Overall, even though the story of the Sanyuanli victory contains deliberate exaggeration, omission, and fabrication, the urge and endeavor of the Guangdong populace in defending their land, either for their own interests or the country, were not fake.

Conclusion

Through popular culture forms like Cantonese operas and ballads, Guangdong elites stigmatized opium selling and consumption, labeled the doves as traitors, and propagated the Chinese victory over the British in the Sanyuanli Incident. While the populace cooperated with officials in some cases, they dissociated from officials in others.[72] In reality, there were gaps between what the propaganda by Guangdong elites presented and how the populace truly thought and responded. The folk song, "People are afraid of officials. Officials are afraid of foreigners. Foreigners are afraid of people!", reveals the complex relationships between the populace,

[71] Yang Qiu, *Biange shiqi de shenghuo Jindai Guangzhou fengshang xisu yanjiu* (Life in the transitional period: Research on the customs of modern Guangzhou) (Guangzhou: Jinan daxue xuebao, 2013), 108-9.
[72] Chen Xulu, "Yapian zhanzheng yu Zhongguo chuantong shehui benglie" (The Opium War and the social split in traditional Chinese society), in *Jindaishi yanjiu* 60 (1990): 64.

officials, and foreigners in China's modern history. Tension between the populace and officials was commonplace throughout history, but the heightened conflicts between the Chinese (both the populace and officials) and foreigners characterized the period starting from the Opium War.[73]

In fact, the anti-foreign propaganda by Guangdong elites complicated the official-populace relationships. Although anti-foreign sentiments always existed, xenophobia in Guangdong was intensively politicized during the Opium War. The anti-opium, anti-dove, and anti-British propaganda by the hawkish gentry and officials reversed the conventional official superiority over the populace, as those Cantonese commoners who bravely defended their home from British aggression appeared morally superior to the dovish officials. With the common folks supporting some hawkish officials in terms of personnel, finance, and public opinion, the government borrowed power from the populace to fight the British. While the populace did not necessarily "frighten" the British in a literal sense, they did pose a threat to the British forces. When the Arrow War (1856-1860) or the so-called Second Opium War broke out in 1856, organizing local militias won stronger support from the government to counter the invaders.

Nevertheless, as Xia Xie commented, if the populace truly frightened the British, they could similarly frighten the Qing government. In fact, the aforementioned ballad continued to retain its popularity to the period of the Taiping Rebellion.[74] During the Opium War, the song reflected how Guangdong officials tried to use the Chinese-British conflicts to cover the official-populace conflicts within the Chinese. Ironically, when the Chinese resentment against foreigners could not overweight the popular grievances against the Qing court, there were anti-state movements like the Taiping Rebellion. Therefore, in the coming two decades, namely the 1850s and 1860s, anti-government (accompanied by anti-Manchu) and anti-foreign sentiments were interwoven in the turbulence brought by the Taiping Rebellion and the Second Opium War.

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[73] Jiang Tao, "Yapian zhanzheng qianhou Zhongguo guanmin guanxi shanbian" (Changes in the relationships between officials and the populace before and after the First Opium War), in *Zhongguo shehui kexue* 2 (2010): 1-2.

[74] Xia Xie, *Yuefen jishi* (Accounts of atmosphere in Guangdong) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2008), 2.

Chapter 2
The Taiping Leaders, Pseudo-Christianity, and Anti-Qing State Mobilization

The Taiping Rebellion was initiated by a group of Guangdong Hakka leaders like Hong Xiuquan through the God Worshipping Society (GWS) that was founded in Guangxi in 1844. It was a Civil War between the army of the Qing court and the Hong-led rebels of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom (THK) from 1851 to 1864. Ironically, Hong and his earliest followers, such as Feng Yunshan and Hong Rengan, originally tried hard to enter civil services for the Qing government through their participation in the Confucianism-based imperial examinations. Their turn from the Qing state and state ideology of Confucianism to the anti-Qing rebellion and pseudo-Christianity reflected the increasingly strained relations between the Qing government and social elites in Guangdong after the Opium War (1839-1842).

Hong Xiuquan failed the prefectural level of civil service exams four times; Hong Rengan failed three times. Feng also suffered repeated failures in the Qing imperial exams, but he saved his face by earning a "Zhuangyuan" (状元, Number One Scholar) title in a literary exam hosted by the THK shortly before his death.[1] Their personal failures in the Confucianism-based imperial exams constituted just one of many reasons for their conversion to the newly introduced Western religion of Christianity and eventually to the anti-Qing rebellion, as previous studies have indicated.[2] However, their conversion from the state-sponsored Confucianism to the foreign

[1] Luo Ergang, "Dui jiuzhu *Taiping tianguo shigao: Keju zhi* juxing kaoshi shiyu yonganzhou shi shuofa dingwu" (Correcting an error that the Taiping civil service examinations started in Yongan Prefecture in my previous work *Historical Manuscripts of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom: Civil Service Examinations*), in *Anhui shixue* 4 (1984): 1-3.

[2] Other reasons include: the competition between limited land and increasing population; the huge indemnity after China's defeat in the Opium War; the feuds between the Hakkas and other local residents in rural Guangxi; the Han nationalism that motivated the Taiping leaders to overturn the Qing government ruled the Manchus; and so on. For further information, please read monographs such as: Jian Youwen, *Taiping tianguo quanshi* (A complete history of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom), (Hong Kong: Mengjin shuwu, 1962), vol. 1, 7; Fan Wenlan, *Taiping tainguo geming yundong* (The revolutionary movement of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom) (Shanghai: Xinhua shudian, 1949), 1-94.

religion of Christianity did not prevent them from using traditional Chinese popular culture in their anti-Qing mobilization and Sinicization of Christian tenets. Their popular culture propaganda and the responses from the peasants and other lower classes also exemplified new relations between social elites and the populace.

Overall, prevailing interpretations of the Taiping Rebellion center around the ideologies and activities of the Taiping leaders rather than what Taiping Christianity and the movement meant to the populace. To fill in the gap, this chapter will explore how some Guangdong-originated Taiping leaders like Hong used popular culture forms like Hakka ballads and folk religious customs to mobilize the populace against the Qing state, and how the populace responded to it. In other words, this chapter will focus on the elites and ordinary people involved in the Taiping Rebellion more than the rebellion itself.

Jonathan Spence's book has gone beyond the macroscopic rise and fall of the Taiping Rebellion by tracing Hong Xiuquan's spiritual journey through Christian belief that finally motivated him to wage an anti-Qing rebellion.[3] But people's reactions to Hong's preaching are not the focus of his book. In contrast, Tobie Meyer-Fong's book transcends statistics like death toll to study how commoners confronted losses at the individual, familial, and social levels, though her study highlights how popular experiences diverged from elite politics.[4] Instead of investigating the intellectual history of the Taiping leaders or the everyday experiences of the populace, this chapter will examine the effects of the Taiping leaders' use of popular culture for mobilizing their followers against the Qing state.

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[3] Jonathan D. Spence, *God's Chinese Son: the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom of Hong Xiuquan* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1996), 3-332.

[4] Tobie Meyer-Fong, *What Remains: Coming to Terms with Civil War in 19th Century China* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2013), 1-207.

Taiping Christianity: Foreign or Native Religion?

Just like previous rebels, the Taiping leaders legitimized their uprising by erecting a dissent belief to rival the Confucian orthodoxy sanctioned by the Qing dynasty, but they resorted to Christianity rather than a Chinese belief. In theory, Christianity excludes idols other than God, but Hong and other Taiping leaders' attitudes towards Confucianism and Chinese folk religions were self-contradictory. For example, while Hong attacked Confucius and folk idols in his preaching texts, he also quoted Confucian classics to critique gamboling, drinking, and smoking opium.[5] Scholars like Rong Sheng describe these self-contradictions as the naivety of the Taiping leaders.[6] Instead of debating over whether the ideology of the Taiping leaders was more Chinese or more Christian, this section will examine the ways that Taiping Christianity was spread to the populace.

When examining why the THK was appealing to the populace, many scholars cite *Tianchao tianmu zhidu* (The land system of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom) and *Zizheng xinpian* (New administrative paper) to prove that the Taipings promoted egalitarianism, social welfare, and modern industries. But *Tianchao tianmu zhidu* had very few printed copies during the rebellion. As for *Zizheng xinpian*, by large only its author Hong Rengan knew its contents well.[7] Both documents are not materials that most Taiping followers were familiar with. In fact, it was through popular culture materials like preaching songs and prophetic doggerels created by the Taiping leaders that the populace received propaganda information.

While scholars like Wang Qingcheng attack these popular culture sources for lacking historical authenticity, Guan Lin suggests that they provide relevance for significant events like

[5] Zhongguo shixuehui (The History Society of China) ed., *Taiping tianguo* (The Taiping Heavenly Kingdom), (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 2000), vol. 1, 87-91.

[6] Rong Sheng, "Hong Xiuquan yu *Quanshi liangyan*" (Hong Xiuquan and *Good words exhorting the world*), in *Lishi yanjiu* 7 (1978): 48-55.

[7] Qin Hui, "Taiping tianguo chuantong minbian de teshu biaoben" (The Taiping Heavenly Kingdom and a special type of traditional peasant uprising), in *Guojia lishi* 8 (2011): 88-94.

military advance of the THK.[8] Reconciling the two conflicting standpoints, this chapter will examine the propaganda of the Taiping leaders and the reception of their followers. Even exaggeration, omission, and fantasy in popular culture materials of the THK could offer insights into how its leaders distinguished themselves from the Qing court and what they wanted the populace to believe, and to what extent the populace accepted their propaganda. In particular, a striking fantasy in their popular culture propaganda was those supernatural messages and customs of Taiping Christianity.

As Luo Ergang asserts, many propaganda materials of the Taiping leaders contain backward religious elements, but they used Christian monotheism merely as a tool to attack corrupt Confucian ideologies and folk religions, and used Christian rules to organize their followers. In reality, the Taiping leaders used doggerels and other vernacular literary forms to educate the common folks on anti-feudal ideas.[9] Luo's argument sets "feudal" Taiping Christianity against "anti-feudal" vernacular literature, implying that the former harmed the populace while the latter benefited the populace. However, such categorization is a contemporary assumption of the mentalities of the Taipings. In fact, Taiping Christianity offered ideas relevant to popular demands through ways that the populace was familiar with, which mobilized many Chinese to rebel against the state.

According to Philip Kuhn, Taiping Christianity was not a part of popular culture given its dramatic departure from Chinese folk religious traditions.[10] However, even though Christianity

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[8] Guan Lin eds., *Taiping tianguo minjian gushi geyao lunwenji* (Collected papers on the folktales and ballads of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom) (Guangning: Guangdong gaodeng jiaoyu chubanshe, 1992), 1-322; Wang Qingcheng, *Taiping tianguo de lishi he sixiang* (History and ideology of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1985), 383-5.

[9] Luo Ergang eds., "Qianyan" (Preface), in *Taiping tianguo shiwen xuan* (Selected poetry and essays of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1960), 16-18.

[10] Philip A. Kuhn, "The Taiping Rebellion," in *The Cambridge History of China*, eds. John K. Fairbank, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), vol. 10, 316-317.

has a western origin, some Christian ideas were relevant to the living realities of the Chinese populace. For one thing, biblical stories helped the Chinese reconcile their puzzles and fear brought by China's defeat in the Opium War. As stories of the great flood destroying the sinful world and the fall of sinful cities like Sodom imply, China's defeat by western "barbarians" was a punishment for misbeliefs of the Chinese in Confucius and folk idols. The story of Exodus offered a more direct explanation for the victory of the British over the Chinese: if the Israelites could not keep their faith in God, God would let foreigners subjugate them and let them be slaves of foreign nations. From Rong' perspective, biblical stories fooled the Chinese by beautifying western imperialism as a trial to test the faith of the Chinese.[11] Nevertheless, obedience to God was by no means equal to obedience to western missionaries and colonialists. According to Hong Xiuquan, some countries in the world had their own access to Heaven while others did not, and China was one of God's elects—God gave a part of its own name, Yehuohua (Jehovah's Chinese translation: 爷火华) to Zhonghua (中华), or China.[12] The belief in God was thus relevant to save the Chinese from foreign hands—the Manchus or westerners.

More importantly, even if the "ideas" in Taiping Christianity were irrelevant to the populace, the "formats" or "ways" that Taiping Christianity was spread to the populace were rooted in some Chinese folk religious practices such as *chaizi* (dissecting Chinese characters) and *jiangtong* (spirit possession) that the populace was accustomed to. According to Hong's apocalyptical vision in 1837, God sent his second son, Hong Xiuquan, to save people from the suppression of demons. In 1848, Hong Xiuquan and Feng Yunshan polished the story of Hong's vision and composed *Taiping tianri* (the Taiping heavenly day). Although the document was not extensively printed before 1862,

[11] Rong, "Hong Xiuquan yu *Quanshi liangyan*," 48-55.
[12] Rudolf Wagner, *Reenacting the Heavenly Vision: The Role of Religion in the Taiping Rebellion* (Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, 1982), 47-48, 118.

many Taiping followers had known the story of Hong's vision well through daily preaching.[13] In the vision, God asked Hong to use "quan" (全) as his name. The Chinese character for "quan" (全) is composed of "ren" (人, man [men]) and "wang" (王, king), which means "the king of men."[14] God also sang a prophetic hymn to Hong, asking Hong to reveal his true identity in the future. The implication of the complete hymn is obscure, but this obscurity can be a strategy to increase mystery and leave room for interpretations. One line of the prophetic hymn is "youge qianzi shao yibi" (有个千字少一笔), which means "The character 'qian' (千, thousand) losses one of its strokes."[15] If "qian" (千, thousand) losses one of its strokes, it can still be a character meaning "shi" (十, ten), which looks like the Christian symbol of the crucifixion of Jesus.[16] Altogether, the prophecy augured that Hong Xiuquan was sent by God to lead all Chinese to build a Christian kingdom.

To further erect Hong's supreme leadership, the Taipings also spread an anecdote that some villagers near Guilin discovered a stele inscribed with a prophetic song.[17] The song held the secrets of the savior of the poor. If singers and audiences deciphered the lyrics with the Chinese folk religious custom of *chaizi* (dissecting Chinese characters), they could "magically" discover the constituents of Hong Xiuquan's name from the song. But in fact, this prophetic song "accidentally" discovered by villagers is just about the same as a doggerel poem deliberately composed by Hong.[18]

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[13] Prescott Clarke and J. S. Gregory, *Western Reports on the Taiping: A Selection of Documents* (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1982), 86-90; Wagner, *Reenacting the Heavenly Vision*, 18.
[14] Wagner, *Reenacting the Heavenly Vision*, 27.
[15] Zhongguo shixuehui, *Taiping tianguo*, vol. 2, 640.
[16] Spence, *God's Chinese Son*, 98-99.
[17] Zhongguo shixuehui, *Taiping tianguo*, vol. 4, 406. The Chinese text for the song is: "三星日出共照天，有福作主救人善，万人识得禾救饥，手扶日头好上天。"
[18] Taiping tianguo lishi bowuguan (Heavenly Kingdom History Museum, or TTLB hereafter), *Taiping tianguo shige xuan* (Selected poetry of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom) (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1978), 14; Dong Conglin, "Youguan Taiping tianguo de chenyao xianxiang jiexi" (Analysis of prophetic songs about the Taiping

To prevent the claim for spiritual power by regular members of the GWS, its core leaders like Hong Xiuquan endeavored to identify evils inside the GWS by using a popular religious practice called *jiangtong* (spirit possession). When practicing *jiangtong*, wizards would suddenly fall and lay on the ground, and then behaved and spoke as their minds were possessed by spirits of gods and ghosts. Wizards would thus be able to exorcize evil spirits, bring good fortune, predict future, and cure diseases for local villagers. When Hong missionized Christianity in Guangxi, many GWS members always "fell sick" accidentally and gave out warnings, blames, and predictions as being captivated. To control the situations, Hong used his authority in the GWS to claim that Yang Xiuqing's possession by God and Xiao Chaogui's possession by Jesus were divine, while other members' possessions by folk idols were evil. Thereafter, God and Jesus frequently descended to earth and questioned the identities of new members of the GWS through the mouths of Yang and Xiao. By judging good and evil of spiritual possession, Hong assuaged the internal chaos of the GWS, elevated his assistants to the leadership circle, and fortified his status as the supreme leader of all followers.[19]

Nonetheless, when the Taiping leaders boasted their military victories over the Qing army, they always compared themselves to idols and heroes in Chinese folk customs, not merely those in Christianity.[20] According to a tale from Yangzhou, a Taiping general explained his military successes to the common folks by saying that he modeled after Zhang Fei, a brave general in the era of the Three Kingdoms (220-280AD).[21] Because the names of Zhang Fei, together with many

Heavenly Kingdom), in *Anhui shixue* 1 (2003): 58-62. The Chinese text for the song is: "三星共照日出天，禾王作主救人善，尔们认得禾救饥，乃念日头好上天。"

[19] Zhou Xirui, *Yihetuan yundong de qiyuan* (The origins of the Boxer Uprising), trans. Zhang Junyi and Wang Dong (Nanjing: Jiangsu renmin chubanshe, 1998), 372-374.

[20] Luo, *Taiping tianguo shiwen xuan*, 194; TTLB, *Taiping tianguo shige*, 31.

[21] Zhongguo kexueyuan Jiangsu fenyuan (Jiangsu Branch of Chinese Academy of Sciences or JBCAS hereafter), *Taiping tianguo geyao chuanshuo ji* (Collection of ballads and folktales about the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom) (Nanjing: Jiangsu wenyi chubanshe, 1960), 63-4.

other heroic figures in Chinese history, like Yue Fei, Guan Yu, and Zhao Zilong, always appeared in popular legends, stories, and dramas, the common folks were familiar with the brilliant spirits and actions of these Chinese military generals. On the contrary, if the Taiping leaders boasted of their military valiancy and compared themselves to Christian heroes like Joshua and Samson, the effect of propaganda would diminish because the Chinese populace lacked the cultural background to recognize how great these biblical heroes were.[22]

In brief, just as Joseph Esherick points out, the Taiping leaders used Chinese folk religious customs and traditions to help the populace familiarize the Taiping ideal of Christianizing China.[23] Also because Taiping Christianity was encapsulated in Chinese customary practices, most Taiping followers barely had a clear sense of Christianity and they might not even know that they were practicing a foreign religion. The populace was familiar with God's Chinese name, "Shangdi." "Shangdi" also refers to the Five Emperors in the mythological era of Chinese history in Confucianism, and to Huangtian shangdi or Yuhuang dadi (the Jade Emperor), the highest Daoist god in Heaven.[24]

Moreover, Hong's claim of being the "Son of God" was similar to the Chinese idea of the emperor as the "Son of Heaven" even from the perspective of westerners.[25] Hong's promise of "the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom" aimed to "build a small Heaven on earth" and "survive great disasters." Similar religious beliefs had given rise to previous popular uprisings like the White

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[22] Feng Zhihong, *Christianity and China: A Historical and Philosophical Perspective* (Hong Kong: City University of Hong Kong, 2015), 67.
[23] Zhou, *Yihetuan yundong de qiyuan*, 373.
[24] After Matteo Ricci came to China, he translated "God" into "Shangdi (a terms already existed in Chinese history)" to help Chinese understand this foreign religious concept. Later, Christian missionaries inherited Ricci's translation, and Liang Fa, a Chinese Christian missionary, also used "Shangdi" to refer to God. The Bible Hong Xiuquan first read was Liang Fa's version.
[25] Clarke and Gregory, *Western Reports on the Taiping*, 275.

Lotus Rebellions, although they did not promise "to ascend to Heaven after death," as Christian millennialism often stressed.[26]

Therefore, possibly for the common folks, Hong Xiuquan (the King of Heaven) was the Son of God, Holy Ghost or God's messenger was the King of the East (Yang Xiuqing), and Jesus was the King of the West (Xiao Chaogui); the Trinity of God, Jesus Christ, and Holy Ghost simply meant the unity of Hong, Yang, and Xiao—many people regarded those Christian terms as the titles of the Taiping leaders instead of grasping the theological meanings of those terms.[27] Regardless of whether Hong Xiuquan and other Taiping leaders had a deliberate intention to utilize the influence of Chinese folk religious practices and idols, the Chinese populace possibly deciphered Taiping Christianity as a familiar religion more than a completely foreign one.

Cultural Vernacularism in the Taiping Propaganda

The spread of Taiping Christianity and the expansion of the Taiping Rebellion not only resulted from the Taiping leaders' efforts to incorporate Chinese folk religious practices into their pseudo-Christianity. They also made full use of other popular culture forms like ballads, doggerels, and operas for their political mobilization against the Qing government. Although Luo Ergang sets folk religious customs against these vernacular literary materials, the two types of popular culture actually reinforced each other in supporting the propaganda of the Taiping leaders.

In 1847, Hong Xiuquan and Feng Yunshan propagated a humanitarian image of the GWS by dismantling the temple for King Gan, a folk idol popular in Guangxi. When King Gan was alive, he killed his mother and used her blood to instill magical power into the clan graveyard for the prosperity of his family. People there had to erect statues for King Gan, otherwise, they would fall

[26] Zhou, *Yihetuan yundong de qiyuan*, 369-70.
[27] Clarke and Gregory, *Western Reports on the Taiping*, 292.

sick or suffer other disasters. However, Hong and Feng removed a statue for King Gan in Xiangzhou. Composing doggerels and inscribing them on the wall of the temple, they condemned the local idol for killing his mother, deceiving God, and violating the Heavenly Laws. Their doggerel promised that "If people here are afraid [of King Gan], please read the Heavenly Laws from the clay wall [of his temple]."[28] Although the action of removing King Gan's statue only lasted for one day, the story of this brave action together with a caring image of the GWS was magnified by the doggerels to influence many people for decades.

Luo hyperbolizes that the vernacular propaganda materials of the Taipings, such as the doggerels attacking King Gan, should be the first instance of the literature for the populace as opposed to the feudal literature for the elites.[29] However, before the Taiping Rebellion, Emperor Kangxi had issued the Sacred Edict to instruct his subjects in orthodox Confucian ideas. Later emperors also ordered local officials to help vernacularize the edict according to local customs and dialects for common villagers. During the Taiping Rebellion, the Qing state was also active in using popular culture to influence the common folks: the state not only erected Guandi (Guan Yu) as the protector of the Qing state in a hope that Qing soldiers could borrow Guandi's military power to defeat the Taipings but also encouraged "loyal scholars and public servants to do house-to-house preaching against Taiping Christianity."[30]

Hence, Luo's praise for the Taipings' propaganda is exaggerated. It is more precise to argue that the Taiping rebels and the Qing state contested with each other for popular support by using popular culture. For example, there was a sensible earthquake shortly after the Taipings established

[28] TTLB, *Taiping tianguo shige xuan*, 12, 28. The Chinese texts for the doggerels are: "打死母亲干国法，欺瞒上帝犯天条" and "该处人民如害怕，请从土壁读天条."
[29] Luo, *Taiping tianguo shiwen xuan*, 15.
[30] Wagner, *Reenacting the Heavenly Vision*, 8, 116.

their capital in Nanjing. The Qing court and the Taiping rebels competed to interpret this natural disaster for the populace. Qing loyalists spread a rumor that the earthquake warned the illegitimacy of the THK. Aware of the rumor, Hong Xiuquan composed a doggerel song, "The earthquake was a sign of a new look; The world was turned upside down to erect a new and perpetual Heavenly Dynasty.", and used it to appease the panic of the populace.[31]

Despite that, the Taipings, compared with the Qing court, had put even more efforts to align themselves with the common folks through popular culture, and most official documents of the THK feature vernacular and memorable rhythms. As Hong Rengan claimed, slang and colloquial words fooled the enemies of the Taipings and popularized Christian claims by replacing elitist prejudice with vernacularism.[32] Most early members of the GWS were poor peasants and marginalized "vagrants" like miners, carpenters, barbers, boatmen, charlatans, fortunetellers and other lower classes who could hardly feed themselves.[33] To a large extent, it was through the conscious use of vernacular propaganda materials that the Taiping leaders were able to win support from many lower-class allies to oppose the elite-oriented Qing state.

Since most Taiping leaders and the early followers of the GWS were Hakkas, many official documents of the THK feature Hakka dialects and ballads. Declaring that even the slightest offense against the Heavenly Laws will be detected by God, an imperial edict from Hong Xiuquan contains two typical Hakka tropes, "mishai yan" (米筛眼, sieve-like eyes) and "luodou yan" (罗斗眼, sieve-like eyes) to claim that "perceptive eyes can catch the slightest things."[34] As a doggerel

[31] TTLB, *Taiping tianguo shige xuan*, 24. The Chinese text for the doggerel song is: "地转实为新地兆，天旋永立新天朝。"

[32] Zhong Wendian, "Kejia yu Taiping tianguo geming" (Hakkas and the Taiping Heavenly Revolution), *Guangxi shifan daxue xuebao* 1 (1991): 5.

[33] Tang Xiaotao, "Baishangdihui huimiao shijian de shehuishi kaocha" (Investigating Baishangdihui's actions of destroying temples through the lens of social history), *Jindaishi yanjiu* 3 (2011): 16.

[34] Wang Qingcheng, "Chongjiao *Tianxiong shengzhi Tianfu shengzi* 1" (Review *Decree of the Heavenly Brother* and *Decree of the Heavenly Father*, part 1), *Jindaishi ziliao* 89 (1996): 183.

order by Hong Xiuquan notes, “People involved in a ‘fingernail’ of (a little bit of) heresy, wrongdoing, evil, and fake are demons or ghosts who won’t be tolerated by Heaven.”[35] A “fingernail” refers to something tiny or insignificant in Hakka dialects. In addition, concerned with primary education, Hong Xiuquan composed *Shijiu shi* (Poem of ten salvations) for his son and son-in-law. *Shijiu shi* imitates the format of “Yue guangguang (Bright moonlight),” a traditional Hakka ballad used to nurse children. Normally, using repeated characters and words is a taboo in writing classical Chinese poetry. This rule, however, does not apply to Hakka ballads, which impress singers and audiences with repetitions, such as “Tianye diedie yan zhenzhen” (天爷爹爹眼针针, God always keeps its eyes on everything).[36] “Yan zhenzhen” (眼针针) is a Hakka dialectal word meaning vigilant eyes. In brief, the vernacularism of these documents indicates that these materials either came from or could be easily turned into oral preaching that could broadly reach the uneducated classes.

However, as the Taiping Rebellion expanded beyond provincial borders of Guangdong and Guangxi where large number of Hakkas lived, Hakka features are less predominant in some of the Taiping documents. In addition to the *Shijiu shi* for Hong’s sons and sons-in-law (Hakkas), the THK issued its versions of *Sanzi jing* (Three-character classic), *Qianzi wen* (Thousand-character essay), and *Youxue shi* (Poems for children’s education) for all children and people with little literacy (many were non-Hakkas). Helping instruct Christian ideas with scrutable languages, these materials do not feature Hakka songs and dialectal words because their target readers were more

[35] Zhongguo shixuehui, *Taiping tianguo*, vol. 2, 435; Bin Changchu, “Lun Taiping tianguo de zhengxie guan” (On views of rightness and evil of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom), *Guangxi shifan daxue xuebao* 6 (2011): 139-143. The Chinese doggerel order is: “人有手指甲一些邪, 人有手指甲一些曲, 人有手指甲一些恶, 人有手指甲一些假, 还是妖, 还是鬼, 都不转得天也。”

[36] Ye Chunsheng, *Lingnan suwenxue jianshi* (A brief history of the vernacular literature of Lingnan) (Guangzhou: Guangdong gaodeng jiaoyu chubanshe, 1996), 403-404.

than Hakkas.[37] The Taipings would print those materials and stick them on arrows, then launching bows to throw them into the cities and towns they encircled.[38] The Taipings even loaded those printed materials into boats, and then released the boats from the upper reaches of rivers to have the materials spread to people living in the middle and lower reaches. The Taiping soldiers were also obligated to explain the doctrines and claims of the THK to peasants during days of rain and to persuade captives to their side.[39]

Moreover, the Taipings also adapted to the cultural and linguistic traditions in non-Hakka areas. For instance, opera and drama performances based on non-Hakka customs and dialects were also used to glorify the Taipings. Although the THK banned operas and dramas as many performances cultivated the loyalty to the Qing state, the ban was never strictly executed. In birthdays of the Taiping leaders and other celebratory events, shadowgraphs, Huagu operas, Kun operas, and so on were staged frequently to tell stories of resistance against the authority in Chinese history.[40]

As a specific example, Cantonese opera performers had buttressed the Taiping Rebellion in various ways. After the Taipings entered Nanjing, they also focused their attention on Liangguang (Guangdong and Guangxi provinces) for more financial resources and military supplies. In Guangdong, Li Wenmao was one of the rebellious leaders who contacted the secret envoys from the THK and planed uprisings in the province. In fact, Li was an opera singer from Guangdong who led his opera troupe to respond to the Taiping Rebellion in 1854. Li and his followers

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[37] Zhongguo shixuehui, *Taiping tianguo*, vol. 1, 225-227.

[38] Yao Dadui, "Qimeng jiaoyu yu zhengzhi xuanchuan: Taiping tianguo *Sanzijing* de yingyi he huixiang" (Children's education and political propaganda: The English translations and introspection of the Taipings' *Three-Character Classic*), *Jinan xuebao* 1 (2017): 21.

[39] Qu Zhiqing, "Shilun Taiping tianguo de jiaoyu gaige" (Educational reform of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom), in *Zhongshan daxue xuebao* 5 (1976): 42.

[40] Xia Chuntao, *Tianguo de yunluo* (The fall of the Heavenly Kingdom) (Beijing: Zhongguo renmin daxue chubanshe, 2006), 234-246.

cooperated with Foshan Triad Society to start their uprising to capture Canton, but later they worked with the Triad Society in Guangxi and established the Dacheng Kingdom there. Li's soldiers, who were opera actors before, wrapped themselves with red turbans, dressed up in costumes, and named their positions with the roles they had formerly played.[41] Li's soldiers also utilized the acrobatic skills they had formerly acquired like turning somersaults and performing curvets in battles. In popular tales, Li's soldiers could vault over city walls like flying birds, which frightened Qing soldiers and forced them to flee in haste. A proclamation of the Dacheng Kingdom, written in colloquial Cantonese language in 1857, declared to the masses of Liuzhou that an opera performance would be arranged to eulogize the military victories of the rebel army and to share happiness with people.[42] Although the performance of Cantonese opera was in Guangxi, there was no shortage of audiences. As an important traffic transit, Liuzhou was awash with merchants from Guangdong. These merchants established guild halls there, with Cantonese opera theaters attached to those halls; opera theaters attached to local temples were also commonplace. In addition, since Liuzhou dialect is largely similar to Cantonese dialect, Cantonese operas are scrutable to non-Cantonese.

Popular Responses: Assent, Dissent, and Adaptations

Chen Disheng, a chief editor of volumes of popular culture materials about the Taiping Rebellion, critiques that most folktales and ballads only glorify the Taiping Rebellion because peasants were so short-sighted and superstitious as to believe the unreal promises in the

[41] Guan, *Collected Papers*, 274.

[42] Gu Lezhen, "Taiping tianguo de lingzhan shiye" (The Taiping Heavenly Kingdom and Opera Performers), in *Guangzhou wenshi ziliao: Yueju chunqiu* (Literary and historical sources of Guangzhou: The age of Cantonese operas), vol. 42, eds. Guangzhou wenshi ziliao yanjiu weiyuanhui (Research committee for literary and historical sources of Guangzhou) (Guangzhou: Guangdong renmin chubanshe, 1990), 122-27.

propaganda of the Taiping leaders.[43] It is true that the majority of the Taiping ballads and folktales deify the Taiping leaders and describe popular assent to the call of the Taipings. For example, with the promotion of Hong Xiuquan's divinity, legends and tales about him were broadly circulated among the common folks. In Hua County, Hong's home place, it was widely said that on the night when he was born, his father saw a golden light glistening in heaven; on the night of Hong's first month of life, his father saw a golden dragon sleeping on Hong's bed. It was also said that there were many drum-shaped stones near the homeland of Hong and that children always jumped onto those stones for fun. No children but Hong made a sound like beating drums when jumping onto those stones.[44] There are also rich folktales about how the populace tricked Qing soldiers and officials and provided military and logistic support for the Taiping army. Ballads like "Sending my son to join the Taiping army" and "Following Hong [Xiuquan] and Yang [Xiuqing] regardless of life or death" are similarly commonplace.[45]

On the other hand, Chen ignores that many people assented to the propaganda of the Taiping leaders and resorted to "superstitious" Taiping Christianity because it satisfied their practical demands and interests that were unfulfilled under the Qing state. In the 1840s, many prayers of the GWS begged for good health, warm cloth, and sufficient food.[46] Since 1851, Hong used rewards like promotion and wealth in this life rather than ascending to Heaven to motivate his soldiers.[47] Moreover, people supported Yang Xiuqing and Xiao Chaogui, the spokesmen of God and Jesus,

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[43] Chen Disheng, "Xuyan" (Preface), in *Huxiao longyin: Taiping tianguo geyao xuanji* (Growling tigers and roaring dragons: selected ballads of the THK) (Guangzhou: Huacheng chubanshe, 2001), 20.
[44] Guan, *Collected Papers*, 147-148.
[45] Guangxi shifan xueyuan zhongwenxi (Department of Chinese of Guangxi Normal College), *Taiping tianguo gushi geyao xuan* (Selected folktales and ballads of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom) (Nanning: Guangxi zhuangzu zizhiqu renmin chubanshe, 1961), 59-60; TTLB, *Taiping tianguo shige xuan*, 120, 128. The Chinese texts are: "送儿去当太平军" and "生死紧跟洪杨走".
[46] Zhongguo shixuehui, *Taiping tianguo*, vol. 1, 73-80.
[47] Spence, *God's Chinese Son*, 137.

not only for their pure belief in God and Jesus. When Yang pretended to be possessed by God, he claimed that he could use the divine power from God to help cure diseases for his followers in propaganda, if not in reality. When Yang himself was wounded or fell sick, the Taiping leaders always claimed that Yang was exhausted by enduring sufferings for the people he cured and transferring their bad lucks to his own body.[48] The ability to cure diseases was attractive to the common folks, especially for the rural poor who could not afford to visit or even had no access to professional medical practitioners.

More importantly, just as Kojima Shinji argues, the Taiping leaders could spread Christianity to the Chinese populace largely because they started their missionary work in Hakka communities.[49] The Hakkas were immigrants to the South and they had serious feuds with local villagers, gentry, and bandits in contesting for resources and especially land in the 1840s. Due to their relationships with the local gentry, officials were inactive to protect, if not suppressed, the Hakkas in those feuds. As Kuhn and Lin Shanke further explain, the locals excluded the Hakkas from any worship of local gods that bound villages and clans. Therefore, accepting the new idol of Christian God offered a centripetal force for the solidarity of those Hakkas (having a smaller population, living in fragmentary parcels in remote mountains, and marginalized by local society) to counter local assaults.[50]

As early as 1844, there was a story about how Hong Xiuquan reproached Liuwu people's worship for a shameless couple who had lived together without marriage. He further attacked their belief for restricting the participation of the Hakkas in all related religious rituals because only

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[48] Zhongguo shixuehui, *Taiping tianguo*, vol. 1, 366-367.

[49] Kojima Shinji, *Taiping tianguo yundong yu xiandai Zhongguo* (The Taiping Rebellion and modern China), trans. Xu Man (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2017), 48.

[50] Kuhn, "The Taiping Rebellion," 264-66; Lin Shanke, *Manman kejialu* (The journey of the Hakkas) (Beijing: Zhongguo wenlian chubanshe, 2000), 7.

local residents there, namely Zhuang and Cantonese people, could worship the couple. Through Hong's reproach to the Liuwu gods, the Hakkas there saw a chance to oppose the local power organization established around temples and shrines. In reality, Hong only attacked the Liuwu belief by writing a critical poem. But in a popular tale, Hong's attack upon the Liuwu belief was mystified: Hong shattered the statue of the couple into ash with only one finger of his right hand.[51] While this tale deifies Hong's image, it shows people's gratitude to him and foreshadows why many Hakkas joined the GWS that was founded months later—the GWS satisfied a practical need of the Hakkas, namely protection and solidarity in their struggles with the locals. As the conflicts between the Hakka-dominated GWS and the local militias led by the gentry escalated, some GWS members were put into prisons because they had been vilified by the local gentry. Grieved, Hong started to describe the Manchu court as an institution of demons and attack the gentry and officials as the running dogs of demons.[52]

Nevertheless, after the Taiping Rebellion broke out in 1851, the locals and bandits also joined the Taipings, and the THK thus symbolized the unity for all Han people, not only the Hakkas. While some people might join the THK because they were fearful of being executed by the Taipings, those who were motivated to join the Taipings were not chiefly attracted by anti-Manchu sentiments. When the Taiping soldiers entered a city, they would confiscate the property of local gentry as military supplies and distribute the grains in landlords' fields to common people as God's rewards to supporters of the Taipings.[53] People's desire to get the resources of the privileged was evident in terms of some popular ballads from the common folks.

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[51] GXSFXY, *Taiping tianguo gushi geyao xuan*, 13-4.
[52] Spence, *God's Chinese Son*, 114-115.
[53] Spence, *God's Chinese Son*, 141-142.

Rather than expressing hatred to the Manchus, most ballads about the Taiping Rebellion convey hatred to the privileged strata like the gentry, officials, and officers. As a pirate who joined the Taipings summoned,

> Upper-class people owe me money.
> Middle-class people, let them sleep.
> But, lower classes, follow me!
> It beats renting an ox to plow barren land![54]

This doggerel song was popular in Guangxi during the rebellion, and its influence remained to the Republican period when many secret societies composed variants of the doggerel to mobilize popular resistance against the state.[55] In another instance,

> Fleas have me marry lice.
> Bedbugs dress and pick me up.
> Mosquitoes play the trumpet at my wedding.
> They are all human-eating demons![56]

This terrifying wedding is not a real event but a metaphor for something unwanted and hated. The four insects, fleas, lice, bedbugs, and mosquitoes, are used to compare to the privileged strata, critiquing them as bloodsucking insects who enjoyed their privileges at the expense of ordinary people.

Furthermore, by attacking the privileged, the Taiping followers wished to move up in the existing hierarchy. As also shown in another ballad below, the opposite to "the Qing demons" is "the poor" rather the Han people:

> The Taiping uprising erupts in Jintian.
> All poor people are ravished with joy.
> The poor are led to annihilate the Qing demons.
> Since then the poor can see a clear sky.[57]

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[54] Quoted from: Kuhn, "The Taiping Rebellion," 277-278. The Chinese text for the pirate's summoning song is: "上等之人欠我钱。中等之人得觉眠。下等之人跟我去！好过租牛耕瘦田！" Please see: GXSFXY, *Taiping tianguo gushi geyao xuan*, 77.

[55] Shao Yong, *Jindai huidang yu minjian Xinyang yanjiu* (Research on modern secret societies and folk beliefs) (Taipei: Xiuwei chubanshe, 2011), 204-6.

[56] Chen, *Huxiao longyin: Taiping tianguo geyao xuanji*, 96. The Chinese text for the song is: "跳蚤做媒嫁虱子。臭虫打扮来接亲。蚊子帮忙吹鼓手。一帮都是吃人精！"

[57] TTLB, *Taiping tianguo shige xuan*, 3. The Chinese text for the ballad is: "天国起义在金田。穷人个个乐连连。带领穷人除清妖。从此穷人见青天。"

Moreover, one ballad is as follows:

> *Chang-mao*[58] reach Xixing;
> All debts are cleared out.
> *Chang-mao* reach Xixing;
> All bachelors can get married.[59]

The Taiping followers expressed a down-to-earth demand for wealth and marriage, but this desire cannot be over-interpreted as a wish to eliminate wealth gap in pursuit of equality. As one ballad shows: "Wear silk. Eat oil. Go to Bao village to behead [the rich]." It tells that many people supported the Taiping army in annihilating a group of militias led by a wealthy gentry in the Bao village because they wanted delicate clothing and food.[60] Altogether, many followers of the Taiping leaders merely wished to grab more social resources like wealth from the hands of the gentry, officials, and other privileged strata more than to strive for a lofty dream to expel the Manchu minorities and revive the Han people. They wished to end their own poverty instead of replacing the existing hierarchy with egalitarianism.

Overall, although most folktales and songs only reveal popular assent to the call of the Taiping leaders, it is inaccurate for Chen to conclude that the populace was so superstitious and benighted that they had no ability to critique the Taiping leaders. As discussed above, many ballads show that the populace did not blindly support the Taipings without any demands—they looked for solidarity to counter suppression and wanted the resources of the privileged strata.[61] Moreover, most folktales and ballads applauding the Taipings might have resulted from the fact that these materials were collected during the early PRC period when the government was beautifying the

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[58] Because the Taiping rebels refused to shave their hair as the Manchu Court ordered, they were called *chang-mao* (literally, "long hair").

[59] TTLB, *Taiping tianguo shige xuan*, 81. The Chinese text for the ballad is: "长毛到西兴; 债务都灵清。长毛到西兴; 光棍好成亲。"

[60] TTLB, *Taiping tianguo shige xuan*, 217. The Chinese text for the ballad is: "穿的绸，吃的油，都到包村去杀头。"

[61] Chen, "Xuyan" (Preface), *Huxiao longyin: Taiping tianguo geyao xuanji*, 17-21.

THK, so the smaller number of ballads and tales revealing people's dissent in the Taiping Rebellion are neglected.

But in fact, the common folks did not hide their attachment to those beliefs attacked by the THK, and they even openly questioned Taiping Christianity. It was said that when the Taiping army captured Chenzhou in 1852, Hong Xiuquan once again destroyed the statue of Confucius there. Annoyed by this action, the Chenzhou population circulated a ballad to defend their esteem for Confucius: "What god can't be burnt? ... Clay statue of Confucius can't be burnt."[62] These lines show that the Chenzhou populace disagreed with superseding their homage to Confucius with a Christian belief. According to another folktale, once the Taiping army attempted to remove an iron statue of a sacred buffalo in Haining. This action provoked steady discontent in the common folks because Haining people lived near the Qiantang River and according to their belief, the sacred buffalo would protect local residents in all water-related activities. Forced by the discontent, the Taiping army had to give up the plan and to make up for their mistake by offering help in local water projects.[63]

Furthermore, the populace also questioned the divine origin of the Taiping leaders and the legitimacy of the THK. In a popular tale, it was said that once Hong Xiuquan's mother heard a strange sound and she mistook it as Hong's falling down from his bed. When she rushed to Hong's room, she saw a snake with a head but no tail creeping on the earth. Frightened, she ran away to find her husband. But after Hong's parents returned, they only saw Hong laying on the ground.[64] The story implies that the populace had doubted whether Hong Xiuquan would succeed in his

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[62] Chen, *Huxiao longyin: Taiping tianguo geyao xuanji*, 343. The Chinese text for the ballad is: "什么菩萨烧不燃？…… 泥塑孔子烧不燃。"
[63] Guan, *Collected Papers*, 77-78.
[64] Guan, *Collected Papers*, 155.

political activities. The snake with a head but no tail can be seen as a metaphor for Hong's fate—Hong started his rebellion with a good start but ended it without an auspicious result. It is even more satiric that this suspicion accorded with the reality—the THK was eventually crushed by the Qing army and westerners. Moreover, given the superficial resemblance of snakes and dragons (similar in appearance, but dragons are heaven-blessed while snakes are mediocre), the story also implies popular distrust of Hong's divine origin—he was not a true dragon from Heaven but only a snake on earth.

Popular distrust of the Taiping leaders mounted especially after 1856. Because Yang Xiuqing was God's spokesman, he had more de facto power than Hong had in some cases. In the name of God, Yang threatened to flog Hong in public and to "light sky lanterns" (burnt someone to death with anointed oil) if anyone offended his orders.[65] In 1856, Hong felt threatened by Yang's ambition and ordered Wei Changhui to kill him. By 1857, the top leadership of the THK was almost torn up. In particular, the death of Yang Xiuqing, God's spokesman, had made the Taiping soldiers question the authority of God and the legitimacy of the THK. As a ballad narrates,

> As Heavenly Father kills Heavenly Brother,
> Seizing the country becomes impossible.
> [Rebels] return home with nothing,
> And they still have to do farm work.
> As Heavenly Father kills Heavenly Brother,
> Everything is in vain.
> The flood dragon is not a true dragon,
> And the country still listens to Emperor Xianfeng.[66]

In this ballad, the line, "The flood dragon is not a true dragon," openly questions the legitimacy of the Taiping leaders. It is possibly a quotation from a folktale. Before the outbreak of the Taiping Rebellion in 1851, Feng Yunshan once put up a couplet in a church in Zijingshan: "Let Mountain

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[65] Spence, *God's Chinese Son*, 236.

[66] Chen, *Huxiao longyin: Taiping tianguo geyao xuanji*, 47. The Chinese text is: "天父杀天兄，江山打无通。空手转回家，仍旧做田工。天父杀天兄，总归一场空。蛟龙非真龙，仍旧喊咸丰。"

Jing be the residence of colorful phoenix; Let Water Zi be the source of flood dragon."[67] But thereafter the common folks whispered that the "flood dragon," which was living in waters but evolved from a snake, was not a "true dragon," which had completed the final stage of evolution and was able to fly in Heaven. Only the true dragon could seize the throne and govern the country.[68] Clearly, regarding Emperor Xianfeng as the true dragon and despising Hong as a flood dragon, the song expresses a popular challenge to the authority and the legitimacy of the THK. In particular, popular concern about the result of the failure of the Taiping Rebellion was to "return home with nothing, and they still have to do farm work," namely the inability to move upward in their social ranks rather than the hopelessness of reviving the Han nation.

It is even more interesting that acceptance and adaption to the values propagated by the Taiping leaders did not necessarily mean that the populace was compliant subjects—the populace actually exploited the propaganda to their advantage. Instead of being passive recipients of the Taiping indoctrination, the populace participated in adjusting and spreading propaganda information. For example, during the period of the THK, *Tiantiao geyao* (Song of the Heavenly Laws) was highly popular among the Hakka communities in Mei County.[69] The song is an adaptation of Hong Xiuquan's *Tiantiao shu* (Book of the Heavenly Laws)—*Tiantiao shu* is an imitation of the Ten Commandments that served to discipline the Taiping soldiers.

In particular, the Hakka populace adapted *Tiantiao shu* to *Tiantiao geyao* with two approaches. One is rewording some sentences in *Tiantiao shu* without changing their original meaning. For example, in *Tiantiao shu*, there are lines like "Evils are adept at tempting human

[67] GXSFXY, *Taiping tianguo gushi geyao xuan*, 1; Chen, *Huxiao longyin: Taiping tianguo geyao xuanji*, 48. The Chinese text for the couplet is: "暂借荆山栖彩凤，聊将紫水活蛟龙。"
[68] Chen, *Huxiao longyin: Taiping tianguo geyao xuanji*, 48.
[69] Luo Kequn, *Guangdong kejia wenxueshi* (History of the literary works of the Hakkas from Guangdong) (Guangzhou: Guangdong renmin chubanshe, 2015), 152-153.

souls. Don't sink into hell due to misbelief." The Hakkas recomposed these lines into "Evils and ghosts are deadly monsters. Don't mistake chicken droppings as gold." The lines before and after adaptation both highlight the belief in true God and the need to exclude heresies, although the later ballad expresses the meaning in a more living way.[70] Another adaptation retains original sentence patterns but alters specific words. For instance, "anpin shoufen" (安贫守分, be content with poverty and obey one's duty) is adapted into "anfen shouji" (安分守纪, be content with one's duty and obey the rules)." In this alteration, while Hong's demand for "obedience" could be acceptable to the Hakka populace, they utterly rejected the "poverty" that had long tortured them. For another line, "Xucong keji kuxiu lai" (须从克己苦修来, [Blessings] come after self-restraint)" is adapted into "Keji kuxiu fu zhenglai" (克己苦修福正来, Self-restraint will bring blessings). Clearly, the original line highlights self-restraint, while the new adaptation emphasizes blessings. Therefore, although Hong Xiuquan asked people to tolerate and experience the "process" of sufferings, the populace instead stressed the "rewards" of blessings.

In general, although the first type of adaptation reveals more literary creativity, the second type of adaptation demonstrates the ability of common people to appropriate the ideas imposed by the Taiping leaders for their own needs, through which they slightly deviated from the expectation of those leaders. While the Taiping leaders like Hong disciplined the populace and emphasized that they had to suffer before enjoying benefits, the common folks always responded with a strong incentive to confirm that their sacrifice would bring good results and concrete gains.

[70] Ye, *Lingnan suwenxue jianshi*, 403. The Chinese text are: "邪魔最易惑人灵，错信终为地狱身" and "邪魔歪鬼害人精，莫把鸡屎当黄金"。

Conclusion

Philip Kuhn stresses that Taiping Christianity was distinct from traditional Chinese folk religions and it had never been a part of popular culture, which explains why this rebellious religion did not linger and appear periodically as the White Lotus Sect did. [71] Nonetheless, Taiping Christianity and rebellion still had a long-lasting effect on Chinese history. The future leader of the Republican Revolution and the first provisional president of the ROC, Sun Yat-sen, called himself as the second Hong Xiuquan and followed Hong's revolutionary spirits to revolt against the corrupt Qing state with western ideas.

More importantly, Taiping Christianity aligned and alienated with Chinese folk religions at the same time rather than being fully detached from Chinese popular culture, and this ambiguity had contributed to the expansion of the THK from Guangxi to eighteen provinces within two decades. Not only was Taiping Christianity spread to the populace through Chinese religious practices like *chaizi* and *jiangtong*, but also its idea of the antagonism between God and Demon offered varied meanings relevant to popular interests at different periods—it was more than the clashes between Christian believers and disbelievers. Before 1851, it featured the tension between the Hakkas and the native Zhuang as well as Cantonese. After 1851, it symbolized a chance for the common folks to oppose the privileged like the gentry and officials.

While many scholars have debated over whether the Taiping Rebellion was primarily a movement featuring religious/ideological split, ethnic conflicts, or class struggles, all these elements are not absent in the propaganda of the Taiping leaders. Such coexistence of different cultural elements left much space for flexible interpretations of Taiping's Christianity in order to satisfy people's diverse needs. But as shown in most ballads and other cultural forms popular

[71] Kuhn, "The Taiping Rebellion," 316-317.

among the common folks, the populace was generally devoted to ending their own social, economic, or political inferiorities more than reviving the Han nation or striving for egalitarianism.

Thus, the alliance between the Taiping leaders and their followers as well as supporters was unstable. While the Taipings had temporarily cooperated with the Triad (worshipped idols like Guandi and Wusheng Laomu) for their common goal to overturn the Manchu court, there was no formal alliance among them due to Christianity's exclusiveness to other religious beliefs. While the Taipings' slogan of building a Christian kingdom first aroused the interest of westerners, foreign envoys and missionaries quickly found that the Taipings identified themselves as being superior to other Christian believers. While the Taiping leaders promoted a Heaven featuring universal brotherhood and egalitarianism, the internal crisis among them as well as the sharp contrast between the strict religious rules for the Taiping soldiers and the sumptuous lives of the Taiping leaders easily frustrated the populace. According to Kuhn, the antagonism between God and Demon was appealing to a society with severe strife like wealth gaps and ethnic conflicts.[72]

But eventually, the THK was not more progressive than the Qing state: neither the Taiping leaders nor their followers desired to eliminate social inequalities, but both aspired to move up in the social hierarchy. Meanwhile, upper strata offered too few spots to accommodate all the Taipings, which means there would be competition and even confrontation between the Taiping leaders and their followers. This partly explains why some popular ballads and tales challenge the leadership of the Taiping leaders and the legitimacy of the THK. This kind of relationship between the Taiping leaders and the populace also provides reasons for the failure of the Taiping Rebellion in 1864 and the survival of the Qing dynasty until the 1911 Revolution succeeded.

[72] Kuhn, "The Taiping Rebellion," 316-317.

Chapter 3
Popular Culture Mobilization of the Late Reformers and Revolutionaries

Most studies on the propagandas of Guangdong-originated reformers and revolutionaries between the 1890s and 1910s focus on their newspaper propagandas across cultural borders.[1] Examining the newspaper battle between reformers and revolutionaries from 1905 to 1908, Michael Gasster argues that both reformist and revolutionary elites ignored the interests of the common folks and their propaganda was detached from the real-life of the Chinese population.[2] But compared with newspaper commentaries, popular culture media like performances, posters, and tabloids could reach people from wide strata. Therefore, this chapter will use popular culture sources in the political debates, such as ballads, novels, operas, dramas, and comics rather than elite-oriented newspapers to discuss elites' attempts to mobilize the populace. Despite that, this thesis does not ambitiously suggest that even peasants living in remote villages could receive the political messages disseminated by those elites. In most cases, "the populace" mainly includes people in cities, towns, and nearby villages.

There are pioneering studies of late-Qing popular culture. Liu Yinghui examines fiction advertisements to discuss the interactions of publishers, writers, and readers from the perspective

[1] Previous studies on this subject include: Tang Haijiang, *Qingmo zhenglun baokan yu minzhong dongyuan: Yizhong zhengzhi wenhua de shijiao* (Late Qing political commentary newspapers and popular mobilization: A perspective of political culture) (Beijing: Qinghua daxue chubanshe, 2007), 1-363; Sun Wenshuo, "Kang Youwei yu haiwai huaqiao baoye" (Kang Youwei and overseas Chinese journalism), *Jinan xuebao* 1 (1988): 45-56; Li Weihua, "Qingmo baokan lixian dongyuan yu zhengzhi bianqian" (Mass media's mobilization for constitutional reform in the late Qing dynasty), *Nanjing shehui kexue* 8 (2010): 101-7; Feng Jianxia, "Xinhai qianhou baoren de zhengzhi dongyuan yu zhengzhi canyu" (The political mobilization and participation of journalists around 1911), *Chengdu daxue xuebao* 6 (2012): 1-5; Li Li, *Zhuanxiang dazhong: Wanqing baoren de xingqi yu zhuanbian* (Turn to the populace: The rise and transformation of late-Qing journalists) (Beijing: Beijing shifan daxue chubanshe, 2017), 3-12.

[2] Michael Gasster, "The Republican Revolutionary Movement," in *The Cambridge History of China*, eds. John K. Fairbank and Kwang-Ching Liu (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1980), vol. 11, 463-534.

of marketing strategies, but her book largely excludes a political dimension.[3] Xian Yuqing explores the integration of popular ballads and political propaganda, but her article is primarily a methodological guide for her collection of ballad texts.[4] Moreover, although Bi Keguan and Chen Pingyuan have written on how comics reflected late-Qing Chinese society, Bi focuses on Shanghai pictorials while Chen seldom examines comics within political contexts.[5] Instead of a focused discussion of actual performance arts, Fan Fangjun stresses how political elites like Liang Qichao theorized opera reforms.[6] Li Xiaoti has studied Chinese popular culture to explore how intellectuals imposed their ideologies upon the lower classes in different regions.[7] By contrast, Li Wanwei focuses on how Guangdong popular culture supported mass education and propaganda, though her work does not discuss how audiences responded to the education and propaganda and how Cantonese-language media affected overseas Chinese.[8] In addition, English monographs studying the political use of popular culture from the 1890s to 1910s are less common, but Guanhua Wang's work on the anti-American boycott around 1905 does have a chapter discussing how popular ballads, posters, and plays served to mobilize nationalist sentiments of the populace.[9]

This chapter will explore how a group of Guangdong political leaders used popular culture to mobilize domestic and overseas Chinese for political reforms or revolutionary movements during

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[3] Liu Yinghui, *Wanqing xiaoshuo guanggao yanjiu* (A study on advertising late-Qing novels) (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 2014), 2-14.

[4] Xian Yuqing, "Yueou yu wanqing zhengzhi 1" (Cantonese ballads and late Qing politics, part I), in *Lingnan Wenshi* 1 (1983): 26-34.

[5] Bi Keguan, "Ji baokan shang de manhua shijian" (Comic incidents in newspapers), *Xinwen yu chuanbo yanjiu* 3 (1982): 228-234; Chen Pingyuan, *Tuxiang wanqing* (Images of late-Qing society) (Beijing: Dongfang chubanshe, 2014), 7-9.

[6] Fan Fangjun, "*Da lishi guan" shiyexia de Qingmo xiqugailiang* (The Chinese opera reforms in the late Qing dynasty: A study from the perspective of "Macro-History") (Beijing: Zhongguo xiju chubanshe, 2013), 1-392.

[7] Li Xiaoti, *Qingmo de xiacheng shehui qimeng yundong* (Late Qing lower classes and social enlightenment movement) (Taipei: Zhongyang yanjiusuo jindaishi yanjiuyuan, 1998), i-viii.

[8] Li Wanwei, *Qingmo minchu de yueyu shuxie* (Cantonese writing in the late Qing and early Republican era) (Hong Kong: Sanlian shudian, 2011), 1-344.

[9] Guanhua Wang, *In Search of Justice: The 1905-1906 Chinese Anti-American Boycott* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Asia Center, 2001), 160-177.

the 1890s-1910s. Through such popular culture propaganda both the reformist and revolutionary groups of elites diverged from the Qing state to different degrees. Since many reformers and revolutionaries were Cantonese and Guangdong was the home province of most overseas Chinese, these political elites received more active support from the populace for their pro-Qing or anti-Qing popular culture propaganda.

Reformist and Revolutionary Popular Culture Propagandas

Increasing foreign aggression after the Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895) provoked intellectual discussions about China' future outside officialdom around the time of the 1898 Reform. As part of the discussions, both reformist and revolutionary elites expanded the political debates through popular culture, such as novels, operas, ballads, and comics.

In 1898, Xie Zantai, an early revolutionary born in Australia and the descendant of an emigrant from Kaiping county, created and distributed a comic entitled *Dongya shiju xingshi tu* (The situation in the Far East) in Hong Kong.[10] As the comic shows, a Russian bear infringed upon North China, while a British dog encroached South China, together with an American eagle, a Japanese sun, a French frog, and a German gut invading China from the Philippines, Manchuria, Indochina, and Shandong respectively.[11] Annotating the comic, Liao Entao, a reformist diplomat originated from Huiyang county and working in Cuba, wrote a *yue-ou*, "Look! Russia is just like a bear showing his teeth and claws with the greatest malice... Britain is just like a tiger crouching at Liangguang with no attempt to concede."[12] The comic and the *yue-ou* reflect the intense situation

[10] Feng Ziyou, *Geming yishi* (An anecdotal history of revolution) (Beijing: Xinxing chubanshe, 2009), vol.1, 42.
[11] Feng, *Geming yishi*, vol.1, 42.
[12] Quoted from: Xian Yuqing, "Yueou yu wanqing zhengzhi 2" (Cantonese ballads and late Qing politics, part 2), in *Lingnan Wenshi* 2 (1983): 57. The original text is: "你睇俄国好似一只大熊，狼到极地，张牙伸爪......故此英国好似一只大虫......蟠埋两广誓不输亏。"

that foreign powers almost tore up China after the Sino-Japanese War. This national urgency alarmed Chinese political elites, especially those from Guangdong, to strengthen China.

These political activists can be roughly divided into pro-Qing reformers and anti-Qing revolutionaries. It should be noted that conservatives were not silent after 1895. For example, *Le bao*, a conservative newspaper in Singapore, recruited Guangdong-originated staff and published some *yue-ou* to satirize reformers and revolutionaries.[13] For example, an intriguing *yue-ou* from the newspaper reads: "You're an unwanted prostitute. Don't complain about wandering far from home."[14] In this *yue-ou*, the prostitute refers to Kang Youwei, the advisor of Emperor Guangxu in the 1898 Reform, by which the author of the *yue-ou* degraded the legitimacy of Kang and satirized his overseas exile.[15] However, the activities, discussions, and propaganda by reformers and revolutionaries were more influential in the period.

Conventional studies have stressed the ideological split between reformist and revolutionary factions.[16] Moreover, many Chinese Marxist historians attack post-1898 reformers and Kang Youwei's Baohuanghui (Society to Protect the Emperor) for submitting to the backward and incapable Manchu court. But the emperor-protecting slogan of the Baohuanghui was used primarily as a symbol to unite domestic and overseas Chinese under the name of Emperor Guangxu and to counter the conservative faction in the Qing court rather than to counter Sun Yat-sen' anti-Qing revolutionary actions.[17] As indicated in the comic of Xie and the *yue-ou* of Liao, although they were a revolutionary merchant and a reformist diplomat respectively, they had a similar

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[13] Li Qingnian, *Malaiya yueou daquan* (Cantonese ballads in Malaya) (Singapore: Jingu shuhua dian, 2012), 11.
[14] Quoted from: Li, *Malaiya*, 107. The original text is: "你系过气嘅秋娘，流落呢处天涯你又唔使怨唱。"
[15] Li, *Malaiya*, 107.
[16] For example: Gasster, "The Republican Revolutionary Movement," 463-534; Sun, "Kang Youwei yu haiwai huaqiao baoye," 45-56; Shi Biqiu, "Xinhai geming qianhou jindai Zhongguo minzu guojia rentong de xingsu" (Shaping a Chinese nation-state identity around the 1911 Revolution), in *Sixiang zhanxian* 4 (2011): 29-33.
[17] Zhongping Chen, "Kang Youwei's Activities in Canada and the Reformist Movement Among the Global Chinese Diaspora, 1899–1909," in *Twentieth-Century China* 1 (2014): 3-23.

concern about foreign aggression. Through the lens of such reformist and revolutionary popular culture propaganda activities, it is clear that both groups of political elites more or less turned away from the Qing state under the foreign pressure.

Reformist popular culture media became especially influential after Liang Qichao founded *Xin xiaoshuo* (New fiction) in Japan in 1902. Moreover, this literary magazine challenged the conservative faction of the Qing court, if not the Qing state as a whole. Zhongping Chen has revealed that the diasporic experience of Kang Youwei after the abortive 1898 Reform, especially his status as political exiles, intensified his radical thoughts.[18] In fact, this can also be applied to the experiences of other Guangdong reformers like Liang Qichao and Ou Jujia.

When outlining his own fiction for *Xin xiaoshuo*, Liang proposed a trilogy to discuss different possibilities of China's future in three novels, *Xin Zhongguo weilaiji* (Future of new China), *Jiu Zhongguo weilaiji* (Future of old China) and *Xin taoyuan* (New utopia).[19] Some contents in the trilogy mildly critique the conservative Qing court. For instance, the story of *Xin Zhongguo weilaiji* starts from an imaged world exposition in future Shanghai where a Chinese scholar is giving a speech about the history of the founding of new China to thousands of audiences all over the world—all audiences understand Chinese. After new China emerges as a powerful nation on the international stage, Britain, France, Germany, the US, Russia, Japan, and other countries all send their students to study in China and learn Chinese.[20] This scenario is a reversal of China' reality in the 1900s when the Qing state was weak and Chinese students had to migrate overseas for learning new knowledge. Meanwhile, it proposes that the isolated Qing state could strengthen itself through

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[18] Chen, "Kang Youwei's Activities," 3-6.

[19] Wang Dewei and Wang Ji, "Xiaoshuo zuowei geming: Chongdu Liang Qichao *Xin Zhongguo Weilaiji*" (Fiction as revolution: Reread Liang Qichao's *Future of New China*), *Suzhou daxue xuebao* 4 (2014): 1-10.

[20] A Ying, *Wanqing wenxue congchao: Xiaoshuo* (Collection of late-Qing literary works: Novels) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1960), vol.1, 3-4.

communication with the outside world. More interestingly, Liang planned to narrate how Chinese diaspora founds a utopia on a remote island and later helps domestic Chinese rebuild China in *Xin taoyuan*.[21] Therefore, Chinese diaspora rather than domestic Chinese will undertake the mission of building China. Given Liang's exile overseas after the 1898 Reform, he possibly referred the "Chinese diaspora" in *Xin taoyuan* to himself and his associates, through which he differentiated the reformers from conservative Qing officials and Empress Dowager Cixi.

Nevertheless, some contents in the trilogy radically suggest replacing the Qing court with a new government. *Xin Zhongguo weilaiji* records an ideological split within the Baohuanghui. After the failure of the 1898 Reform, a group of Kang Youwei's disciples like Ou Jujia and Liang Qichao were inclined to resort to revolution if necessary and supported Guangdong's independence from the Manchu court.[22] Such radical ideas were clear in the first two episodes of *Xin Zhongguo weilaiji*: the building of new China starts with Guangdong and other provinces gaining their independence from the Qing state and then follows with different provinces forming a united republic.[23] However, the later episodes, published after Kang Youwei wrote letters to scorn Liang Qichao and Ou Jujia for their ideas about Guangdong's independence, abruptly turn to discussion about the danger of provincial independence: lack of central control and state unity will incur perilous foreign intervention in Chinese politics and tear China into pieces. Such internal strife is apparent in debates of two main characters in the fiction: Li Qubing argues that provincial independence is crucial to building a Chinese republic, while Huang Keqiang favors a centralized empire and attacks revolutions for bringing chaos and disunity.[24]

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[21] Wang, "Fiction as revolution," 1-10.
[22] Xia Xiaohong, "Xin Guangdong: Cong zhengzhi dao wenxue" (New Guangdong: From politics to literature), in *Xueshu yuekan* 2 (2016): 118-120.
[23] A Ying, *Xiaoshuo*, vol. 1, 1-82.
[24] Xia, "Xin Guangdong," 118-120.

In fact, Liang's radicalization was not unique in *Xin xiaoshuo*. According to Xian Yuqing's study, *Xin xiaoshuo* conveys conservative views that were detached from the demands of the populace. She argues that reformist figures did not dare to attack the dark side of the Qing court as revolutionaries did.[25] But in fact, many reformers were determined to critique the conservative faction in the Qing court, and even struggled between a peaceful reform and a radical revolution. In this literary magazine, *Dongou nühaojie* (Eastern European heroine) depicts a heroine named Sophia who assassinated Russian Tsar and sacrificed herself in the righteous action.[26] Its author is Lingnan yuyi nüshi (An ethereal Lingnan lady) who should be Luo Pu, a male reformer from Shunde, according to Feng Ziyou.[27] Luo probably used a feminine pen name for this radical fiction to satirize Chinese men—they should not boast their muscular power if they failed to support militant actions physically or literarily as Sophia or Lingnan yuyi nüshi did. The plot of assassinating the autocrat might be justifiable within the reformist framework if the autocrat represents Empress Dowager Cixi. But the plot still reflects the militarization of reformers after 1898. Both Liang and Luo were among the "thirteen naughty boys of Kang's school" (thirteen disciples disobeying Kang Youwei's instruction) who had frequent contacts with Sun Yat-sen during their political exile in Japan around 1900 and they petitioned to Kang for cooperation with revolutionaries. Suspicious of revolutionaries, Kang attacked whomever urging the cooperation as conspirators.[28] Kang's disproval of their radical changes might also be a reason for Luo Pu to disguise his identity under a female pen name. As opposed to Feng's view, A Ying argues that "Lingnan yuyi nüshi" should be the nickname of Zhang Zhujun, a female revolutionary from

[25] Xian, "Yueou 1," 31-33.
[26] A Ying, *Xiaoshuo*, vol. 1, 83-166.
[27] Feng, *Geming yishi*, vol. 1, 215.
[28] Marius Jansen, "Japan and the Chinese Revolution of 1911," in *The Cambridge History of China*, edited by John K. Fairbank and Kwang-Ching Liu (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), vol. 11, 339-74.

Panyu.[29] The message behind this statement—a revolutionary published a novel in a periodical run by reformers—suggests even deeper collaboration of reformers and revolutionaries. Regardless of whether Feng or A Ying is correct, *Dongou nühaojie* confirms the radicalization of reformers in the early 1900s.

Influenced by a memoir by Liang Qichao in his elegy for the abortive 1898 Reform, Liao Entao, a Qing diplomat originated from Huiyang county, composed an opera named *Weixin meng* (Dream of reform) to attack the conservative faction in the Qing court.[30] The opera gives nicknames to Qing officials, such as "Hou Sanjie 侯(猴, monkey)三捷" for "Yuan Shikai 袁(猿, monkey)世凯."[31] While avoiding direct mention of Yuan, this technique also satirizes him as a nonhuman (there was a claim that the 1898 Reform failed because Yuan exposed reformers' conspiracy to Cixi).[32]

More radically, some vernacular literary works composed by Liao propose to overturn the Qing court (or the conservative faction only) with militant approaches. According to one *yue-ou* by Liao, "Someone says ant-like commoners shouldn't disobey the court... But today there is no Chinese. The Manchu court is so impudent that it sells the people and the country but pretends innocent… Let Guangdong be autonomous first! As we catch up with foreign powers, won't the remaining seventeen provinces follow?"[33] As Xia Xiaohong argues, Liao possibly met Liang Qichao in North America and was affected by Liang's radical views in 1903.[34] But as Liang

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[29] A Ying, *Xiaoshuo ertan* (Second discussion of fiction) (Shanghai: Gudian wenxue chubanshe, 1958), 111-112.
[30] A Ying, *Wanqing wenxue congchao: Shuochang wenxue juan* (Collection of late Qing literature: Talking and singing literature) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1960), vol. 2, 509-531; Xia Xiaohong, "Wanqing waijiaoguan Liao Entao de xiju chuangzuo" (Late Qing diplomat Liao Entao's opera creations), in *Xueshu yanjiu* 3 (2007): 136-8.
[31] Xia, "Liao Entao," 136.
[32] "侯" and "袁" respectively reads similar to the two Chinese characters for "monkey," "猴" and "猿".
[33] Quoted from: Xia, "Xin Guangdong," 125. The original text is: "有的话既属系蚁民，唔该逆旨......今日中国无人，个满政府来得咁放恣，卖民卖国佢重诈作唔知……广东先自治，个阵平权万国，怕佢十七省唔追住跟嚟？"
[34] Xia, "Xin Guangdong," 124-5.

observed in America, overseas Chinese always fought for their own villages or lineages against other Chinese; internal clashes inside China would be even severer than in North America. Liang thus suggested that China should sustain as an empire rather than a republic, otherwise China would demise in the internal strife.[35] In other words, Liang Qichao shifted away from revolutionary approaches during his trip in the US in 1903. Had Liao met Liang in North America in 1903, it would have been unlikely that Liao turned to support violent resistance against the court simply because of Liang's influence. More likely, during Liao's service as an ambassador in Cuba, he was exposed to the history of Cubans' violent struggles against the Spaniards for national independence and was impressed by Cuban independence in 1902, although Cuba actually gained independence from the US rather than the Spaniards in the end. His opera published in 1903, *Xuehaichao chuanqi* (Legend of the tide among students), praises a group of Cuban students who bravely fought the autocracy of Spanish colonists with militant approaches.[36] The opera implicitly compares Cuban conditions to Chinese conditions.

Another figure among the "thirteen naughty boys" was Ou Jujia. Ou's overseas experiences made him open to militant struggles in Qing China. His *Xin Guangdong*, a treatise advocating Guangdong's independence from the backward Qing Empire, contains a map of Guangdong and a picture of the Independence Hall of the US, which suggests Ou's support for rebuilding China as a republic as the US did. Invited by his friends in San Francisco, Ou watched a Cantonese opera in a local theater, but he left before the performance ended because he was disappointed at the romantic story of love and lust in the "feminine" performance. He recalled his experience as an audience in Japan where he admired the "muscular" plot of warriors' uprising against the shogun.

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[35] Liang Qichao, *Xindalu youji* (Travel to the New World) (Changsha: Hunan renmin chubanshe, 1981), 144-146.
[36] Xia, "Liao Entao," 138-40.

As Ou also recalled, after France was defeated in the Franco-Prussian War, the French did not watch love romance for relief. Instead, they established new theaters in Paris and staged gunpowder, corpses, orphans, and widows to remind themselves of the humiliating past. No matter in Japan or in France, the audiences, regardless of their gender, class, and age, all cried, stood up, and roared against the enemies of their country. This experience made Ou Jujia believe militant operas would motivate people to diverge from those conservative powerholders in the court and strive for a new China with militant approaches.[37]

To militarize the Chinese populace, Ou Jujia composed *Huang Xiaoyang huitou* (Reincarnation of Huang Xiaoyang) in 1904. In the opera, the Yellow Emperor sends Huang Xiaoyang, a folk idol in the Pearl River region, to return to the earth and help Guangdong gain independence.[38] This setting shows Ou's use of a folk belief—many Cantonese circulated tales and ballads telling that Huang Xiaoyang died near the Pearl River, but he would be reborn very soon.[39] Due to Huang Xiaoyang's popularity among Cantonese, it was easy for Ou to make the actions of the reincarnation of Huang Xiaoyang, Huang Zhongqiang, look "right" to Ou's target audiences—the Cantonese populace. One action of Huang Zhongqiang, together with many other overseas Chinese students, is the collaboration with anti-Qing secret societies. In addition, a notable secret society member in the opera is Hong Shaoquan, a descendant of Hong Xiuquan, an anti-Manchu rebel in the 1850s and 1860s. The archetype of this character may be Hong Quanfu, a nephew of Hong Xiuquan. In 1903, Hong Quanfu cooperated with two revolutionaries, Xie

[37] A Ying, *Wanqing wenxue congchao: Xiaoshuo xiqu yanjiu juan* (Collection of late Qing literature: Research on novels and operas) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1960), 67-71.
[38] A Ying, *Shuochang wenxue*, vol. 3, 433-509.
[39] Xia, "Xin Guangdong," 122.

Zantai and Li Jitang to initiate an uprising against the Qing state, but their uprising ended with failure.[40] This setting possibly expresses Ou's sympathy for the failure.

More interestingly, as Kang Youwei lamented, once a Cantonese diplomat met a Mandarin diplomat in Singapore, although they both could read and write Chinese characters, the two had to talk with each other in English because neither of them could understand the spoken language of the other.[41] The implications of this story made the linguistic media used by reformers, namely vernacular Chinese and sometimes Cantonese dialect, more radical. First, the written system, namely classical Chinese sanctioned by the state, was separated from the everyday spoken language of the Chinese populace. Hence, vernacularizing writings symbolized an attempt of these reformers to align with the populace and to challenge the Qing authority. Second, in the short term, just as Zhao Zhanhua points out, using dialects like Cantonese as linguistic media could help vernacularize new political messages for the local populace.[42] But in the long term, just as historian Cheng Meibao stresses, dialectal writing could impede the unity of the state as it strengthened local cultural order.[43] Therefore, Liang, Liao, and Ou's use of dialects (vernacular Chinese is dialectal in nature since it is largely based on northern dialects) echoed their radical political proposal for the independence of Guangdong and other provinces from the Qing state. The openness to using dialectal expression was a common feature that these radical reformers shared with Guangdong revolutionaries.

[40] Qiu Sile and Zhang Jun, "*Huang Xiaoyang huitou* zuozhe wei Ou Jujia kao: Jianlun Ou Jujia zai qianqi *Xin xiaoshuo* zuozhe zhong de zhongyao diwei" (The author of *Huang Xiaoyang Huitou* is Ou Jujia: The important status of Ou Jujia among the early authors of *Xin xiaoshuo*), in *Xiju yishu* 1 (2009): 31.

[41] Kang Youwei, *Kang Youwei quanji* (A complete collection of Kang Youwei's works) (Beijing: Zhongguo renmin daxue chubanshe, 2007), vol. 1, 54-56.

[42] Zhao Zhanhua, "Shehui dongyuan shifaxia de qingmo yueyu baokan" (Cantonese newspapers from the perspective of social mobilization), in *Jinan Journal* 1 (2015): 142.

[43] Cheng Meibao, *Diyu wenhua yu guojia rentong: Wanqing yilai Guangdong wenhuaguan de xingcheng* (Regional culture and national identity: Formation of the cultural outlook of Guangdong since the late Qing period) (Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 2006), 163.

Compared with reformers who had founded *Xin xiaoshuo* in 1902, revolutionaries used popular culture for propaganda tardily. The Guangdong-originated revolutionaries founded their first newspaper in South China, *Zhongguo ribao* (China daily), in Hong Kong in 1900, but their systematic use of popular culture media happened around the anti-American boycott from 1905 to 1906. A group of revolutionary artists in Guangdong, such as Pan Dawei and Gao Jianfu, founded *Shishi huabao* (Pictorial of news) to publicize the suffering of overseas Chinese laborers.[44] *Weiyi qubao yousuowei* (The only tabloid that matters), founded by Zheng Guangong, was famous for its use of Cantonese ballads and operas during the anti-American boycott. Due to their lively formats and contents, ballad and opera performances were commonplace at piers, restaurants, and teahouses around Guangdong and Hong Kong. There were at least sixty pieces of anti-American *yue-ou*, most of which came from Guangdong revolutionaries.[45] Xian thus concludes that reformers were less active than revolutionaries were in supporting the anti-American boycott.

But unlike what Xian argues, reformers largely contributed to initiating the anti-American boycott, while many revolutionaries were instigator and opportunists more than leaders in the boycott. In 1904, the US proposed to renew its treaty that limited the entry of Chinese labor immigrants to America. The Qing court was not active in opposing the treaty because the US was less aggressive than other foreign powers and the court sought to befriend the US.[46] Instead, the Baohuanghui members like Kang and Liang helped overseas Chinese contact Chinese merchants in Shanghai to plan the boycott in 1905.[47] As J. L. Larson points out, the Baohuanghui used its

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[44] Guangzhoushi renmin zhengfu difangzhi bangongshi (Gazetteer office of Guangzhou People's Government), "Juyue fanmei yundong" (Anti-American treaty boycott), in *Canton Gazetteer*, posted June 11, 2015, http://www.gzsdfz.org.cn/sqzt/gmfy/201506/t20150611_29108.html.

[45] Xian, "Yueou 1," 28, 33; Xian, "Yueou 2," 61.

[46] Shih-shan H. Tsai, "Chinese Immigration to America: Political and Legal Aspects," in *Early Chinese Immigrant Societies: Case Studies from North America and British Southeast Asia*, eds. Lee Lai To (Singapore: Heinemann Asia, 1988), 39-40.

[47] Wang, *In Search of Justice*, 7, 84-5.

transnational network to support the initial organization of the boycott in terms of providing financial backing, information channels, key personnel, and propaganda support.[48] Liang's follower, Wu Jianren, composed novels like *Jieyu hui* (Dust after disasters) in Shanghai, lamenting the suffering of overseas Chinese laborers.[49] As the anti-American boycott erupted, the Qing court had tried to use the boycott to develop native industries, win the support of Chinese capitalists and prevent them from financing anti-Qing revolutions. But after the boycott became radicalized, the Qing court had to put an end to it in a fear of another Boxer Uprising.[50]

According to Guanhua Wang, popular support for the anti-American boycott in Guangdong was more spontaneous because the province was the homeland of most overseas Chinese in America. The anti-American mobilization in Guangdong relied less on influential figures than on ordinary speakers fluent in Cantonese: some speakers gave speeches to the urban and rural populace voluntarily, while others were paid by local charity halls and merchant organizations. For example, a thirteen-year-old boy named Fan Zhaoguang gave a speech in front of around 500 audiences at Haizhuang Temple in Canton. Impressed by his public speaking skills, Kaihua charity hall financed him to give more speeches at crowded places like Beidi Temple.[51] Such speeches, usually with folksongs and operas included, contain provoking words, such as "I swear aloud. Had I used American goods, a tortoise I would have been!" A trader first expressed the anger towards America's exclusion of overseas Chinese: "Only the cold-blooded won't be angry! Friends! Look

[48] Jane Leung Larson, "Articulating China's First Mass Movement: Kang Youwei, Liang Qichao, the Baohuanghui, and the 1905 Anti-American Boycott," *Twentieth-Century China* 33, no. 1 (2007): 6.

[49] A Ying, *Fanmei huagong jinyue wenxueji* (Literary works against American treaty for exclusion of Chinese labor immigration) (Beijing, Zhonghua shuju, 1960), 310-417.

[50] Daniel J Meissner, "China's 1905 Anti-American Boycott: A Nationalist Myth?" in *Journal of American-East Asian Relations* 10, no. 3-4 (2001): 195.

[51] Wang, *In Search of Justice*, 110-114.

at the US! How vicious it is!" The trader then critiqued the inaction of the Qing court: "We have hands from 400 million people and don't have to depend on the Manchus."[52]

The anti-American operas and ballads composed by revolutionaries for the common folks spread various interesting and instigating stories all over Guangdong. For example, a young boy smashed an American-made phonograph and forced their parents to throw away American goods.[53] Traders sold kites painted with scenes of how Americans enslaved overseas Chinese for labor.[54] As an opera also notes, in Xinning county, some activists purchased paper fans regularly, and hired painters to draw how Americans mistreated overseas Chinese on one side of the fans and draw how a cruel owner whipped his pity buffalo on the other side; they sold the fans at a bottom price.[55] The paintings on the fans compare Americans to the cruel owner and compare overseas Chinese to the pity buffalo, showing that overseas Chinese were exploited for labor and treated as nonhuman slaves by Americans. In Foshan, a group of anti-American activists planned to set up a zoo, urging all warm-blooded Chinese to observe the ugly looks of cold-blooded animals (a metaphor for people unsupportive of the anti-American boycott).[56]

Despite their limited role in initiating the boycott, Guangdong revolutionaries made use of the boycott to expand their influence by linking their anti-Qing propaganda to the popular concerns about their families, relatives, and friends overseas. The revolutionaries also took the opportunity to stigmatize the reformers and the Qing court by condemning their collaboration with the US,

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[52] Quoted from: A Ying, *Fanmei huagong jinyue wenxueji*, 13, 681-682. The Chinese texts are: "我就大声发个誓，驶亲美货係乌龟！", "除是冇血，边得话唔嬲！君呀！你睇吓花旗，几毒嘅计谋！", and "有四万万人声，不必靠到满洲。"

[53] A Ying, *Fanmei huagong jinyue wenxueji*, 683.

[54] Xian Yuqing, "Yueou yu wanqing zhengzhi 3" (Cantonese ballads and late Qing politics, part III), in *Lingnan Wenshi* 1 (1984): 132.

[55] A Ying, *Fanmei huagong jinyue wenxueji*, 683-4.

[56] Huang Xianqiang, *Kuayu shixue: Jindai Zhongguo yu nanyang huaren yanjiu de xinshiye* (Trans-border history: A new perspective on modern China and overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia) (Xiamen: Xiamen daxue chubanshe, 2008), 38.

when the Qing court avoided irritating the US and the Baohuanghui proposed to reduce white prejudice through self-reform of overseas Chinese besides radical resistance.[57] Their *yue-ou* describe overseas Chinese laborers as *li-chao-yan* (swallows away from their nests) who were homeless and helpless in foreign countries.[58] The narrative highlights how foreigners kidnapped or enticed Chinese to leave China and marginalizes the fact that many Chinese moved overseas for economic opportunities or other benefits.

Claiming that the US suppressed overseas Chinese, revolutionaries attacked those who resorted to negotiations with the US as collaborators. For instance, Chen Shuren, a painter from Panyu who joined Revolutionary Alliance in 1905, wrote a *yue-ou* to argue that the Manchu court had no difference from the US because they both treated the Chinese as slaves: "Think how he (the Manchu court) treat Han people, my friend! ... Compare him with the US, can you tell who is more oppressive?" In another instance, Zheng Guangong wrote, "How funny is the self-claimed Sage (Kang Youwei)! He says he has met the US President Roosevelt and says the president has agreed to revise the treaty!"[59] According to revolutionaries like Zheng, some Baohuanghui members in Guangdong distributed leaflets to spread the news that Kang Youwei had reached an agreement with President Roosevelt on revising the treaty about Chinese immigrants. Zheng described the agreement as inexistent, accusing the Baohuanghui of cheating domestic and overseas Chinese.

Another example of how Guangdong revolutionaries acted as opportunists to expand their influence during the anti-American boycott was a controversy around a comic. During the boycott, Roosevelt's daughter planned to visit Canton in September. Aware of the news, Pan Dawei and

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[57] Chen, "Kang Youwei," 3-23.
[58] Xian, "Yueou 2," 61-3.
[59] Quoted from: Xian, "Yueou 2," 66-67. The original text is: "试想佢平日点样子待我汉人，君啊！", "将佢比较花旗，试问边个咁惨苛。", and "重好笑有个自认圣人(康有为), 唔怕罗 (烧焦的味道) , 散布传单, 到处打锣。佢话美总统罗君（罗斯福）, 佢曾去见过 , 讨得个人情, 着数（胜算）好多；又话总统应承, 将例改妥......"

He Jianshi, two revolutionary artists, painted a comic of a foreign woman sitting on a sedan-chair carried by four turtles, and distributed the comic all over Canton, such as the Tianzi Wharf (a local wharf set for receiving officials) and the General Office of Finance.[60] In folk beliefs, turtles represent long life but also coward and shameless persons.[61] The comic attaches a Cantonese ballad to satirize that only turtles (Qing officials) would carry sedan-chairs for Roosevelt's daughter and her companies: "Shame! Shame! Shame! Americans (or the beauty; both "Americans" and "beauty" are written as "mei-ren" in Chinese) treat us as dogs but will visit our port tomorrow... Scums you would have been, had you carried sedan-chairs for them!"[62] *Gongyi bao* (News of public benefits), another revolutionary newspaper, also published the comic to mobilize the patriots in Hong Kong to support the anti-American boycott.[63] To pacify American guests, the governor general of Liangguang, Cen Chunxuan, ordered Nanhai Prefect to arrest the authors and disseminators of the comic, and they arrested Ma Dachen, Pan Xinming, and Xia Zhongwen on September 2, 1905. Ironically, Ma, Pan, and Xia became heroes after being arrested. Many people sent food and clothes to prisons to thank their righteousness.[64]

Accusing Qing officials and the Baohuanghui of persecuting the three heroes, revolutionary journalists made use of the influence of Ma, Pan, and Xia to win popular support. According to Chen Yuan (Xia Zhongwen's teacher), since officials could not catch the disseminators of the comic, they arrested Ma, Pan, and Xia who were giving anti-American speeches on street as

[60] Bi, "Manhua shijian," 228.
[61] Huang, *Kuayu shixue*, 34-6.
[62] Quoted from: Wu Jijin, "Xinwen manhua guitai meiren tu yinqi de zhengzhi fengbo" (The political storm brought by the comic news of "the beauty carried by turtles"), in *Lantai shijie* 6 (2011): 54-55. The original text is: "丑丑丑，美人作我地系狗，第日但就来我埠，想探听我地人心唔够。干祈唔好抬但呀，牛豆！如果你重抬，就系哩只家烂豆。"
[63] Bi, "manhua shijian," 229.
[64] Wu, "Xinwen manhua," 55.

scapegoats.[65] However, Guangdong revolutionaries accused the Baohuanghui of causing the arrest of Ma, Pan, and Xia. As suggested in a *yue-ou* by Chen Shuren, the Baohuanghui members in Guangdong like Jiang Kongyin and Wu Jieming falsely accused the three heroes as organizers of the comic incident. The US consulate in Canton thus asked Cen Chunxuan to arrest them. In another *yue-ou* by Zheng Guangong, he accused *Linghai bao* (News in Guangdong) and *Shang bao* (Business newspaper), two reformist newspapers, of indicting the three heroes as anti-Qing rebels from secret societies.[66] Moreover, after the arrest of Ma, Pan, and Xia, He Jianshi and Pan Dawei, the two revolutionary artists who actually spread the comic, painted more comics to intensify anti-American, anti-Qing, and anti-Baohuanghui sentiments of the populace.[67]

After the anti-American boycott, revolutionaries well noticed the powerful ability of comics to instigate popular sentiments. Another notable comic incident related to Guangdong revolutionaries happened in April 1907 when *Minbao* (People's newspaper) published three comics to propagate anti-Manchu demands. The first comic paints a hunter chasing a fox. Since the Chinese pronunciation of "hu 狐 (fox)" is the same as "hu 胡 (northern barbarians)," the comic actually implies "hunting the Manchus." The second comic depicts three Han officials serving the Qing court, Zeng Guofan, Li Hongzhang, and Zuo Zongtang, as beings with human faces and animal tails, which explicitly accuses Zeng, Li, and Zuo as betrayers of Han civilization. The last comic shows three Han provincial governors: Yuan Shikai, Cen Chunxuan, and Zhang Zhidong.[68] In the comic, the three governors are beheaded, which implies that their service for the Manchus

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[65] Wu, "Xinwen manhua," 54.
[66] Xian, "Yueou 2," 70-71.
[67] Wu, "Xinwen manhua," 54.
[68] Mo Shixiang, "Qingmo Sun Zhongshan Tongmenghui yu Gangying zhengfu de boyi" (Late Qing struggles between Sun Yat-sen's Revolutionary Alliance, and British Hong Kong government), *Shenzhen daxue xuebao* 5 (2011): 32-8.

would incur punishment. *Zhongguo ribao* reprinted the comics in Hong Kong, which gained great social influence among the Chinese in Hong Kong, Guangdong and even overseas.[69]

It should be noted that although the anti-American propaganda by Guangdong revolutionaries was particularly intensive in Guangdong and Hong Kong, the propaganda was not confined within South China. Because Cantonese had their networks for migration, many *yue-ou* in Canton and Hong Kong were spread to overseas Chinese, such as those in Malaya.[70] In fact, liners were important locations for propaganda because passengers could transmit the information they heard to different places, such as different ports in China and even overseas. The anti-government propaganda was so regular on liners that the Qing court also sent personnel to talk about traditional ethics like loyalty to the passengers.[71] In addition, many revolutionary periodicals related to the anti-American boycott like *Shishi huabao* also had overseas distribution centers like those in Tokyo, San Francisco, and Honolulu. Revolutionaries even founded speech teams in different foreign ports to deliver revolutionary ideas in Cantonese and Min dialects.[72]

Overall, making use of the anti-American boycott, Guangdong revolutionaries expanded their influence among Cantonese by propagating anti-Manchu and anti-Baohuanghui ideas as solutions to save Chinese people from foreign aggression. Since many Cantonese were immigrants or had family members and friends overseas who were directly exposed to racism, it was easy to provoke popular hatred towards "collaborators" of foreign powers, the Manchus and the Baohuanghui, through which the revolutionary movement expanded. For example, Li Shinan, an overseas Chinese in San Francisco where his father ran a shoe shop, became a revolutionary because he was

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[69] Feng, *Geming yishi*, vol. 2 539.
[70] Li, *Malaiya*, 8.
[71] He Weijie, "Tongmenghui zai Aomen de xuanchuan celue lunshu" (On the propaganda strategies by the Chinese Revolutionary Alliance in Macao), *Zhengzhou daxue xuebao* 3 (2013): 143-147.
[72] Feng, *Geming yishi*, vol. 3, 1130.

attracted by the anti-American propaganda of revolutionaries. In another instance, after Feng Xiawei committed suicide in front of the US consulate in Shanghai to protest American exclusion of Chinese immigrants, journalists of *Tunan ribao* (To the south daily) in Singapore decided to hold an event to memorialize Feng. *Tunan ribao* was associated with Zhonghetang, a pro-revolution organization in Singapore led by You Lie. In the memorial event, You gave a provoking speech to justify the need to boycott American goods. Participants of the memorial event gave thundering applause to You. Later on, numerous dockers joined Zhonghetang and refused to unload any goods whenever an American ship arrived.[73]

On the one hand, the pro-revolution propaganda during the anti-American boycott helped revolutionaries establish their reputation among lower classes like Chinese laborers. However, revolutionaries lacked enough support from wealthy classes like Chinese capitalists. For example, seven top cotton and tobacco firms owned by Cantonese in Southeast Asia all supported the Baohuanghui.[74] Most overseas Chinese in North America were also inclined to support reformers.[75] As a revolutionary leader Hu Hanmin explained, wealthy businessmen were more conservative because they refused to use their huge fortune to bid for risky revolutions and because they benefited rather than suffered from traveling overseas; small merchants and workers were exposed to acuter racism and were thus more willing to use their tiny gains to venture for a bright future.[76] Although this surmise might not be valid in all cases, it was possibly reasonable within the context of people's responses to Guangdong revolutionaries' propaganda during the anti-

[73] Feng, *Geming yishi*, vol. 2, 356, 478.
[74] Feng, *Geming yishi*, vol. 3, 958.
[75] Gasster, "The Republican Revolutionary Movement," 463-534.
[76] Feng, *Geming yishi*, vol. 3, 960.

American boycott, which connected the interests of overseas Chinese laborers with anti-Manchu and anti-Baohuanghui policies of revolutionaries.

The Effect of Reformist and Revolutionary Mobilization among the Populace

In general, the popular culture propagandas of Guangdong reformers and revolutionaries can be divided into two types by their ways to reach the populace. One is "published literature," namely novels and operas that were never put into any performance. Another is "performance arts" such as operas, dramas, ballads and so on. Most novels and operas in *Xin xiaoshuo* belong to published literature. In theory, vernacular works published in *Xin xiaoshuo* could reach people with basic literacy. In reality, their content was too abstruse for the common folks. For instance, Liang himself also recognized that his *Xin Zhongguo weilaiji* was a mixture of political treatise and speech instead of a real vernacular novel. As a result, actual readers of most serious political novels would be much fewer than people with basic literacy. In contrast, Wu Jianren's *Ershinian mudu zhi guaixianzhuang* (Bizarreness witnessed over twenty years), which is less ambitious in instructing political thoughts and more crafted with storytelling skills, had a much better sale figure than *Xin Zhongguo weilaiji* had.[77] Professional novelists like Wu were more effective than reformers like Liang in influencing the common folks.

However, Liang had inspired many professional novelists to reconsider the function of novels, and professional novelists thus served as intermediaries between Guangdong reformers and the populace. In his literary magazine, *Yueyue xiaoshuo* (The all-story monthly), Wu Jianren stated that he was motivated by Liang Qichao's proposal of "Literary Revolution" or the use of novels as the best literary form to enlighten Chinese people, and by the example of *Xin xiaoshuo*

[77] Fan, *Qingmo xiqugailiang*, 170-79, 180-86.

to compose reformative novels.[78] As an experienced tabloid journalist, Wu was accustomed to jokes, riddles, and other entertaining materials appealing to readers. Some tabloids even reserved a correspondence column for readers' letters. Thus, even though Wu attempted to model after Liang and use fictions for social reforms, *Yueyue xiaoshuo* constantly adjusted fiction content according to readers' responses, added love stories when talking about politics, and included illustrations to increase readability.[79] In other words, while *Xin xiaoshuo* aimed to give political lectures to its readers, *Yueyue xiaoshuo* built communicative means to respond to popular expectations for entertaining novels. Although many readers were not directly involved in composing novels and operas, their interests were injected into those literary works.

Moreover, readers could also become authors of propaganda texts in some cases, by which they transformed from ordinary readers of fiction periodicals to active participants in reformative propaganda. Among the 1902-1908 advertisements calling for submissions to major fiction periodicals, most editors asked for novels that could enlighten Chinese people. Because remuneration for accepted novels was substantial, many lower-class intellectuals became authors of political fictions. But in fact, the slogan of social enlightenment was largely in name. Even the politics-oriented *Xin xiaoshuo* also publicized advertisements to call for novel manuscripts that express patriotic spirits in the form of sensational love stories because love stories were the most popular novel type.[80] Moreover, when running *Yueyue xiaoshuo*, Wu was devoted to integrating political instruction, social enlightenment, and popular entertainment. At that time, there were 45 periodical stands for *Yueyue xiaoshuo* in 36 cities. Later, as Wu was replaced by other novelists, *Yueyue xiaoshuo* was dominated by love stories. The number of periodical stands increased to over

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[78] A Ying, *Xiaoshuo xiqu*, 151-2; Fan, *Qingmo xiqugailiang*, 183-185.
[79] Liu, *Xiaoshuo guanggao*, 141, 166.
[80] Liu, *Xiaoshuo guanggao*, 109, 117-118, 180.

70 in more than 40 cities.[81] In other words, while novel readers might regard enlightenment as beneficial, they would be more likely to read novels for leisure than for lectures. Some scholars, such as Liu Yinghui, regard the popularity of love stories as a sacrifice of political seriousness.[82] But they fail to recognize that novels with sensational plots would not necessarily harm the effectiveness of propaganda: novels must be popular enough so that they could convey political messages to a population broad enough, especially lower classes who were less interested in abstruse content.

Although there were gaps between reformers' goal of using novels for enlightenment and readers' natural preference for entertainment, reformative novels were more influential among the common folks than elite-oriented newspapers. The Qing court ranked *Xin Xiaoshuo* as more "dangerous" than serious periodicals like *Xinmin congbao* (New people repository) because most Chinese could not understand those refined words in *Xinmin congbao*.[83] Moreover, reformist newspapers inside and outside China, such as *Shi bao* (Times) in Shanghai and *Xinmin congbao* in Japan, all helped advertise *Xin xiaoshuo*. *Shi bao* also published advertisements for *Yueyue xiaoshuo* to support its circulation. These reformative novel periodicals had distribution centers not only in major cities and towns in China but also in foreign cities like Tokyo.[84]

By contrast, Guangdong revolutionaries established their novel periodicals four years later than reformers did. Two brothers from Panyu, Huang Shizhong and Huang Boyao, had been reporters for *Tiannan xinbao* (South news), a newspaper supporting the Baohuanghui in Singapore, but they became revolutionaries under the influence of You Lie. After Zheng Guangong passed

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[81] Liu Yinghui, "Wanqing xiaoshuo qikan de guanggao xushu" (Advertising narration in novels and periodicals of the late Qing dynasty), in *Dongnan daxue xuebao* 6 (2013): 85-91.
[82] Liu, *Xiaoshuo guanggao*,182-4.
[83] Liu Chang, "Xin xiaoshuo zazhi de zhengzhi lishi he shehui xiaoshuo yanjiu" (The political history and social fiction of the journal of *Xin xiaoshuo*), (MA thesis, Dongbei shifan daxue, 2009), 1-33.
[84] Liu, *Xiaoshuo guanggao*, 167, 189-198.

away, the Huang brothers continued revolutionary activism via popular culture media in Guangdong and Hong Kong. In 1906, they founded *Yuedong xiaoshuolin* (Eastern Guangdong novels) in Canton. The periodical was renamed as *Zhongwai xiaoshuolin* (Chinese and foreign novels) after moving to Hong Kong in 1907. The most notable revolutionary novels were generally composed by Huang Shizhong, such as his *Hong Xiuquan yanyi* (Romance of Hong Xiuquan) and *Nianzai fanhua meng* (Dream of twenty-year splendor). In particular, *Hongxiuqun yanyi* imitates the format and style of *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* to express evident anti-Manchu sentiments with some anecdotes and legends about the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom. After *Hong Xiuquan yanyi* was published, many overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia and the Americas also knew the novel; some people even adapted the novel into different opera scripts for performance.[85] Revolutionary newspapers, such as *Zhongxing ribao* (Revive China daily) in Singapore, would advertise for novels in *Zhongwai xiaoshuolin*. Those novels also had their selling agencies in other regions, such as *Guanghua ribao* (Recover China daily) in Yangon, *Ziyou xinbao* (Freedom news) in Honolulu, and *Datong ribao* (Great harmony daily) in San Francisco.[86] Despite that, the influence of revolutionary novels based in Hong Kong and Canton were generally not comparable to that of reformative novels based in Shanghai.

Although Guangdong revolutionaries fell behind reformers in terms of using novels, they did not fall behind in terms of retaining contacts with audiences or readers of their propaganda media. For example, they also organized activities that turned the common folks into participants rather than merely recipients of revolutionary propaganda. In 1905, *Yousuowei bao* published a notice to solicit children's ballads. The first prize was given to a ballad imitating the format of three-

[85] Feng, *Geming yishi*, vol. 1, 222.
[86] Liu, *Xiaoshuo guanggao*, 346, 348.

character classics (a popular form of children's textbook), which teaches children to open their eyes, study hard for national progress, and be righteous men rather than flattering slaves.[87] The ballad uses repetitive words to impress the audiences, such as "Children, don't give up! Children, be prepared!", which sounds like a teacher giving a face-to-face lesson to students.[88]

In 1908, *Zhongguo ribao* in Hong Kong called for anti-Manchu couplets, and the activity was followed by other revolutionary newspapers, such as *Zhongxing ribao* in Singapore, *Guanghua ribao* in Penang and Yangon, *Ziyou xinbao* in Honolulu, and *Datong ribao* in San Francisco. According to the rule of the activity, contributors should compose the second line of a couplet to match the first line offered by Zhu Zhixin, a revolutionary from Panyu. In total, revolutionary newspapers in different areas had received over 100,000 pairs of couplets from Hong Kong, Canton, Xiangshan, Shunde, and overseas.[89] This activity promoted mass participation in expressing nationalistic anti-Manchu sentiments.

In addition to published literature, Guangdong political elites turned their audiences into participants in propaganda through their use of performance arts. Revolutionaries were more active than reformers in using performance arts for propaganda. As aforementioned, the population of people with basic literacy rate was rather small in the Qing period. There still were many people who could not read vernacular fiction, so opera and drama performances secured a higher possibility that politicized information could reach the illiterate. For example, performances of Cantonese ballads and operas spread all over restaurants, teahouses, theaters, brothels, opium dens, and streets, and the price for watching such performances was affordable for most people—in

[87] Yang Guoxiong, *Jiushukan zhong de Xianggang shenshi* (Hong Kong's past in old books and periodicals) (Hong Kong: Sanlian shudian, 2014), 180

[88] Quoted from: Yang, *Jiushukan*, 180. The original text is: "细佬哥，莫放弃。细佬哥，要准备。"

[89] Feng, *Geming yishi*, vol. 1, 142.

Malaya, it could be as low as two to three silver cents. Political activists founded propaganda troupes; merchants used ballads for advertisements; blind girls and poor peddlers could also be performers.[90] These popular culture propagandas brought humor and ridicule to their critique of politics, thus intriguing the populace. For instance, comparing politicians (or other well-esteemed strata) to prostitutes (or other despised strata and even non-humans) and comparing officialdom (or other well-esteemed circles) to a brothel (or other despised circles and even animal zoos) are typical analogies in popular culture propagandas satirizing the authority or powerful men.

Invited by Datong School, Liang Qichao composed an opera, *Ban Dinyuan ping Xiyu* (Ban Chao pacifies the West).[91] Because many students of Datong School came from Guangdong, Liang included Cantonese dialectal words in the opera script.[92] He also included army songs written by Huang Zunxian, another reformer from Guangdong, and *longzhou* ballads for promoting nationalistic devotion to the country and militant resistance against foreign enemies. The historical setting of the opera is the Eastern Han dynasty when the Central Plain was threatened by the Xiongnu tribe but Ban Chao helped pacify the Western barbarians, which paralleled late-Qing politics when China was threatened by Western imperialists. Moreover, Liang Qichao probably hoped this opera would be adapted for performances in other regions so he offered translations of Cantonese dialectal words and suggested possible ways to rewrite the story. The most interesting suggestion is to inject the love tragedy between Marguerite Gautier and Armand Duval in *The Lady of the Camellias* into the experience of Ban Chao and his wife. While this adaptation might weaken the opera's political seriousness, Liang possibly noticed sensational plots could attract

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[90] Li, *Malaiya*, 4-6.

[91] Li, *Yueyu shuxie*, 314.

[92] Zhong Xinzhi, "Dawenhao de xiaojuchang: Liang Qichao *Ban Dingyuan ping Xiyu* de shiyan jingshen ji qi dui Zhongguo xiandai juchang de teshu yiyi" (Great writer' small theater: Experimental spirit of Liang Qichao's *Ban Dingyuan ping Xiyu* and its significance to modern Chinese theaters), in *Hanyuyan wenxue yanjiu* 2 (2017): 57.

audiences from diverse strata. Staged in 1905, *Ban Dingyuan ping Xiyuan* had evoked overseas students' interests in offering drama and opera performances.[93]

A striking pioneer in this aspect was Chunliu Troupe (春柳社), the first influential Chinese drama troupe founded by a group of overseas students in Japan in 1907. The first formal performance by the troupe was *Heinu yutianlu* (Cry of the Blacks), adapted from Harriet Beecher Stowe's anti-slavery novel, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, in which the troupe compared the Chinese to the Blacks who suffered the same brutality of Western imperialism.[94] The troupe welcomed audiences from not only China but also Japan, Korea, and India. In 1909, the troupe staged another popular performance, *Relei* (Hot tears), which narrates how French revolutionaries escape from prisons and sacrifice their lives in their struggles against the authority. According to Ouyang Yuqian, many audiences went to the backstage to express their gratitude to the troupe; Revolutionary Alliance members who had watched the performance also recognized the progressiveness of the troupe.[95] After the performance, over forty people joined Revolutionary Alliance.[96]

However, the great effect of the Chunliu Troupe's performance was an accident rather than a result of deliberate propaganda for Revolutionary Alliance. Fan Fangjun argues that the troupe had connections to Revolutionary Alliance because one of its founder, Li Shutong, supported revolutionaries as he witnessed the newspaper battles between *Xinmin congbao* (headed by Liang Qichao) and *Min bao* (headed by Hu Hanmin, a revolutionary from Panyu) that ended with reformers' failure.[97] But such connections were limited and in fact, as Ouyang Yuqian (a member of the Chunliu Troupe) noted, although many people labeled the performance by the Chunliu

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[93] Zhong, "Dawenhao de xiaojuchang," 60, 62, 63.

[94] A Ying, *Xiaoshuo xiqu*, 196-7, 279-80.

[95] Ouyang Yuqian, *Ouyang Yuqian xiju lunwenji* (Collection of Ouyang Yuqian's treatises on dramas) (Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe, 1984), 160.

[96] Ouyang Yuqian, *Ziwo yanxi yilai* (Since I started to give performance) (Shanghai: Sanlian shudian, 2014), 8-27.

[97] Fan, *Qingmo xiiqugailiang*, 378.

Troupe as revolutionary propaganda, Chunliu members initially organized the performance for fun. They did not devise any propaganda plan or established any formal organization. Perhaps their performance appeared revolutionary as it was unavoidably affected by the popular idea of opposing autocracy in Japan, but they did not do it intentionally.[98] Even Chunliu members themselves could not believe that over forty people joined Revolutionary Alliance simply due to their performance.[99] However, even if the founding of the Chunliu Troupe and its initial organization of the performance were spontaneous, revolutionaries had offered subsequent support for its performance once they noticed the possible propaganda value in it.

As many Guangdong revolutionaries were not experienced actors or scriptwriters, they relied on professional troupes as intermediary propagandists to expand their political influence. In fact, many troupes did not have a clear political orientation at the beginning, but their nationalistic performances were esteemed by both reformers and revolutionaries. Revolutionaries were more active in contacting opera and drama troupes, by which a revolutionary label was given to troupe members by people later on. As a result, the public reputation of revolutionaries also increased as professional troupes gained great social influence. For example, Wu Jianren's reformative novel, *Heiji yuanhun* (Wraith wronged by opium), had been adapted into an opera performance in Shanghai in 1908. Every time after performing *Heiji yuanhun*, Xia Yueshan, Xia Yuerun, and Pan Yueqiao would sell drugs for opium cessation to audiences at their theater. Their performances were so influential that they always received threatening letters from opium merchants. Later, revolutionaries set up a secret communication base at the theater. During the 1911 Revolution, the Xia brothers and Pan led a group of martial-role actors to attack the Jiangnan Manufacturing

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[98] Ouyang, *Ouyang Yuqian xiju lunwenji*, 153.
[99] Ouyang, *Ziwo yanxi yilai*, 18-27.

Bureau and organized multiple charitable performances to collect donations for revolutionaries.[100] Aware of the influence of the Xia brothers and Pan, Sun Yat-sen visited their theater to give speeches and presented inscribed boards as gifts. But this possibly happened after 1911 because between 1908 and 1911 Sun was busy soliciting funds for anti-Qing revolutions from abroad.

In another instance, Renshounian Troupe (人寿年班), a Cantonese opera troupe based in Shenggang (Canton and Hong Kong), was particularly famous for its 1909 performance about Yue Fei, an anti-Jurchen general of the Song dynasty. To praise the Renshounian Troupe's performance, *Zhongguo ribao*'s journalists presented a banner inscribed "shi-po-jing-tian" (world-shaking) to the troupe.[101] However, stories of national heroes like Yue Fei were routine themes in traditional Cantonese operas rather than new topics inspired by revolutionaries. Historically, Cantonese opera actors had been warriors in various anti-Manchu struggles, like supporting Zheng Chenggong in the early Qing era and the Taiping rebels in the late Qing era.[102] Despite all that, Guangdong revolutionaries expanded their propaganda influence through frequent contacts with opera and drama troupes that might not be revolutionary at the very start.

Meanwhile, Guangdong revolutionaries also established revolutionary troupes by themselves. According to Chen Feinong, revolutionary troupes, though amateur, were very popular.[103] In 1904, Cheng Ziyi, a revolutionary educator in Canton, contacted two other revolutionary leaders, Chen Shaobai and Li Jitang, to discuss how they could inform the populace of revolutionary ideas given the fact that the literacy rate was low. They thus established an opera school, Cainange Troupe (采南歌剧团), in Canton and recruited 80 students aged from 12 to 16. Chen Shaobai served as a

[100] Fan, *Qingmo xiiqugailiang*, 300-304.
[101] Feng, *Geming yishi*, vol. 1, 339.
[102] Li, *Yueyu shuxie*, 186-7.
[103] Chen Feinong, *Yueju liushinian* (Sixty years of Cantonese operas) (Hong Kong: Zhongwen daxue chubanshe, 2007), 10.

scriptwriter while Li served as a sponsor. The troupe quickly went bankrupt due to financial difficulties. Nonetheless, in 1907 and 1908, Guangdong revolutionaries founded Youtianying Troupe (优天影剧团) in Macao and Zhentiansheng Troupe (振天声剧团) in Canton.[104]

The most famous performance given by Youtianying was an opera memorializing Wen Shengcai, a revolutionary assassin.[105] Born in Shunde, Wen joined Revolutionary Alliance when he worked in Malaya. He shot Fuqi, a Manchu general, before the Guangzhou Uprising of April 1911. In the opera by Youtianying, after Wen is arrested and interrogated by Zhang Mingqi, the governor general of Liangguang, for Wen's allies, Wen replies, "Inside the courtroom are your running dogs; outside the courtroom are all my allies!" Wen continues to persuade onlookers surrounding the courtroom, "Listen carefully, my compatriots! We are born slaves. Living in a despotic state is just like a dumb person tasting bitter herbs but speaking no words. After you hear my words, please be assertive as citizens!"[106] Shortly, the British Hong Kong government banned the performance.

Zhentiansheng's performances also featured nationalism, such as the story about Wen Tianxiang's sacrifice for the Southern Song Dynasty during the Mongol conquest. The most popular performance given by the troupe was *Titou tong* (Sorrow of pigtails). Provokingly, the script of *Titou tong* includes a poem written by a Ming loyalist in the early Qing period, "One has to choose between his head and his hair. Just let them shave our hair. Our heads will still be our heads. Today they shave our hair. Tomorrow being shaved will be their heads!"[107] In the name of

[104] Feng, *Geming yishi*, vol. 1, 77, 338-339.
[105] Li, *Yueyu shuxie*, 91.
[106] Quoted from: Li, *Yueyu shuxie*, 191, 210. The original text is: "堂上生的是你的狗腿，堂外站的便是我的同党！" And the next one is: "众同胞站在两旁静耳细听，人在世为奴隶何等下贱。住在了专制国家好比哑子食黄连，众同胞听罢我言，须要坚持国民主见。"
[107] Quoted from: Feng, *Geming yishi*, vol. 1, 340. The original text is: "有头皆要剃，无剃不成头。剃自由他剃，头还是我头。请看剃头者，人亦剃其头！"

raising funds for natural disasters, the troupe traveled to Southeast Asia to give performances for overseas Chinese. When in Singapore, the troupe visited Sun Yat-sen, and its members joined Revolutionary Alliance. After the reformers in Singapore were informed of the troupe's connections to revolutionaries, a new round of debate between reformatist and revolutionary newspapers happened there.[108]

In addition, Huang Xiayi, a revolutionary from Dongguan county, founded Xingtianmeng Troupe (醒天梦剧团) in his hometown to propagate anti-Manchu ideas and led his troupe to give a performance in Hong Kong in 1909. The performance featured the uprising of Xiong Fei, a national hero who had led a group of righteous people from Dongguan to support Wen Tianxiang and fight the Mongols. Audiences of the performance, including revolutionaries like Feng Ziyou and Huang Shizhong, gave unceasing praise to the troupe. Later on, Feng Ziyou invited Huang and a group of other Dongguan people to join Revolutionary Alliance. Xingtianmeng had contributed greatly to fundraising for the expansion of the southern branch of Revolutionary Alliance from Hong Kong to other areas in South China. Another revolutionary member of the troupe, Lin Zhimian, donated all his estate of about 20,000 dollars to the southern branch of Revolutionary Alliance.[109]

After Revolutionary Alliance's third Guangdong Uprising failed in April 1911, Sun asked its members in San Francisco to join Hongmen-Zhigongtang, or the Chinese Freemasons, and appointed Li Shinan, a revolutionary originated from Taishan and born in San Francisco, as the accountant of Hongmen Fundraising Bureau. To raise funds, Li founded a troupe in San Francisco and performed as a young actor. Li's handsome look captivated the heart of numerous female

[108] Feng, *Geming yishi*, vol. 1, 340.
[109] Feng, *Geming yishi*, vol. 3, 978-980.

audiences in San Francisco. Every time Li went back from theaters, phone calls and gift packages overwhelmed his home.[110]

Overall, Guangdong reformers such as Liang Qichao were more effective in using published literature like fiction that had never been performed, while revolutionaries such as Li Shinan were more effective in using performance of operas, dramas, and the like for propaganda. However, both reformers and revolutionaries utilized the organizational networks of the Baohuanghui or Revolutionary Alliance to spread their politicized published literature or performance arts from Shanghai, Hong Kong, and Guangdong to other major cities and towns in China and overseas. They both tried to attract more readers and audiences by soliciting propaganda texts from the common folks and thus turning recipients of propaganda into propagandists. Nevertheless, the populace had a preference for entertainment over enlightenment. Many, if not most, people were attracted by the popular cultural propagandas they enjoyed more than the political messages from them. Therefore, it was necessary to have a group of professional performers and novelists like Wu Jianren who served as intermediaries between Guangdong political elites and the populace, given their familiarity with popular tastes.

Conclusion

To conclude, pro-Qing reformers and anti-Qing revolutionaries, who seemed antagonistic in their political outlooks, both used popular culture media to express views diverging from the existing official policies of the Qing state. Since the diasporic experiences as political exiles after 1898 radicalized Guangdong reformers like Liang Qichao and Ou Jujia, they composed novels and operas to explore the possibility of promoting Guangdong independence from the Qing state,

[110] Feng, *Geming yishi*, vol. 1, 357-358.

which can be seen as a metaphor for a radical breakaway from conservative rulers and officials. Their embrace of militant approaches to modernizing China through fictional plots like assassinating autocrats made them look "revolutionary." Although Guangdong revolutionaries extensively used popular culture media later than reformers did, they caught up with reformers by acting as opportunists during the anti-American boycott. To mobilize anti-Qing sentiments of the Cantonese populace who usually had close relationships with overseas Chinese labors, revolutionaries like Zheng Guangong and He Jianshi spread propaganda ballads and comics to accuse reformers and the Qing court for collaborating with the US and thus harming domestic and overseas Chinese. Overall, reformers and revolutionaries employed different strategies to propagate their political outlooks, but they both waged radical challenges to the conservative Qing court.

Although those radical ideas challenging the Qing authority were encapsulated in popular culture media, audiences and readers of these politicized operas, dramas, ballads, and fiction might be attracted by the cultural forms they liked more than the political ideas that the reformers and revolutionaries cherished. While Guangdong political elites endowed popular culture media with the lofty duty of political lectures, the populace was always fascinated by sensational plots and love stories for daily leisure. Such gaps were filled by the contribution of professional novelists and performers like Wu Jianren and the Xia brothers who acted as intermediary propagandists to bridge the demands of political leaders and the interests of the populace. When Guangdong political elites exerted their political influence on the populace, they still had to care about popular preferences. Hence, Guangdong reformers and revolutionaries were not the only authors of politicized popular culture: intermediary novelists and performers, as well as the populace, were also involved in producing propagandas.

Conclusion

This is a study on the use of popular culture for political mobilization of the populace by Guangdong elites in modern China and the Chinese diaspora. But it also reveals the historic change of the relations between these elites, the state, and the populace in 1839-1911. As the countdown of the Qing dynasty began, Guangdong elites first tried to save China by positioning themselves inside the Qing system and cooperating with Qing officials to resist the British intrusion in the Opium War from 1839 to 1842. However, as foreign aggression increasingly exposed domestic crisis while importing new resources like Christianity, constitutionalism, and republicanism to China, Guangdong elites acquired weapons to influence the country outside the Qing government. After suffering repeated failures in the civil service examinations, Taiping leaders like Hong Xiuquan, Feng Yunshan, and Hong Regan resorted to Christianity to mobilize a rebellious movement against the Qing state from 1851 to 1864. After being purged by the conservative faction in abortive 1898 Reform, reformist leaders like Liang Qichao and Ou Jujia exiled overseas and explored the possibility of militant actions against the reactionary forces in the Qing court in novels and operas. After his eight-thousand-word letter for social reforms was neglected by the governor general of Zhili and Beiyang Trade Minister Li Hongzhang, Sun Yat-sen turned to revolutionary movements with the support of Guangdong-originated comrades like Chen Shaobai and Zheng Guangong who did much anti-Qing propaganda work through ballads, operas, and comics. In this process, Guangdong elites transformed from the fortifiers of the Qing state to its challengers.

To be specific, Guangdong elites gradually dissociated from the Qing state: from undergirding the Qing authority in the Opium War, to challenging the Qing court but not its socio-

political system in the Taiping Rebellion, and finally to confronting the backward Qing system in reformist and revolutionary movements until the fall of the Qing state in 1911. During the Opium War, many Guangdong gentry like Zhang Weiping allied with hawkish officials like Lin Zexu to instigate the anti-British sentiments of the Guangdong populace and defend the Qing state by stigmatizing opium, denouncing the doves like Qishan, and constructing the Sanyuanli victory. In this period, local elites and Qing officials closely cooperated to resist western intrusion. But during the Taiping Rebellion, lower-class Hakka intellectuals like Hong Xiuquan mobilized the marginalized Hakka populace in South China, especially those in Guangxi, to challenge the Confucian authority sanctioned by Qing officials. In this period, Hong used pseudo-Christianity to promise a chance to reverse rather than end the existing imperial system and social hierarchy. Until 1911, Guangdong political elites had embraced western influence in a more literal sense. Revolutionaries like Zheng Guangong demanded a complete breakaway from the Qing state for a new republic, and even reformers like Liang Qichao also radically attacked the conservative faction in the court for a real constitutional reform. They both confronted Qing officials by using popular culture propaganda to persuade domestic Chinese and the global Chinese diaspora to overturn the old system of China.

Thus, popular culture materials like ballads, operas, dramas, and comic provided a critical propaganda tool for Guangdong political elites to cooperate with, compete with, or confront the Qing authorities while influencing the common folks from 1839 to 1911. The populace also expressed their assent, dissent, and adaptation, by creating eulogistic or satiric ballads and tales, or by selecting, adapting, and transmitting certain popular culture materials politicized by Guangdong political elites. Therefore, through the lens of popular culture sources, the relationships of Guangdong political elites and the populace as well as the Qing state became more interactive

than unilateral, which more or less destabilized the hierarchy of state officials at the top, local elites in the middle, and the common folks at the powerless bottom. Compared with the more focused popular media, newspapers, these popular culture materials would have influenced broader audiences—not only because its vernacularism helped shorten the distance between those elites and the common folks, but also because its distinction from the classical writing sanctioned by the Qing state helped those elites convey defiant messages in rebellious, reformist, and revolutionary movements after the Opium War. As a result, Guangdong elites significantly influenced China' politics by mobilizing the populace from Guangdong province to southern China and the global Chinese diaspora to resist western invasion and occupation, to masquerade a traditional revolt in the name of Christianity, and to promote modern reforms and revolutions with global horizons.

Nonetheless, while these political elites noticed the importance of popular support for their political purposes like countering the doves and revolting against the Qing state, the demands of those elites might have clashed with the interests of the populace. There still were ballads and tales from the common folks that attacked the anti-opium campaign co-launched by Guangdong gentry and officials like Lin Zexu, challenged the divinity of Taiping leaders and the legitimacy of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom, and questioned the political intentions of reformist and revolutionary elites. The populace had expressed their dissenting voices derived from their personal interests like profits in the opium trade, concrete gains like wealth and marriage in the Taiping Rebellion, and unwillingness to devote their fortune and lives to reformist and revolutionary ventures.

Even when the populace finally offered support for those Guangdong political elites as their interests coincided, the common folks might still have nuanced concerns distinct from the purposes of those political elites. For instance, after hawkish officials and gentry spread patriotic and anti-British sentiments to the Guangdong populace, the latter might have supported the

propaganda also because they wanted to protect their own families—not only for the country. While the Taiping leaders propagated Christianity for overturning the Qing court, most peasant followers such as Guangxi Hakkas might only resort to the Taipings for refuge from the bullies of locals and bandits as well as for greater wealth and higher ranks. In addition, professional novelists and performers, as well as ordinary contributors to propaganda ballads and novels of late reformers and revolutionaries, became propagandists themselves not only for the lofty aspirations to enlighten domestic and overseas Chinese but also for remuneration and competition prize, or simply by accident.

Finally, while this thesis examines popular culture for political mobilization, using such sources for historical studies has long been questioned by historians for lacking authenticity. The popular culture materials used in this thesis like ballads and folktales are fictional sources that contain narratives filled with metaphors, fantasies, and hyperboles. Many historians insist that "science speaks the language of law or theory" and attack narratives for violating objectivity.[1] Nevertheless, as historians attempt to formulate a proper interpretation for the evidence they collect and select, history shares the narrative feature of fiction.[2] Literary fiction embraces imagination based on "what has happened and is happening in the world," while history explains "how things happened and clear[s]…misunderstanding."[3] In other words, since literary fiction has a constructive role while historical research has a critical role, they supplement and compete with each other rather than rule out the other. Held in Chengdu in 2007, an international symposium on modern Chinese popular culture welcomed notable historians like Joseph Esherick, Cheng Meibao,

[1] Allan Megill, "Does Narrative have a Cognitive Value of its Own?" in *Historical Knowledge/Historical Error: A Contemporary Guide to Practice* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 69.
[2] Callum Brown, *Postmodernism for Historians* (London, UK: Pearson, 2005), 97, 107.
[3] Ann Rigney, "History as Text: Narrative Theory and History," *SAGE Handbook of Historical Theory*, eds. Nancy Partner and Sarah Foot (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2013), 19-20.

and Wang Di, who have reached a consensus that using popular culture for historical studies justifies the use of literary stories to narrate history rather than solely relies on scientific patterns to explain history.[4]

This thesis has used popular culture sources to examine the power relations that found expressions in fictional narratives like propaganda ballads. Instead of affirming the authenticity of historical events, the analysis of these popular culture materials helps unveil the functions and impacts of those politicized fictional narratives in shaping significant historical events like the Opium War, the Taiping Rebellion, and late reforms and revolutionary movements stepping towards the end of the Qing dynasty and the founding of the Republic of China.

Although this thesis focuses on Guangdong popular culture in the late-Qing period, the political use of popular culture was similarly or even more remarkable in the later periods of modern Chinese history, such as semi-deification of Sun Yat-sen as the Father of the Chinese nation through eulogistic and elegiac couplets, telegrams, and poetry in the Republican era, as well as systematic use of propaganda posters and revolutionary operas cultivating the cult of Mao Zedong after 1949. In the world, the politicization of popular culture and intensification of state control over the masses that came with capitalism as well as rising fascism before and during the Second World War actually had inspired sociologists like Antonio Gramsci and Theodor Adorno to critique the state hegemony fortified by the manipulative device of "popular culture." Later on, propaganda battles through films, televisions, and radio also constituted a large part of the Cold War between the East and the West. In short, the dominating and pervasive force of popular culture

[4] Ai Zhike, and Li Deying, "Dierjie jindai Zhongguo chengshi dazhongwenhuashi guoji xueshu yantaohui zongshu" (Overview of the second international symposium on modern Chinese history of urban mass culture), in *Shehui kexue yanjiu* 1 (2008): 196.

was and is still growing stronger worldwide after the early 20th century, and this thesis is an entry point into its political complexities.

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