

**Comrades Share Time:  
A Study of Participation in a Chinese Village**

by  
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## Abstract

Has China's countryside left socialism behind? Is the rise of digital connectivity an indication of, as Jodi Dean argues, the foreclosure of opportunities to participate in society towards collective empowerment? This dissertation addresses these questions via a case study of Heyang Village in Zhejiang's mountainous Jinyun county. Taking advantage of the village's sustained material culture I develop a historical review of the media used to organize village life over time informing values and providing opportunities for political, economic, and cultural participation as members of the village. This review is used to inform an analysis of the current dynamics of village life in Heyang today. Six months of fieldwork over a period of four years between 2015 and 2019 comprises the majority of this research. Focus group interviews help to provide local interpretation of events. Participant observation research, in particular with working aged men and seniors, provides deeper insights on the values, actions and positive trajectories identified in the focus group interviews. Barbara Adam's timescape perspective is employed to bring the multiple elements of the case study together. This perspective helps to draw out how communication technologies that are used to keep time enable opportunities for specific forms of political belonging. While a postsocialist discourse on individual's qualities (*suzhi*) is predominate, socialist values of comradeship persist. This comradeship is particularly evident in seniors' use of mobile phones to keep the time via hourly announcements recalling the temporality previously provided by the Chinese Communist Party's mass line inspired use of wired-radio loudspeakers. This temporality is premised on bringing the people and leaders together to share time in order to affect mutually transformative experiences and unite the collective towards shared political goals premised on sustaining basic wellbeing. I identify "shared time" as a socialist temporality that is still maintained and can be used to recognize positive actions and recommend ways forward to fan the embers of socialism into a revitalized commitment to communism.

**Keywords:** Participation; Mass Line; Postsocialist; Shared Time; Comrade; Quality

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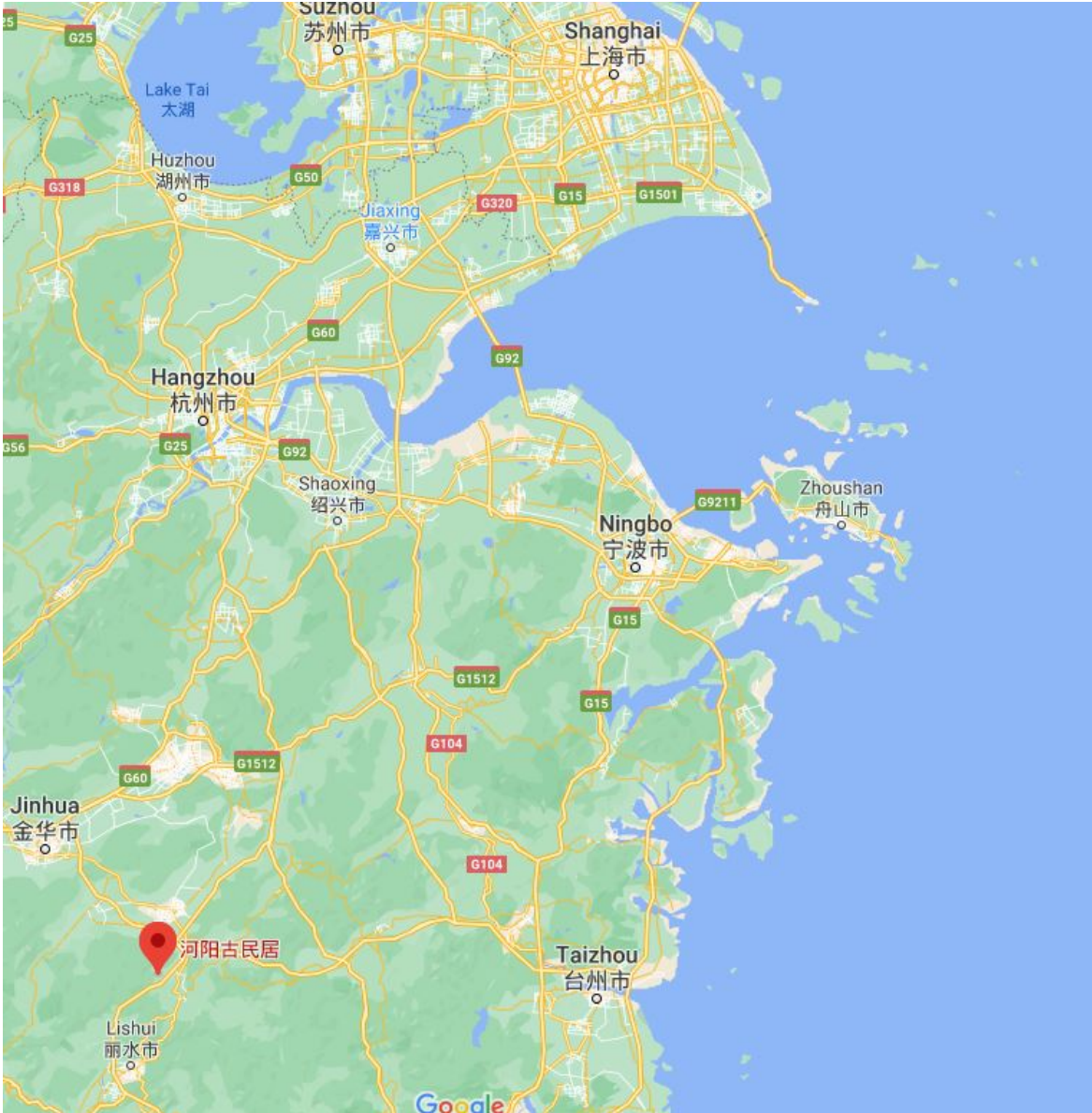
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## List of Acronyms

CCP	Chinese Communist Party
HIRS	Heyang Institute for Rural Studies
ICT4D	Information Communication for Development

# Maps



*Google Map image of Heyang village in relation to major urban centres*

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<https://www.google.com/maps/place/%E6%B2%B3%E9%98%B3%E5%8F%A4%E6%B0%91%E5%B1%85/@29.9585325,120.0407907,8.25z/data=!4m5!3m4!1s0x0:0xd419479b8da18206!8m2!3d28.725152!4d120.009428>,  
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*Aerial photo of Heyang village displayed in the village council office*

Photo by author

# Chapter 1.

## 1.1. Introduction

This dissertation questions the postsocialist conditions of China's countryside and reveals how socialist practices are recreated in current technological, political, economic and cultural contexts. It examines how communication technologies are used in multiple and dynamic ways as a media ecology to support different forms of political belonging and participation. Heyang village, located in the mountains of Zhejiang province's Jinyun County serves as a case study for this research. Via Heyang's history, I trace how China's national engagements with capitalism, first via European missionaries and diplomats, later as socialist revolution to resist capitalist imperialism, and now as a member of global markets, has impacted the material culture and political belonging of the people who reside in China's countryside. Following the work of Barbara Adam (2008), this examination takes a timescapes perspective targeting the processes that influence understandings of political belonging and are realized through time in participatory action. This approach enables me to ask if China's peasants must expect continued postsocialist development, or if paths leading to the communist horizon are still present.

Alexander Day's 2013 book *The Peasant in Postsocialist China* takes up the problem of the peasant in development. Following the work of Arif Dirlik, Day (2013) argues that postsocialism is the recognition that communist governments like China's are no longer standing in antagonistic opposition to capitalism but are increasingly integrating with it, leading to re-evaluations of commitments to and interpretations of socialism. He argues that part of this postsocialist process in China was Chinese Communist Party (CCP) intellectuals in the late 1970s redefining peasant subjectivity from a progressive revolutionary, into a backwards barrier to the nation's development. He traces numerous means that the CCP has employed to bring the nation's peasants, its rural farming people, into market relations. He highlights the rise of a normative discourse that judges people according to their ability to successfully demonstrate marketable qualities, the quality (*suzhi*) discourse, which has most of the trappings of self-development identified in neoliberal oriented subjectivities (Wallis, 2013). Accordingly, avenues for participation in political, economic, and cultural domains of life are understood as functions of one's marketable qualities. Added to this context is the telecommunications boom that has

occurred concurrently with China's entry into global markets. The spread of mobile phone technology in China has been a story of markets developing ahead of state support (Qiu, 2009). That this is especially true with rural China only seems to further the interpolation of China's peasantry as consumers engaged in market relations rather than as a revolutionary force working through the state.

In her 2012 book, *The Communist Horizon* Jodi Dean argues for a politics that will lead to communism. She situates this quest in conjunction with the revival in Marxist studies that she evidences with a trajectory beginning with the popularity and ongoing impacts of the 2009 Birkbeck Institute for the Humanities conference *On the Idea of Communism*. This conference brought multiple different scholars together to address the political fallout of the 2008 global financial crisis with the question whether in these historical circumstances "communism" is still the name to be used to designate radical emancipatory projects" (Douzinas and Zizek, 2010 p.viii). Even though most nation-states that have practised state socialism under a Communist Party are now being identified as postsocialist societies, like Day (2013) identifies China, the participants of this conference widely confirmed "that one should remain faithful to the name 'communism'" (Douzinas and Zizek, 2010 p.viii). As part of the effort to "reinvigorate[e] and imagin[e]... communism as a philosophical ideal and political project". Dean penned the conclusion to the anthology *Afterlives of Chinese Communism* (2019b p.337). This collected work examines the legacies of China's Communist Revolution with the effect of not only engaging ongoing socialist practices within China, but also, as Dean summarizes, to,

enable us to discern if our politics is revolutionary: it helps us ask whether ostensible efforts to serve the people fragment them into identity categories such that the people can no longer be seen as a revolutionary force (2019b p.341).

A crucial aspect of Dean's project is to imagine how one can act towards the collective emancipatory potential of communism as a horizon for humanity. She (2012; 2020) builds her argument mainly in dialogue with her earlier critiques of contemporary participation in digital networks as a form of communicative capitalism where collective politics are foreclosed by the capitalist nature of the available platforms (2004; 2010). She claims that as a result of these capitalist conditions,

The specific contribution has no symbolic efficiency; rather, it marks only the fact of its having been made. This decline in a capacity to transmit meaning, to symbolize beyond a limited discourse or immediate, local context, characterizes communication's reconfiguration into a primarily economic form. It produces for circulation, not use (2012 p.127).

If we agree with the communicative capitalist thesis, then what celebration can there be in the rise of access to and widespread use of mobile phones in rural China? Should this not be taken as yet another sign of the country's increasing indications of becoming a postsocialist society? Not necessarily. Rather than lament that capitalist providers can entrap all participation in the context of commodified digital communication technologies, we might also look at how the technologies become integrated into political practices grounded in China's socialist legacies. The conceptual issue of whether socialist relations still have merit, and the empirical concern if they can be constituted on the ground in contemporary relations, therefore guides this research project.

## **1.2. Notes on Method**

The research for this thesis is a combination of fieldwork, policy analysis, and theoretical investigation to present a case study of how media ecologies contribute to the experience of time for the people of Heyang and resulting opportunities for political, economic, and cultural participation as members of the village.

Case study methodology is key when investigating empirical counterexamples to theoretical generalizations (see Schrank, 2006), where time and place can push for more nuance in the experimental use of theory to explain social trends (Burawoy, 1991, 2000). It emphasizes mixed methods, such as combining observations with interviews and documentary research to provide multiple means of eliciting evidence and triangulating the validity of findings (Berg, 2001). Additionally, my combination of historical and contemporary resources (Hays, 2004; Vanderstoep *et al* 2009; Yin, 2003), as well as emphasizing theoretical reflexivity (Hays, 2004; Schrank, 2006), are research practices typical of the flexibility and focus of case study research.

Heyang was chosen as a field site for study because of its position as a moderately wealthy southeastern village situates it at the turbulent dynamics of rural development in China today. Located in the economically prosperous eastern province of Zhejiang, Heyang benefits from rural tourism with a nationally recognized 4-A heritage tourist site

ranking based on its numerous preserved buildings dating back as far as the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644). The local county of Jinyun is promoting an economic model based on nostalgia for rural heritage and lifestyles to address development goals set out in the central government's drive to revitalize the countryside (Qian, 2017). Heyang can prosper from tourist economic development because historically it was a prominent landlord village where many families reinvested their wealth into family homes and ancestral halls with white plaster walls, intricate wooden carvings, and black tiled roofs. Maintained through ongoing traditions of filial piety, these structures have survived rounds of destruction and iconoclasm from the Taiping Rebellion in the mid-1800s to the Cultural Revolution in the 1960s and 1970s. Bullet marks and big red graffiti-like painted characters from these periods remain, imprinting their histories within the protected ancient village of Heyang. The central section of the village is lightly peppered with and surrounded by newer homes with four-story houses constructed from the 1980s and onwards, giving the village a motley feel of history hodgepoded together with garden plots, cobblestone roads, and satellite dishes. Material developments here tell a story of the coexistence of different eras of material infrastructure more than of replacement. The reform era has seen residents in the village benefit from economic migration primarily based on raising ducks, shrimp, and fish. Of the approximate 3,010 people registered as permanent residents in Heyang, it is locally estimated that about one-third of them, including people who have migrated from other villages, live in Heyang (Zhao 2017). Exemplary of shifting dynamics, many have made their fortunes in such ventures while others have lost their investments, and those who return include people from both categories. Heyang represents a village indicative of the gravity of national projects, the porousness of wealth during reform, and the complexity of history shoved into a seemingly single dimension of now.

More pragmatically, Heyang is a village that I am able to access as a foreign researcher. It is my supervisor Dr. Yuezhi Zhao's home village, and she set up the Heyang Institute for Rural Studies (HIRS) to support prolonged academic research. I was therefore situated with ready access to various levels of government to both inform and support my extended field work. While in Zhao's home village and part of her research center I was not readily linked to her or her family. While I would bring up her name to explain who I was and why I was there, often this link would be dropped when residents would



explain who I was to each other, focusing instead on me being a foreign researcher with approval from the Village Council and Tourism Management Company.

I engaged in over six months of fieldwork during four visits to Heyang between 2015 and 2019. This included extended stays from June 26 to July 13, 2015, from March 26 to April 14, 2017, August 17, to December 9, 2018 and February 2 to March 4 2019. During the first stay in 2015 I was a member of Dr. Zhao's *Global to Village: Grounding Communication Research in Rural China* research team which was composed of graduate students and junior faculty members from Simon Fraser University and the Chinese University of Communication (Zhao, 2017). In 2017 I visited Heyang in the role of a tourist and was joined by my mother, wife and daughter in the second week of the stay. During this visit I conducted minor observational research but more importantly I made myself more visible and familiar to various residents in the village. In 2018 and 2019 I conducted the primary research for this project as a visiting scholar with the Heyang Institute for Rural Studies.

The fieldwork consists of observation, participant observation, two rounds of focus group interviews totaling 27 groups with 172 participants, and 15 one-on-one interviews. Participants in the focus groups were chosen to represent a large swath of age, gender, class, and education levels in the village including ordinary residents, people who work in the village (be it employees of the state-owned Tourism Management Committee, or at the school); and local leaders. The participants cited in this article represent a selection of this research and have been given pseudonyms and identified by their self-declared profession and age according to decades, as a means to help shed light on their years of experience and give explicit, yet anonymous, voice to the largely older population and their complex accounts of living in Heyang. At times a claim may be attributed to members of a group to better obscure more cutting remarks.

One of the major concerns of this research is how media can provide material support to social structures (Adam, 2006; Postone 1993; Innis, 1971). Chapter four traces the rise and fall of different media in Heyang's overall media ecology. To address this media ecology question most of my observations are focused on the material environment of media placement and times of use. These observations are premised on Forsey's notion of "engaged listening" as an audio counterpart to "participant observation" (2010). Forsey's concept of engaged listening is to promote a "democracy of the senses" in

anthropological work and is built on Johannes Fabian's (1983) social justice arguments critiquing how anthropology situates its studied "Others" in the past denying them coeval status. In making this argument Fabian is particularly critical of the "visual root metaphor of knowledge" used for presenting knowledge (1983 p.67). I engaged in this listening in part by going for "listening walks" a method Murray Schafer identifies as "a walk with a concentration on listening" (1993 p.212). The listening walks that I engaged in helped me to identify the rhythms of media use and, by paying attention to the "soundscape of the village" and appreciate how different media contribute to a complex and dynamic media ecology of multiple media working together.

In addition to walking and listening to the village to understand the media ecology, this research project is interested in the question of how media ecologies can support different forms of participation. I investigate the concern of participation with three methods. The first is through observation of and listening to social organization in public spaces as noted above. The second is via participation in village activities, particularly labour. In this regard I joined primarily housewives and elderly women in doing at home contract assembly of small plastic goods. I was also invited to volunteer with the village's fire brigade which is a primary local employer for working-age men. Through my volunteering with the fire brigade I also was able to participate as a dragon dancer in the cultural events sponsored by Heyang's Village Council.

The final way I investigated participation is with interviews. One concern with conducting focus group interviews is that they can present collective consensus, offering little space for diversity (Neal and Walters, 2008). This is especially true for rural settings where the ideal of a group to be composed of strangers cannot be met because of the small and interconnected nature of a rural setting like a village (Goodsell, War and Stovall, 2009). Focus group interviews were chosen as a primary means of soliciting direct participant involvement in the research, however, because they provided an effective means of soliciting involvement from a large number of residents. On this point, Neal and Walters argue that "the participation-led nature of focus groups means that they are less dominated by the research than would be the case in an individual interview setting (2005 p.180). They explain that the opportunity for participants to make comparisons and build off each other's experiences can offer depth and avenues that might otherwise be neglected (Neal and Walters 2005). Agyemang, Awumbila, and O'Dwyer (2010) argue that focus group interview designs should, therefore, be loose, enabling

participants to help direct the flow. Both rounds of focus group interviews were therefore semi-structured with questions related to social attitudes, economic decisions (see Park, 2006), and inquiring after “critical incidents” (Kain 2004). The “critical incident” questions are used to provide more specification and saliency to ongoing one-on-one interviews and my observations (Bradburn et al 2004). One-on-one interviews were conducted throughout 2018 with the aim of understanding events via local interpretations and meanings rather than objective explanations (Kramp, 2004; also see Maxwell, 2009). Key figures in the village were also selected for one-on-one interviews to solicit accounts of decision-making processes (deMarrais, 2004).

To the extent that I work to situate developments in Heyang, informed by the lasting architecture, locally recorded history, and personal accounts of residents, against historical national level policy shifts my research methodologically fits in with what Brown and Johnson (2015 p.1) call “grassroots history”. This method of “explain[ing] processes of change and continuity over time from the perspective of relatively unknown historical actors”, enables me to better delve into “everyday contexts that make the familiar analytical categories of ‘state’ and ‘society’ impossible to clearly distinguish from each other (Brown and Johnson 2015 p.1). As Chapter Four details, the collective labour organized during the Mao era now informs participants’ normative values regarding participation and empowerment and speaks to the troubles they have with an increasing separation between state and society today. It is on this point that my findings concur with grassroots historian Jacob Eyferth’s finding that, “interviewees [positively] described work in the teams... because it took place in the company of equals” or at least in the spirit of achieving egalitarianism (Eyferth, 2015 p.149).

The following details some of the specifics of how these methods shaped my research, not only for generating data but also for improving my familiarity with village residents.

### **1.2.1. Notes on Initial Field Work**

My first visit to Heyang was from June 26 to July 13, 2015. During this time, as introduced above, I was a member of a group research team lead by Dr. Zhao. This research project was the initial project for HIRS. During this two-and-a-half-week period, I joined the research team in a series of initial meetings with local officials from the

Village Council, the Tourism Management Committee, and local historians. I also joined the research team in conducting a series of focus group interviews.

These interviews included a session with government officials who were visiting family in the village, and eight sessions of groups of six selected from a pool of 94 adults. These participants were recruited through a combination of purposive sampling and snowball methods, with an initial list of 42 participants who were selected in partnership with the Village Council to have a base representation of different genders, ages, and educational backgrounds. A primary constraint in recruitment, however, was with age as most working-age adults work outside of the village, as a result, most participants were over the age of 40. Our team conducted two of these interviews as a large group, one with adults in Yanshanxia, which, previously a natural village, was amalgamated into Heyang (a higher ranked administrative village) in 2004, and a second with a group of leaders from various levels of government who also have family living in the village. Apart from these focus groups, the research team was split into four groups of 3-4 researchers and interviews were conducted concurrently in the Zhu family ancestral hall provided by the Village Council. These interviews ranged from 1.5 to 2.5 hours in length and a total of eight interviews were conducted over five days. My focus group included two other research projects which saw the interview focus first on the consumption of small household appliances, then environmental regulations, and then my questions. These questions focused on media access and political participation and evolved throughout the series of focus groups to respond more directly to common themes raised by participants.

During this initial visit, I supplemented the team-based research activities with my participant observation, premised on Fosey's (2010) concept of "engaged listening" via listening walks. I spent my free time walking around the public spaces of the village to listen to what media were playing and when, as well as to understand daily rhythms and be present during key events. In particular, I was able to: observe social life organized around a small loudspeaker during its three daily broadcasts, become familiar with the village's senior center, and witness an *ad hoc* village meeting which formed when a county official came to inspect work being done on Heyang's sewage system and a crowd formed to voice their concerns.

My second visit to Heyang was not as a researcher but as a tourist between March 26 and April 14, 2017. I was in China studying at the Communication University of China as a visiting scholar and took advantage of my proximity to visit. I spent the first few days on my own and then was accompanied by my mother, and Chinese wife and infant daughter for the last two weeks. Rather than a focus on data collection, this visit was my turn to expose myself to villagers in order to develop relationships and trust (see Gottlieb, 2006; Hays, 2004). Part of this trust-building resulted in being confronted by elderly women for the first time and on a regular basis. As will be detailed later there were concerns that my daughter was not dressed appropriately for the season. While I knew a few of the residents at this time, the presence of my family and the respect we showed in listening to parental advice would be remembered by many when I returned for my main research in 2018.

### **1.2.2. Notes on Primary Field Work**

The primary components of the research took place in my following two visits to Heyang. My main fieldwork lasted between August 18, 2018, and December 9, 2018. During this period, I worked independently and at various times was joined by my supervisor Dr. Zhao and two other visiting researchers to HIRS, Xiaoxing Zhang of SFU's School of Communication, and Linda Qian of Oxford's School of Global and Area Studies. Heyang's Village Council and Tourism Management Committee both provided support to us because of our affiliation with HIRS. One of the main forms of this support was being invited to the daily lunch provided by the Tourism Management Committee to its managerial and tour guide staff. One staff member helped me arrange the village's Party office and presentation equipment to run an English language class that I taught on Friday and Saturday evenings to children from the village as a means to give back to the village. I offered these classes because English is a subject taught in the Chinese curriculum and extra lessons, especially those taught by foreign teachers, are a prized commodity in the country. In the nearby urban county seat of Jinyun, group English classes were priced around 100 yuan (approximately \$20 CAD) per hour. These classes were often filled with 40-60 children at a time, including half as many parents listening along.

During the four months of this visit, I conducted daily participant observation continuing my practice of listening to the village. This general practice turned into regular visits to

the senior center, which as a semi-public space frequented by many was easily accessible. As I became more familiar with villagers, and they with me, I began to integrate with different segments of the population by volunteering my labour. This first began with small groups of neighbours who were doing menial assembly of small plastic goods. These groups primarily consist of stay-at-home mothers and elderly women, but also the occasional handicapped male. The general practice of a neighbour stopping to chat and do a little assembly during a chat is something I had observed and found easy to integrate with. That I would choose to sit and do this initially surprised many, but it opened up conversations where I could introduce myself as a researcher and why I was there, opening into wider conversations with regular themes centering on comparisons between countries and parenting strategies. Many of these conversations were filled with long periods of silence as we worked and these moments worked to build familiarity and trust. By the middle of my stay, in the first half of October, I was unofficially recruited into Heyang's fire brigade whose members I initially impressed by learning some of the local dialect. I began by becoming a visitor of the fire brigade chief's nightly gatherings where some of the day's shift would drink tea with different collections of other men from the village. Following this, during my morning walks listening to the village, I would inevitably cross paths with the fire brigade members as they conducted inspections of the village and I would be called to join along. I mostly just followed behind as they worked around the village I also joined in when holes were dug to plant new shrubberies around the Zhu family temple, in the demolition of farming structures, and removing rubble from different construction sites within the village. My willingness to get my hands dirty turned into invitations for dinner by brigade members and to a trip out of the village where we foraged for some plants. Through this connection, I would also be invited to join the village's dragon dance. This method of sharing in labour proved to be deeply intertwined with participants' complaints of increased social distance in the village and my engagement in it helped me enter different networks of have-not residents including women making small amounts of money to supplement family food budgets and working-aged men who, in finding little success in outside labour markets, make a minor income with village labour.

Another means by which residents recognized me as participating in village life was cooking my own dinner. While weekday lunches were provided by the Tourism Management Committee, I was responsible for my other meals. I would eat breakfast at

a small locally-run restaurant where I would meet many other residents getting their breakfasts, but this place would close before 5 pm and was not suitable for dinner. I had the option to order dinner in from the town, but instead, I made the effort of procuring a propane tank and burner, as well as a small fridge to set up a makeshift kitchen in the three-room farmhouse I had rented. When I was observed buying vegetables from the few street vendors at the front of the village I would inevitably be approached by one resident or another, who, interested about my culinary senses would talk to me about local cuisine and as often as not invite me out to their fields to show off their produce telling me to come and take as needed. In my attempts to be thankful but not entitled I never took vegetables on my own, which in one case led to a miscommunication of me snubbing a farmer's produce and being accompanied out to his field on a few occasions.

During this participant observation, I conducted unstructured interviews to provide local voices to ongoing events and personal experiences (Berg, 2001). In particular, I would often conduct interviews following key events like after the local fire brigade took down local farm structures or the village's dragon dance. I also conducted several targeted interviews including Director Xu Shoushan of the Tourism Management Committee, Zhu Weici of the Village Council, Zhu Furen the chief of the fire brigade, Zhu Tang a retired middle school teacher and recognized as one of the most authoritative voices on the village's history during his lifetime, and Liu Dian, a producer with Jinyun's television station, to solicit narrative accounts of key events and decisions (deMarrais, 2004).

I additionally had planned to conduct a survey of media use and political participation in the village. I designed a pilot survey with questions based on my interests to collect data on histories of household access to different communication technologies and with questions focusing on political participation. The goal of the survey was to attain a level of saturation to inform my qualitative methods (Hutchinson, 2004). This survey was not conducted for various reasons, partly because of the decontextualized nature of the questions surrounding participation and the at times personalized way the questions were interpreted by participants who had volunteered to review the materials with me. Another reason this survey was not carried out is that in pilot testing I encountered problems with access to residents as there is no official account of who is and is not living in the village at any one time. The result is that a large segment of the population living in the village is senior citizens. Seniors, as will be detailed in later chapters,

represent a key demographic of China's rural population and while becoming a key aspect of the focus of my research, did not find the survey pilot easy to engage. They found the language of some of the questions confusing and the task of reading through questions and answers tiring and taxing. Via consultation with first my supervisor Dr. Zhao, and then the other two visiting scholars with HIRS at this time, I decided that a second round of focus group interviews would be a more successful means to engage participants and elicit meaningful responses. To coordinate the interviews so that all the research projects might benefit from organizing participants, they were held between February 13 and March 1, 2019.

The second round of focus group interviews was designed like the first, consisting of a prolonged discussion that covered topics in turn: beginning with understandings of the good life, followed by uses of technology in organizing village life, and ending with considerations of nostalgia. Where participants signed a single letter of informed consent for the interviews conducted in 2015, participants of these groups signed separate letters of consent consistent with the ethics approvals of each research project. Participants were originally selected in the first week of February according to a random selection from the village's household registry, with every 7th person selected as determined by using a random number generator, and children being skipped over. In going door-to-door with invitations to participate, our make-shift research team again encountered the problem of finding people who were at home. When one person was not accessible at home we moved on to the next preselected name. When invited participants were asked to indicate a day, they would have time between 10-11:30 am or 2-3:30 pm. We additionally put out a paper notice that was posted around the village for a general call for participants. Through such methods, we thought we had filled the first few days of interviews with six participants in each slot. These interviews were hosted in the center of Heyang village in one of two rooms that had been rented out as the physical location of HIRS. On the days of the interviews, however, we would have between one and three people show up, and as a result recruited people through snowball methods asking participants to bring in others they know, as well as trying to collect whomever in the vicinity might be free at the moment. Responding to the low turnout and difficulty in recruiting people, our research team targeted specific groups to interview and found that by moving the location of the interview from HIRS to places familiar to distinct groups of participants, such as at one of their homes, we were able to generate much higher rates



of participation (see Johnson-Bailey (2004) for a wider discussion on how being with a group of other trusted people can empower participation in interviews). The targeted interviews we conducted include: a group from Yanshanxia, a group of young entrepreneurs who had recently set up shops in the village, members of the Heyang Lotus Cooperative, two separate groups from the fire brigade, the village tour guides and the security officer and ticket collector who work with them and finally female volunteers organized by the women's association leader. While the affiliations of the latter four groups might indicate that their interests and responses may align with the village leadership, all but the last group represented people who have not found much success in labour markets and provide dynamic insights on their individual and shared experiences and values. The women volunteers' meeting provided insights that corresponded more with those of the focus groups we conducted targeting village leadership, including a meeting with Zhu, a previous leader of the Village Council, a meeting with current members of the Village Council in supporting roles, a meeting with the Village Council leader and village CCP Secretary, a meeting with the Tourism Management Committee's daily operations management team, and a meeting with the Tourism Management Committee's top managers. In targeting the leadership in such a specific manner we were able to pull out rich and complex insights on the evolution of the village's governance structure through *ad hoc* arrangements and cooperation between the Village Council and Tourism Management Committee, which, as will be explained in Chapter five, was invited to take over the heritage protection and tourism management by the Village Council in 2001. These interviews also helped to provide a dynamic against which the concerns raised by other "have not" residents could be responded to by current leadership. In total this series of focus group interviews included 81 participants in 18 separate focus group interviews. As with the initial focus groups, while respondents represented a variety of gender as well as education and income levels, most of the participants were over the age of 40.

Where the first round of focus group interviews re-orientated my research focus from mobile phones to the organizational characters of the CCP's mass line, the second round provides grounded interpretative context to many of the events I observed and participated in during 2018 and into 2019 including a village-wide meeting that was held on February 15, 2019. The values raised in discussing different events in the village that were related to sentiments that one's participation is appreciated or not helped to inform

my review of literature on communication development pushing me deep into Mao Zedong's development of Chinese political theory and practice to identify where and how local experiences and values are divergent from dominant literature in communication research and China studies.

In empirical observations and via interviews I took notice of audio announcements of the hour on senior residents' phones. These announcements mimic those previously heard on wired-radio loudspeakers and reinforced previous accounts I had received that wired radio was useful for knowing the time as well as a contemporary push for the revival of a village broadcasting system. While the main voices for the revival of wired radio, including Zhu Tang, want Heyang's broadcasting system back for local announcements to help better collectively inform residents on ongoing village developments, focusing on the use of technology for keeping time helps to draw out the distinction James Carey makes between transmission communication emphasizing the movement of information and the ritual function of communication to maintain social bonds. The audio announcements of the hour are ripe with community bonding around mealtimes, just as the previous wired-radio loudspeakers were.

In perusing the theoretical importance behind the symbolic value of this experience of time I explore how the way that media ecologies are used for systems of time reckoning and how these impart structures for participation within a given society (Adam, 2006; Croll, 1994; Hershatter, 2011; Hope, 2016; Kaneff, 2004; Mihelj and Huxtable 2015; Sharma, 2014). Barbara Adam explains that time reckoning:

is know-how knowledge for the structuring, ordering, synchronizing, and regulating of social life. Moreover, it is knowledge that engenders a sense of ownership and control. (2006 p.123).

In exploring the theoretical evolution of the concept of participation, in particular, how it is theorized for development communication like community media (Carpentier, 2019; Carpentier, Lie and Servaes, 2003; Myers, 2011; Sparkes, 2007; Servaes and Malikhao, 2005; Servaes, 2007), commitments to the moment of decision-making, and temporariness in the possibility for democratic cohesion on decisions are made explicit. The social ramifications of these temporal conditions are linked, via policy analysis, to the capitalist-market shifts in China's post-reform media ecology and contrasted with the

temporality produced via the loudspeaker announcements of China's collectivist past and as recreated on seniors' mobile phones.

The policy analysis begins with a focus on the domestic ramifications of China's national and prolonged synchronization with European developed 24-hour *Universal Common Time*. In this focus wired-radio loudspeakers are identified as the first modern timekeeping device common in Heyang village and most of rural China. Following Pan (2019) the rhythmic nature of loudspeaker broadcasts is linked to interdepartmental responsibilities between broadcasting content and the management of the telephone lines originally used to connect loudspeakers. This analysis moves on to follow national level departmental shifts to identify why mobile phones, rather than a broadcasting technology is the most widely disseminated technology today.

### **1.3. Contribution to Ongoing Academic Debates**

This thesis responds to calls for research and current debates in academic literature on numerous levels.

At the base level, my prolonged empirical fieldwork and emphasis on participant involvement from a rural Chinese population responds to calls for more inclusion of rural voices in research on rural adaptations to new technology from socialist states integrating with global capitalism like China (Kay, Shubin and Thelen, 2012; Oreglia et al., 2015; Zhao 2017a; Zhao in Zhao and Gong, 2017). My methodological focus on the use of technologies for secondary purposes such as time reckoning to help draw out specific elements of the barriers experienced in participation and solutions developed that are seen as empowering participation in the constitution of the village, specifically in term of how they relate to class division, responds to Zhao's (2009) call to reintroduce considerations of class in Chinese Communication studies, and Qiu's (2010) recommendation that this can be accomplished in part by investigating non dominate media uses. In answering this call, the thesis helps to address the gap Qiu and Bu (2013) identify in critical research on China's communication systems.

This then helps to address a recognized need to de-westernize communication studies (Chakravarty and Zhao, 2008; Curran and Park, 2000; Waisbord 2014; also see Chen (2010) from a specific call for "Asia as method"). Efforts at de-westernization have been

critiqued for falling into area studies and this is intertwined with the politics of post-modernism which has been critiqued as privileging the small and unique against systemic ability to change predominate conditions (Waisbord, 2014). What this means is that in the process of giving recognition to non-western voices there has also been a largely anti-state liberal approach to choosing what voices to highlight and why they matter with an emphasis on resistance or discord with both local and global markets as well as the state (Gilman, 2003). This has the problem of positioning cultures and practices from the contemporary arenas of social power (Fabian, 1982; Roach, 1995). China is a prime example of the political use of local informants to diminish state politics and traditions in order to assert a liberal agenda (Lin, 2013; Vukovich, 2019; Zhao and Wu, 2020). Identifying the problem of putting Chinese experience into theories premised on western experiences Zhao and Wu (2018) call for research that recognizes and integrates China's modern socialist revolutionary experiences. This thesis responds to the call by privileging participant voices and the political ideologies and experiences that inform their values and understandings of solutions to move forward. Where recent China studies research, like the recent anthology *Afterlives of Chinese Communism*, also rigorously investigate China's revolutionary past these take up the general analysis that China is a post-socialist nation, with a large state structure remaining without past socialist commitments. This thesis, in contrast, and following Zhao (2011; 2020), takes the CCP's ongoing commitment to socialism seriously and thus positions memories of socialist pasts as informing current practices both by average residents and government officials.

Finally, at a more general and theoretical level, the thesis teases apart some of the time commitments of political and social participation as it is theorized and critiqued in capitalist liberal-democratic states (Carpentier, 2019; Dean, 2004; Sharma 2014; Hope, 2016) comparing them against the temporalities fostered through China's socialist experiments (Croll, 1994; Hershatter, 2011). In this analysis, the current concern with social processes speeding up past the influence of human agency to intervene (see Sharma 2014), are correlated with how liberal participation, particularly with a minute focus on moments of decision making and contrasted against socialist mobilization that emphasizes integrated interaction and commitment over durations of time.

This perspective helps to open the history of "participation" as it has been theorized for development and international communication studies. This investigation demonstrates

the empowerment of participation was not always linked to a sense of individualized emancipation, but to enable collective responses to political economic conditions. Thus, where Dean (2004; 2012 pp.143-145) is dismissive of the liberal privileging of the term “participation”, linking it and liberal privileging of the concept of “choice” to the exponential growth of commodified communication circulating today, I examine why the concept resonates so strongly with the notion of collective empowerment and trace how participation can function for socialist purposes building upon her work on “comrade” as a form of political belonging. As such, this research works to raise local Chinese experiences to the level of challenging and expanding ongoing global communication theory. Indeed, conceptually it builds upon and adds nuance to Dean’s recognition of China’s mass line as “indispensable to the return to communism” and empirically it pushes “the project for a new communism... [past] academic politics” (2019b p.339) to the grounded experiences of the people of Heyang village.

## **1.4. Chapter Summary**

Chapter Two begins a literature review into the conflicts between western and Chinese theories of participation beginning by exploring how participation is theorized in development communication. It relates the empowerment identified in participation to how non-western theorists and practitioners developed it; first through Mao Zedong’s engagement with Marxist theory adapting it to the contexts of China in the 1930s, and how Mao’s work on the mass line, in particular, informed Paulo Freire’s (1995) theory of conscientiousness- the awareness of systemic barriers and means to address them. I focus on the importance of the place of social leaders in theories of participation identifying the West’s focus on those without power, where non-Western sources put particular emphasis on the responsibility of leaders to be regularly engaged in the lives and circumstances of those otherwise without power. This difference leads to a contrast in how non-Western emphasis on participation to affect systemic change have been neutralized to the development of small, localized projects in Western theory. I then move on to detail how the mass line was a growth of Marxist theories of epistemology and review its importance in helping the CCP organize the peasantry for a successful revolution and its role in governance during China’s collectivist era. This review points to the mass line’s role in enabling a sense of mutuality between social leaders and disadvantaged peasants in rural settings. The way that the mass line was used to

organize society to affect this mutuality is identified as a core characteristic to understand why it is still valued in the changed social circumstances of today. I conclude by linking the participatory actions implied in the mass line to Dean's (2019) work on the political belonging of "comrades".

Chapter Three continues the literature review with a specific focus on how communication technologies can be used to support different forms of social organization via the way the technologies are used for time reckoning. Quickly identifying how time is argued to be speeding up in liberal democratic societies, and how this in turn is linked to a temporary temporality in western theories of participation, I move to explore how socialist temporalities have been theorized. This review draws attention to characteristics such as synchronizing collective action and sharing awareness as primary elements of a socialist temporality. This temporality affects mutuality by emphasizing the importance of sharing duration of time, rather than exchanging them, as in capitalist systems, providing an opportunity for a transformative praxis of people working and sharing circumstances collectively. I then I lay out the elements of Adam's (2008) timescapes perspective highlighting five key terms that this perspective addresses. This sets up a general framework to begin to explore how communication technologies have affected experiences of time in Heyang.

Chapter Four provides an in-depth historical and policy review of how time reckoning and media ecologies have developed nationally in China and have been realized in Heyang from the 15th century Ming Dynasty to the completion of this study. Particular attention is focused on the development and deployment of wired radio in connection with the collectivization of China's economy. Attention is also drawn to the social organization and communication practices from this period that inform how participation is evaluated today. The second half of the chapter is dedicated to detailing how de-collectivization has impacted the people of Heyang. This section highlights how the CCP has worked to balance rural communication needs with the marketization of the economy including broadcasting and telecommunications. Through a back-and-forth analysis of top-level decisions and on the ground adaptations, the recent developments of Heyang's media ecology are broadly sketched out. This provides historical, political-economic, and material infrastructure context for the next three empirical chapters.

Chapter Five lays out how participants describe their current circumstances and concerns with communications. It begins with a quick review of ongoing bottom-up political efforts to reinstate a village broadcasting system. This specific story helps to highlight core themes including showing how groups at the bottom will claim to not be heard, but that leadership does take concerns into account. It then identifies how responsibility for projects that become stalled is often deferred to higher levels. These circumstances, in seeing projects partially completed, or slow to be realized, informs a shared appreciation for decisive leadership by many different elements of the village from those who have not found much success in labour markets, to those who have positions of leadership. After this short review, I move into an analysis of my first round of focus group interviews. I identify how the responses changed my initial research focus from prioritizing technology to prioritizing social organization and move into the major themes that shaped a majority of residents' concerns with not being informed of local events, not having their ideas heard, and not being appreciated as having a stake in the village's collective development. These concerns are reasoned by participants to relate to differences in wealth and from there social worth. I then move onto participant accounts and evaluations of social participation in the final series of focus group interviews. These accounts narrow in on one core issue, the development of 120 *mu* (approximately 20 acres) of land for housing to move people out of Heyang's designated heritage protection area. The politics of this project help to demonstrate continuity in terms of the kinds of barriers faced in participation between 2015 and 2019. This chapter identifies how members of Heyang's Village Council, in comparison to members of the Tourism Management Committee who operate Heyang's heritage protection and tourism industry, are particularly responsible for communicating and working with residents. The concerns of residents of not being heard, and thus not having their interests and involvement as members of the collective appreciated, is given validity in how the current housing development is currently deprioritizing the needs of disadvantaged residents in the heritage protection area.

Chapter Six moves from participants' accounts in focus groups to events I observed and participated in, shifting the focus from political to cultural participation. I begin by noting that there is currently top-down support by the CCP for the revival of rural culture and contrast Zhao's (2018) emphasis on new opportunities for rural participation to Ka-ming Wu's (2015) concern of the production of hyper-rurality where cultural productions are

disconnected from the daily needs for maintaining one's well-being as a rural resident. The chapter identifies how the Village Council is actively organizing multiple different cultural events that are part of the overall national promotion of rural culture. Given that many of these activities, such as galas, often prioritize more female participation, as a male I was limited from fully entering these social networks. As such I move on to explore how working-aged men can make a living in Heyang. This leads to how I became an honorary member of Heyang's fire brigade and how the members of this team form most of the people needed for the village's dragon dance. I highlight the politics, of who participates and who does not, based on understandings of mutuality and resulting conceptions of individual self-worth and belonging. This chapter works to help reinforce evaluations of barriers to participation in connection with social-economic gaps made by participants in Chapter Five.

Chapter Seven is the final empirical chapter and traces how solutions to the above-identified barriers to participation are being addressed through bottom-up and top-down efforts. These efforts are specific to Heyang's senior population and are informed by a socialist temporality used to affect mutuality. This point is first identified in the symbolic importance of seniors' use of their phones to announce the hour in the same manner which it is broadcast over once-ubiquitous wired-radio loudspeakers. This time reckoning is analyzed within the social dynamics of the senior center, where many practices are informed by concern over collective well-being. These bottom-up practices are contrasted with top-down efforts to address communication problems in the village. These efforts culminated in a village-wide meeting held to explain changes in a pension the Village Council previously managed for senior residents and the Village Council's plans to improve the senior center to better address the needs of seniors, especially those without families to support them. Because this meeting happened in the middle of the final round of focus group interviews, evaluations of the meeting from both leaders and other residents were fresh in participants' minds. Both leaders and other residents provided positive evaluations of the meeting, feeling that it worked to bring relations closer. This review of positive evaluations of participation is used to help better inform participants' evaluations of the core barriers to participation in Heyang and help to demonstrate how to bring relations closer and empower the mutuality of collective investment and involvement in Heyang's future.



Chapter Eight brings the thesis to a conclusion linking the above empirical findings back to the theoretical concerns of temporality and participation. I begin with a review of how the research project has evolved from its start, leaning into a reflective account of how the research participants have helped to influence the questions and ends of this research. I then provide a comprehensive summary of how Adam's (2008) timescape perspective has helped to draw out the central thesis, that the people of Heyang use the mass line as an ideal to interpret how participation in local development can be empowering, and see a need to be treated as mutually involved in the village's ongoing existence. That these practices are not apolitical but continue to have transformative rhetorical force is demonstrated by the local government responding to these appeals with more village meetings and by the CCP at the national level developing policy priorities to help the people act for their collective wellbeing. This sets up a final review of the question of the future of China's socialism where I position the people as a primary active force that cannot be separated from the CCP when considering if the mass line is dead in China and the communist horizon with it.

## Chapter 2. Participation, Development and the Mass Line

### 2.1. Introduction

Participation has been a key term in communication studies and other social sciences since the 1960s (Carpentier, 2014). A key concept of liberal theories of civil society and citizenship, participation is most often linked to access and involvement in decision-making (Arnstein 1969; Jenkins and Carpentier 2013; Servaes and Patchanee Malikhao, 2005). While Jodi Dean (2004) specifically critiques the liberal celebration of “participation” as intertwined with capitalism, the effect of her critique is that the emancipatory potential of participation is pacified through affective appeals to one’s individuality. This is similar to Nico Carpentier’s (2014) concern that most forms of participation are examples of “minimally participatory” conditions. However, where Carpentier’s (2014) solution is to quantitatively argue for more equity in individual access to participate in decision making forums, Dean’s solution is to qualitatively argue for participation that contributes to collective empowerment. This chapter examines the theory of participation as it is applied by scholars of China today, how it is normatively recommended in development communication studies, and its place in China’s socialist history as a continuing legacy to be able to inform the values and actions of the people of Heyang.

There are three primary frameworks of participation in this thesis. The first framework of participation is the “quality” (*suzhi*) discourse. Highlighting China’s national integration with capitalistic economic and social policies, the “quality” discourse is most often discussed as the realization of neoliberal subjectivities in China (Anagnost 2004; Kipnis, 2015; Sigley, 2006; Wallis, 2013) that Day (2013) places in the context of a postsocialist China. The second framework is the civil society model. In this chapter I specifically focus on the notion of an ideal “maximal participation” (Carpentier, 2016; 2019), and how it influences development communication literature (Carpentier, Lie, and Servaes, 2003; Servaes 1996; Servaes and Malikhao, 2005), the segment of communication studies most commonly applied to non-Western rural settings (Engel, 2015). The third framework is the mass line ideal of state-supported collective action aimed at meeting the necessities for popular wellbeing that we may connect to Dean’s (2019a) concept of

“comrade”. The mass line is part of most participants’ historical experience of economic, political and cultural opportunities for participation before the onset of Deng Xiaoping’s economic reform and opening-up policies.

Where the neoliberal “quality” framework provides context to understand research participants’ descriptions of current conditions for participation in political, economic and cultural aspects of life, the civil society framework is how these problems are usually addressed by western researchers critiquing these developments (Anagnost 2004, Sigley, 2006; Wallis, 2013). Significant aspects of the civil society framework, such as: separating one’s interests and actions from the state, the potential benefit of indecisive leadership, and its emphasis on moments of decision-making, make this framework an ill fit for understanding how research participants value participation and consider their selves as blocked from being able to participate in village life. The mass line framework represents part of the socialist legacies that China’s New Left highlight in their primarily domestic responses to China’s reform era engagement with global capitalist development (Day, 2013; Wang, 2013; Lin Chun 2013; Zhao, 2011). Elements of this model include: closeness of social relations (Blecher 1983; Pan 2019), a need for concerted action (Meisner, 1978), and concern for basic wellbeing (Lin, 2013). In later chapters I show how this model is useful for both recognizing how participation is being understood and to formulate policy recommendations for future development.

While Lin Chun (2019) argues that the mass line framework for social action and political policymaking is “dead” at the national level, it is still active in local government and residents’ understandings of their relationships and may be in the early stages of being revived at the village level by Heyang’s current Village Council. An in-depth investigation of the history of the mass line’s theoretical development and history of its application helps to highlight the characteristics by which research participants use it to evaluate conditions of political, economic, and cultural participation in Heyang.

The effect of this review is to contrast the mass line as a framework of participation that emphasizes recognition of mutuality with the civil society norm of individual self-emancipation. This contrast is used in the following chapter to question the experiences of time associated with these distinct frameworks of participation when they are supported by the time reckoning function of media ecologies. That contrast sets up a historical review of Heyang’s media ecology and how it has supported shifting avenues

for participation in local political, economic, and cultural practices. Further empirical chapters detail how residents and local officials are finding barriers in their interactions and how they are working to overcome these barriers. These practices are related to the mass line and an emphasis on sharing time to foster mutual recognition between leaders and residents to empower the direct production of everyone's participation in the ongoing development of Heyang village.

## **2.2. Neoliberal Subjectivity and Suzhi**

The concerns of many of the research participants of this study are not unlike those of people the world over confronting social systems beyond the sense that one's participation matters and can influence change. Their comments, as will be shown in later chapters, are contextualized by a framework that identifies individuals as more or less worthy according to their ability to demonstrate characteristics in line with capitalistic labour markets and manners in line with urban middle-class sensibilities often summed up as "culture" and "hygiene". These characteristics comprise the discourse of personal "quality".

Alexander Day (2013; also see Anagnost 2004; Kinpis 2015; Wallis 2013) links the rise of the "quality" discourse to Deng Xiaoping's reform and opening-up policies marking the supposed onset of China's postsocialism. Day (2013) traces how national-level discussions on China's model of development began to emphasize "technical change", shifting the role of the peasant class and their contributions to China's future. Mao's previous emphasis on including the peasant class into a form of agricultural socialism was reframed as ensuring that peasants would be dependent upon a state structure and detrimental to the state's efforts to develop through technological change. Day explains the outcome of intellectual and policy level debates from the early 1980s as it related to the status of peasants in these terms,

Only by breaking with state dependency... could the peasant help to produce a new historical trajectory for Chinese society. However, on what basis might peasants break from the state to become independent entrepreneurs? This position led to the question of peasant 'quality'... a new formulation of peasant agency (2013 p.37).

In questioning peasant quality, the CCP shifted its evaluation of labour from valuing the quantity of people able to contribute to a project, to valuing the quality of an individual

worker's skills. The language privileging "quality", "was mirrored in the contemporary discourse on population and birth planning" with the rise of the concept of "population quality" valuing urban workers over rural peasants (Day 2013 p.38). "Quality" has since become a constant feature of government policies; rural cadres are internally judged and ranked according to their abilities to raise the quality level of the people in their jurisdiction (Thogensen, 2003), and there is a growth of vocational schools targeting rural-urban migrant workers with "quality" education teaching people both labour and personal skills (Wallis, 2013). It may therefore be seen as a discourse of political belonging that is along the lines of a market agent where political and cultural merit are a factor of economic accomplishment.

The discourse on "quality" today is as much top-down as it is popularly reproduced (Wallis, 2013 p.345). In her research on migrant women, Carla Wallis found that most research participants did not use the exact term "quality" (*suzhi*) in their interviews. Instead, many of her research participants spoke of needing to

'develop' themselves... Such self-development, equated with improving their *suzhi*, including learning basic literacy, computer proficiency, and vocational skills as well as hygiene, ethics and social etiquette (2013 p.342).

The qualities highlighted by this discourse are primarily interpreted as an indication of China's integration into global political-economic systems, primarily neoliberalism (Anagnost, 2004; Harwood, 2009; Sigley, 2006; Wallis, 2013).

Western researchers most often interpret the "quality" discourse with reference to Foucault's theory of governmentality (Anagnost, 2004; Harwood, 2009; Sigley, 2006; Wallis, 2013). Foucault developed his theory of governmentality to explain a state's decreased use of policing to ensure acceptable conduct among a population in advanced liberal societies where citizens are expected to be able to act on their own agency to "conduct" their selves according to shared ideals (Foucault, 2007 pp.126-145). While none of the researchers in the loosely grouped body of 'China governmentality studies' attests that China has become a liberal society, they claim that the CCP is combining neoliberal informed goals and subjectivities of individual choice and agency with past commitments on social engineering (Sigley, 2006; Wallis, 2013). True to Foucault's main project, this work identifies how despite the "quality" discourse is orientated to helping people become self-governing, society working as a collective

whole, prevents the marginalized from acting upon their new agency. Research on the “quality” discourse then is less about recognizing valued participation, and more about identifying how people are prevented from having their participatory contributions recognized because they lack “quality” (Anagnost, 2004; Kipnis, 2015; Wallis, 2013).

The effect of this research then is not to understand anything new about participation normatively, but a means of identifying some signs of increased commonality between Chinese society and the West and then to apply a Western derived normative evaluation. The effect of such analysis ranges from showing how there is harmful interference by state and market actors in China just as there is in the West (Sigley, 2006), or as far as insisting on particular signs of authoritarianism in China (Kipnis, 2015). As will be detailed in later empirical chapters, participants in my research also make use of the “quality” discourse to explain changes in and barriers to multiple forms of participation in Heyang today. However, where Western researchers lean into the desire for increased individual autonomy, research participants addressed such barriers with a contrasting understanding of participation that emphasizes the recognition of mutuality. Before getting into the literature that helps to contextualize the historical experiences informing the research participants’ views, it is worthwhile to explore the Western normative understanding of participation and its general application in projects like community media aimed to develop rural societies and spread democracy.

### **2.3. Civil Society and Development Communication**

Those critiquing neoliberal avenues of participation, contextualized by the marketization and branding of personal being and social relations, do so with a firmly established tradition of research on a civil society notion of participating in conditions outside the influence of both markets and the state. Participation became a key theoretical concept in the social sciences at large in the 1960s and 1970s with theorists concerned about how institutional frameworks provided opportunities for or barriers to participating in democratic decision making. An essential outcome of this work is Sherry Arnstein’s (1969) “ladder of participation”. This scheme has three main categories of how citizens participate with governments ranked in descending normative order from the most to the least opportunity for participation:

1. Citizen power

- a. Citizen control
- b. Delegated power
- 2. Partnership
  - a. Tokenism
  - b. Placation
- c. Consultation
  - d. Informing
- 3. Nonparticipation
  - a. Therapy
  - b. Manipulation (Arnstine, 1969 p.217)

In this framework “citizen control” is the highest form of “citizen power” and represents a form of regular direct democracy. The second category “tokenism” enables citizens to contribute their voices to decision-making forums, but no say in end decisions. The final category of “nonparticipation” indicates states where social elites will do as they please and try to influence others that it is okay. The highest form of the ladder, therefore, represents what Nico Carpentier would later, with reference to Carole “Pateman’s (1970) definition of full participation as the equal power position of all actors in a decision-making process”, call “maximalist participation” (Carpentier in Carpentier and Jenkins 2013 p.267).

As the current chair of the International Association for Media and Communication Research’s (IAMCR) Participatory Communication Research Section, Carpentier’s work represents an authoritative voice on how participation is currently theorized. In a 2013 article, Carpentier joined another leading communication scholar, Henry Jenkins, in a debate over the celebratory nature of scholarship on the participatory opportunities of digital networks. Jenkins, who coined the term “fandom” (1992), has argued how participatory culture has grown with digital technology. Where he is usually celebratory of new opportunities, in this debate, he followed Carpentier’s insistence that there are differing degrees of participation and that the most ideal form of participation occurs when there is equitable sharing of decision-making power (Carpentier and Jenkins, 2013).

In application, Carpentier's work mainly gravitates to community media initiatives, exploring how they are better or worse realizations of the ideals of maximal participation (Carpentier, Lie and Serveas, 2003; Carpentier and Scifo, 2010; Carpentier, Dahlgren and Pasquali, 2013; Carpentier, 2019). He takes a rhizome approach to community media "that explicitly articulates... diversity, contingency and fluidity" and positions it as distinct from the state and market (2019 p.20). Being distinct from these two loci of power, and premised on voluntary associations, Carpentier claims that community media is a realization of civil society and represents great potential for enabling "democratization and maximalist participation" (2019 p.3).

Carpentier recognizes that the entomological root of participation has, "a strong emphasis on 'taking part', which implies the presence of more than one actor" (2014 p.1002). He goes on to say that within this context of people coming together that there will be power imbalances that are "addressed (and limited) through the participatory process itself" promoting further equality (2014 p.1002). This equality, however, Carpentier claims will never be accomplished in full, asserting that there will always be struggle and contestation in society. Hence, the goal is to promote ever more participatory cultures (Carpentier and Jenkins, 2013). In explicating this concern, he sides with Anthony Giddens in recognizing that "structure is the counter-weight of agency" (2014 p.1006). Carpentier proposes that participation is valued because of the belief that one's actions will have an impact on what he calls, "the make ability of the social, or in other words, the belief that individual agency "'truly' matter[s]" when "actions... reach beyond the individual level" (2014 p.1007). "This stretching beyond individual control [however] is exactly the characteristic of structure that frustrates" the concepts of "freedom and agency", which inform the normative good of participation (2014 p.1006). These conflicts inform Carpentier's overall argument as to why a fully participatory society is but a "fantasy" but a necessary one focused on the goal to "deepen the democratic revolution" (Mouffe as cited in Carpentier 2014 p.1004).

This position is expanded on in a future article where Carpentier claims that all social decisions can only be temporary (2016). He uses Chantal Mouffe's argument that at the ontological level society is fundamentally antagonistic to demonstrate that once a decision is made, it impacts the context that led to its formulation. Carpentier claims this can then lead to revaluations and new moments of agreement. With such reflection, he argues for a normative acceptance of "undecidableness" in political leadership (2016).



While undecidability helps to address the concern of how structure can impinge individual agency, it is also demonstrative of what Gilman (2003 p.266) argues is the conservative bias in postmodern theory enabling status-quo relations to remain without serious challenge.

Florencia Enghel (2015) claims that international and rural applications of communication studies are most frequently conducted as development communication. Specifically targeting participatory theory in development communication, Colin Sparks rearticulates Gilman's point with more exactitude asserting that it focuses on local processes and unable to address broader systemic issues (2007 p.218). This raises the question if Western theories of participation simply have not been up to the task of recognizing systemic disadvantages. A review of the historical influences of the concept in development communication suggests otherwise.

### **2.3.1. Participation and Impacting Social Systems**

Jan Servaes is a leading researcher in development communication and has linked his work with Carpentier's research via co-publication (Carpentier, Lei, Servaes, 2003). Servaes and Patchanee Malikhao (2005) argue that two basic traditions inform theories of participation in development communication literature: the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) definition, and the work of Paulo Freire.

The 1977 UNESCO *Meeting on Self-Management, Access and Participation in Communication* in Belgrade codified and institutionalized the place of UNESCO to assist with the development of communication infrastructure in developing nations (Jouet, 1977). These meetings were part of a series of meetings on participation in the media and the recognition that "development is good and communications media can contribute towards development" (Berrigan 1979 p.1). Dominated by capitalist liberal democracies and developing countries, the meeting focused on community media and the question of how community media models from developed countries could be reproduced in developing and rural settings. The emphasis on participation was part of a very explicit recognition that "At the theoretical level, the understanding of what communications is about has moved from a... view of [vertical top-down] message transmission" to one that recognizes horizontal meaning-making communication.

(Berrigan, 1979 p.3). The emphasis on community media suited this theoretical shift as such projects prioritize “two-way communication... adaptations of media for use by the community, for whatever purposes the community decides” (Berrigan 1979 pp.6-7).

The meeting produced a hierarchical definition of participation to understand the potential of community media.

1. Access

- a. for choice of content and form of technology
- b. for feedback between audiences and producers

2. Participation

- a. in producing media content
- b. in decisions over content and general management of media
- c. in planning future projects and policies

3. Self-management

“Participation may infer no more than representation and consultation of the public in decision-making. On the other hand, self-management is the most advanced form of participation. In this case, the public exercises the power of decision-making within communication enterprises and is also fully involved in the formulation of communication policies and plans” (Jouet, 1977 p.5).

This definition of participation is strikingly similar to Arnstine’s ladder. However, where she had manipulation and therapy as forms of non-participation at the bottom, this ranks access to technology and programming as a minimal level of participation. This emphasis on access to technology at the beginning of discussions on participation in development communication has remarkable parallels with the emphasis on technological change as a mode of development in the above “quality” discourse. For both, problems in society require technological solutions and social activity is considered after this base, but systemic, condition is met. Additionally, for both frameworks, the technology under discussion is specifically commodities, products made for a profit. This reflection adds to the inability of theories of participation promoted internationally, especially by development communication studies, to initiate structural change. This is because the theories are dependent upon the current inequitable systems that produce whatever popular and cutting-edge technologies that are promoted as the latest solution

for communicatively empowering those otherwise exploited by these very systems (Chakravartty, 2009).

The second inspirational source for participation in development communication identified by Servaes and Malikhao (2005) is Paulo Freire. Servaes (1996) notes that Freire did not deal with electronic communication but focused on dialogic engagement between people with and without power. He goes on to argue that Freire's concept of "conscientization" informs understandings of empowerment in communication participatory theory (1996 p.80). Conscientization is a process of guided reflection and action that enables people to define their world and take action to liberate their selves from imposed social barriers. Freire's research and advocacy addressed both the marginalized and the privileged. This is, in contrast, to most of the above theorization focuses on how to change the circumstances of the marginalized. Servaes argues this focus on the marginalized is common to development communication literature because the marginalized are in processes of "gaining an understanding of their situation, confidence and an ability to change that situation" (1996 p.80). How leaders are to overcome their own contexts of social power and work with an empowered marginal population is neglected, except perhaps, for Carpentier's appeals for indecisiveness.

In his review, Servaes (1996) goes to lengths to distinguish the UNESCO meetings and Friere as distinct influences on participation in communication. He goes as far as to indicate three primary distinctions between the sources. The UNESCO language allows for gradual progress, uses neutral language like "the public" and prioritizes singular projects like a community media station. Servaes claims Freire allows for no compromise, having a deontological insistence on forms of respect between individuals who are in related struggles for liberation in social systems of oppression. An essential aspect of how Servaes represents these differences is Freire's "Marx[ian]... insistence on collective solutions" (1996 p/78).

The extent that this has influenced communication theory is another question. For while Servaes does recognize that there are communication scholars who argue that local problems cannot be addressed until there are broader systemic changes, he, for one, does not push this agenda. Additionally, we can find Freire's work referenced without a push for collective solutions by looking no further than the reports from the UNESCO meetings. For all the ink Servaes spends on distinguishing between the two sources, the

UNESCO reports liberally cite Friere's work on conscientization as the essential characterization of the empowerment of participation in media development and use. Empowerment that is linked to their self-management of local community media, but with no mention of broader social implications. It may be fair to say that in the UNESCO documents Freire's social justice is turned around on its head as those with social power banking their experience and knowledge in rural and remote populations.

Turning our attention to this consideration of leadership, Freire's work identifies such people as educators. In explicating the work of an educator, in terms of the content that is taught and in the kind of relationship necessary to affect emancipatory change, Freire looks to Mao Tse-tung's writings on communist leadership in China. Concerning content, Freire claims that Mao's affirmation "we must teach the masses clearly what we have received from them confusedly'... contains an entire dialogical theory of how to construct the program content of education" (2005 p.93). On the next page, Friere notes how the traditional approach of oppression works to "adjust [people] to a reality which must remain untouched" (2005 p.94), which is precisely the result that occurs when theorists like Carpentier and Servaes highlight the marginalized without questioning the state, the market or the power holding individuals who act through these institutions. In his admonition to revolutionary educators to avoid this reproduction of dominance, Freire once again turns to Mao's arguments. Freire quotes Mao at length on the need for leaders to be embedded in the daily lives of the people and when

objectively the masses need a certain change, but subjectively they are not yet conscious of the need, not yet willing or determined to make the change... We should not make the change until, through our work, most of the masses have become conscious of the need and are willing and determined to carry it out... There are two principles here: one is the actual needs of the masses rather than what we fancy they need, and the other is the wishes of the masses, who must make up their own minds instead of our making up their minds for them. (Mao, as cited in Freire 2005 p.94)

Without naming it directly, the Maoist concept that Freire refers to in these footnoted quotes is the mass line.

## 2.4. The Mass Line

Referring to “the masses” a form of social organization that C.W. Mills (1956) noted as being passé in the 1950s, and the very notion that research into “participation” and communication since the 1940s has been juxtaposed against (see Babe’s (2009 pp.121-125) discussion on the line of theoretical development in communication studies from minimal effects to active audiences), the mass line is the notion that as a result of historically facing economic and cultural marginalization, the vast majority of society has a political subjectivity that must both inform, and be directly involved in carrying out, collective solutions to the systemic injustices which cause their marginalization. Mao defined this concept with the maxim “from the masses to the masses” which details a mechanism by which members of the CCP could adhere to the mass line, by first learning from the experiences of exploitation, then after formulating these into transformative policies, to propagate the policies back to the people so that the policy may be both understood and realized in popular practice (Mao, 1965c). On the point of policy implementation, Mao emphasized active discussion to not only ensure understanding (Mao, 1965b), and thereby promotion of revolutionary subjectivity, but also to enable people to discuss how to carry out any given policy given local contexts (Mao, 1965a, 1965b, 1990). Such discussion is part of a system of mutual transfer of information as reports would be sent back up to central Party offices as much as policies would be propagated to the people. More crucially, however, this communication contributes to the mutual transformation of subjectivity with CCP cadres being integrated into local realities and locals becoming more socialist. It is this process, one which Robert Cox (1983) praised as enabling a segment of the world’s proletariat a seat at the world table, that will enable a focused investigation into routes that participation can and do occur in China.

Much has been written on the mass line in research focused on describing and explaining the workings of the CCP and life in China under communist governance (Hartford and Goldstien (1989) provide a comprehensive review of relevant literature). However, this concept has rarely been abstracted and considered for its own theoretical merits in the way that Western theory is often abstracted and universalized (see Dean’s (2019) use of Lin Chun’s work as a rare example), nor has it been integrated into development communication theory as an alternative to concepts such as “civil society”

and “community media”. That it is present in the core theorization of the empowerment that communications can affect - *conscientization*, and thereby rooted in the broader social commitments that are dropped in reference and usage of the concept in crucial settings such as the reports on UNESCO’s *Meeting on Self-Management, Access and Participation in Communication*, strikes at the orientalist nature and liberal biases in this field of knowledge production (see Escobar (1995)).

Not only a concept that can be distilled out of the history of development communication theory, the mass line is also a concept known by my research participants, who discuss it explicitly in response to direct prompts in interviews, and qualitatively express it with broad ideals of cultural political and economic relations with which they describe and evaluate their current circumstances. To understand how the “mass line” exists as a normative concept for Chinese peasants requires an examination of both the concepts’ theoretical ideals and the history of its implementation under the CCP.

Theoretically, Mao’s development of the mass line is a continuation of Marxist epistemology (Dirlik 1983; Hammond, 1978; Mao 1967 pp.9, 28). Hammond (1978) traces the history of this epistemology to the enlightenment’s dismissal of God as a final arbiter of truth. In developing this critique, one German scholar, Ludwig Feuerbach, claimed that objective truth was not abstract but the reality of an individual lifespan. Marx built upon this critique by shifting Feuerbach’s emphasis on the individual to social relations as a whole. In this representation of Marx’s epistemology, social relations are the subject of knowledge-producing historically contextual knowledge, and social practice is the object of that knowledge -we apply knowledge to the production of future relations. This stance on the contextual nature of knowledge leads Marx to argue against abstract-universal truth and claim “it is essential to educate the educator” (as cited in Hammond 1978 p.8). That a worker could become aware of their historical material circumstances and inform their actions to transform those relations was summed up by Marx as “revolutionary consciousness” informing practice (Dirlik 1983 pp.194-199). Dirlik (1983) argues that Lenin advanced this theory by arguing that revolutionary consciousness does not necessarily arise on its own as a historical realization of social organization but requires political leadership. However, Lenin’s work separated the Communist Party as a political vanguard for workers to the point of asserting that workers do not join the Party as workers, but rather as intellectuals informed by their revolutionary consciousness (as cited in Hammond 1978 p.18). Mao’s development of

the mass line brought all these components together, as Hammond (1978) explains with reference to Hegelian terminology. The mass line begins as a sociology where we learn about the conditions of a *class-in-itself*. From here, the mass line functions as a methodology for educating workers (and peasants) about their conditions and how to improve their position as a *class-for-itself*. Finally, the mass line functions as an epistemology where self-aware action enables workers (and peasants) to act as a *class-in-itself and for itself* (Hammond 1978 pp.15-16). This application of knowledge and method is the primary mechanism of class struggle for the end of a proletariat class that typifies interpretations of Marxist theory.

The importance of context in Marxist epistemology addresses liberalist arguments against communist vanguardism. Such critiques point to the limits of human knowledge and attest that communist leaders lay claim to privileged knowledge, that they do know how to proceed into the future (Sigley, 2006). This claim of a separate knowledge, however, is a misrepresentation of the theory as laid out above. The correct knowledge is nothing more than a commitment to address class exploitation. The means to do so, the manner that knowledge of social difference is applied, becomes historically contingent and worked towards through the experimentation of testing, appraising, and retesting. This notion of knowing through practice and learning through reflection on practice was spelt out theoretically in Mao's essay "On Practice" (Lewis as cited in Dirlik 1983 p.198) and is depicted as a progressive "spiral" with improvements in the movement between practice reflection and newly informed practice in his essay "Some Question Concerning Methods of Leadership"; where Mao's most developed articulation of the mass line is found. Learning is to be accomplished by direct contact with the masses to understand local conditions and talents, enabling them to relate the revolutionary goals of the communist party as a political vanguard to local concerns and issues in a process Mao called "combining the general with the particular" (1965 p.117). In this fashion, while Lenin's notion of workers as intellectuals foreshadowed Gramsci's concept of organic intellectuals, Mao's theorization of the mass line proposes how Party members can integrate with and become part of mass culture, emphasizing the changes in their awareness, as much as their ability to affect change among their compatriots (Dirlik, 1983).

From this theoretical ideal, we can look at specific instances of the mass line through the CCP's history to sketch out its realization in practice. This perspective helps to address

why commentators have long postulated that the mass line was only practised in the Party's history and has either failed to reach its goal of "abolish[ing] the separation of party from people" (Dirlik 1983 p.207) or "is dead in China" (Lin 2019 p.126). It will also provide context for why it remains a potent normative concept in Heyang residents' evaluations of participation and how communication techniques and technologies can help empower participation in village life. Crucially, this reflection extends to the benefits of a collective economy in the face of the current state-led management of their village heritage tourism industry.

### **2.4.1. Mass Line Ideals in Practice**

Moving from theory to practice, many commentators point to the mass line as the critical mechanism that enabled the CCP to wage their revolutionary war successfully (Dirlik, 1983; Hartford and Goldstien, 1989; Kim, 1973; Selden, 1995; Wang 2013). Like Lenin's contributions to communist theory, much of Mao's work pragmatically targeted the political issues facing the CCP at the time and then evolved over time through practice. Mao's work to translate Marxist ideology to Chinese cultural traditions came with his rise in the Communist Party after the Party retreated from urban centres in 1926 and began to operate through China's southeastern countryside (Dirlik 1983 194; Kim, 1974). Mao's theory of the mass line is an outcome of this experience.

Ilpyong Kim (1973) provides one of the most detailed accounts of the CCP's shift to the countryside and the development of the Jiangsi Soviets. His research details how this shift from urban to rural political organization led to a new form of leadership, cadres.

The new meaning of "cadre" became functionally associated with the emerging concept of leadership and the organizational techniques of the mass-line style of work... it meant anyone who possessed the ability to lead and organize the masses. (Kim 1973 p.192).

This change in terminology was the result of inner-Party debate at the time on whether or not a bourgeois-democratic revolution had been accomplished; if so then rich bourgeoisie would be the enemy, if not then the whole of the population could still be united. Mao's mass line entered this fray by emphasizing how middle and rich peasants could be included in political organization and production work. "Mass line" efforts to include all elements of society proved more effective than a more Leninist hierarchical method of political organization, a "class line" (Kim, 1973 p.190). This move had the



effect of shifting “the Chinese revolution from an elitist and intellectual movement to a mass political movement” (1973 p. 22).

Kim's (1974) research on the mass line demonstrates how the mass line interacts with the communist concept of centralized democracy within the CCP. It destabilizes the long critiqued “special privilege” that the Communist Party has as a vanguard to interpret what directions are best for society. The mass line provides a mechanism by which Party direction could be challenged, and a means for it even to be self-reflective, and even long-term analysis of how policies are creating new conditions of exploitation to be addressed.

Selden (1995) expands on how the CCP went from being a concern of the elite into a mass movement. In particular, he demonstrates how peasant interests were included in the CCP's priorities through structures such as party cadres going to villages, and the institution of dual governance models enabling the CCP to match its leadership with the motivations and will of the people it claims to represent. Wang Hui (2013) points to Selden's analysis as a means of showing how the CCP was responsive to the process of the mass line when its pre-revolutionary priorities were turned back to land reform before finishing the war with Japan.

Where Selden (1995) identify moments and effects of peasant involvement in decision making bodies for Party leadership and governmental policy, Kim's (1973) analysis claims that merely by having institutional support for peasant participation procured active support for the CCP and its revolution. Both authors, however, claim that once the revolution had been achieved, the mass line was used more as a tool for homogenizing national policies, rather than a dialogic tool for local interpretation of and response to Party leadership.

Meisner's (1978) focused study of leadership in Dazhai village is perhaps the most illuminative of how the mass line works on the ground. He demonstrates how this leadership is not a simple or necessarily always self-aware process, but that it could still be said to attain its ideals through practice. Meisner (1978) depicts how the village head of Dazhai Chen Yonggui struggled to represent his village and motivate productive labour during the Great Leap Forward; leading to Dazhai becoming a national model village in 1964. Meisner shows how cadres sharing in menial labour and holding regular

mass meetings generated both shared awareness of the village's situation and motivate active support for addressing new policies. This local democracy led Chen Yonggui to have conflicts with higher levels of administration when he would not commit to the unrealistic production goals set during the Great Leap Forward but also enabled him to be on the right side of arguments in the aftermath of not only this but other incidents during China's period of high socialism.

Beyond this empirical record, Meisner (1978) does a few other things in his article that are of relevance for our discussion here. The first is that he labels the village as a "developing community" and identifies the mass line as a means of development. This language provides clear analytical parallels to development communication, whose usual subject, as noted above, is rural populations. It also explains the mass line from the point of development (also see Lin, 2013; Wang, 2013). In the mass line, the core mechanics of development,

normally associated with a centralized bureaucratic hierarchy... become diffused throughout society to communities of basic-level producers [enabling] economic experience... [to] be understood by the masses increasingly... as a 'human relation' (Meisner, 1978 p.28).

Lin Chun recaptures this general sentiment in her argument that the mass line is relevant because of, the "conviction...: ordinary people can be proud of themselves as direct producers of both material and cultural wealth in the collective mastery of their own destiny" (2019 p 121). The observations work together in that they emphasize the importance of collectivity for shared experience and that through awareness of this experience participation in society at large may become less exploitative.

Writing at the end of China's period of high socialism, while the CCP instituted reform policies such as ending rural collectivization, Marc Blecher (1983) captures a snapshot of a few essential qualities of mass line leadership that remained consistent from its first conception. One key point he draws attention to, intimacy, can also be found in Meisner's (1978) work and is alluded to in Selden's (1995) writings. Intimacy is an antonym of alienation. It represents an emergent qualitative social value that can arise through quantifiable processes of spending time together and underwrites the notion of closeness in holding the social bonds of a community together.

Blecher (1983) makes the point that mass line leadership works in a holistic manner that challenges usual western analytical categories like political participation being specific and intended moments of citizen leader engagement. His discussion of work teams is particularly relevant here,

Work teams are charged with gaining a detailed understanding not only of the members' views, but also of the history, economic conditions, social relationships, and political situation in the production teams, that condition those views and gives them meaning (1983 p.74).

He quotes a member of a work team at length to provide more detail on how the work teams were able to accomplish this in-depth study,

'We interviewed them at various times and places: their homes, the fields during breakfast, while they were cooking before they went to sleep.' During this phase, the members of the work team spent about half of their time participating in labour. (Blecher, 1983 p.75).

This point of sharing in labour was a model of how local leadership ought to work in general. The practice, along with sharing in local material conditions and other ways of "being close" to the masses is identified by Blecher as a dialectical means by which Chinese villagers had immediate access to local leaders to voice their views and leaders were able to have more intimate knowledge of village members' lives enabling them to mobilize popular participation in government priorities better. He even goes so far as to link the relations fostered by the mass line to communal life describing them as able to foster "relations both among members and between members and leaders informed by equality and mutual intimacy" (1983 p.63). The conduct of the mass line by local village leaders however was uneven, and these represent but small windows that can help us to understand why it may have had a lasting impact.

#### **2.4.2. The Difference in Mass Line Participation**

The above discussion of the CCP's mass line method of leadership details "participation" as "mobilization". Or rather, intentional and organized collective participation towards a shared end. When contrasted against the above models of a ladder of participation, mobilization is a less desirable form, framed as manipulative and placating (Arnstein, 1969). Additionally, the mass line has an ambiguous place in the Heyang. While it is still active in leaders' descriptions of their work, most participants do

not think that the mass line is being practised. Most speak of it in describing past relations. Despite all of this, mass line ideals of participation are active in villagers' evaluations of the contrasting neoliberal avenues and barriers they face. Furthermore, Jodi Dean cites Lin Chun's descriptions of the mass line as a "significant... conceptual innovation" for producing "participatory governance and political accountability" (2019b p.338). These accounts raise the question, what makes mass line participation so worthy?

Blecher's (1983) analysis of mass line intimacy helps us to bring our discussion back to what makes participation meaningful. Here we might follow Levy-Bruhl's (as cited in Sahlins, 2011) anthropological account of participation. His work to ground it in the concept of shared existence helps to draw out the "mutual intimacy" which Blecher reads in mass line relations. From this perspective, participation is a sharing of intentionality, "an interchange of standpoints and roles in which each person, knowing the other as an intentional being like oneself" (Sahlins, 2011 p.230). This take on participation recognizes a "mutuality of being... the same sense of conjoined existence [that] is involved in taking responsibility" (Sahlins, 2011 p.231). Using this perspective, we can look at "power" defined as the ability to "generate effects in one another" (Sahlins, 2011 p.237), as an emergent property of participation rather than a precondition of the institutional roles that people may inhabit. It is this position of participation as "mutuality of being" and the implied responsibilities of shared existence that is promoted in the participation organized by the CCP's mass line.

The forms of participation that enable mutuality in this sense relate to the relations that Jodi Dean (2019a) associates with the political belonging of "comrade". While this term was not widely used by the research participants, even by the elderly in my interactions with people in Heyang, this would have been the term of address that research participants would have used during the period of Heyang's collective economy when the mass line is argued to have been practiced (see Chapter Four).

Dean's (2019a) work on comrades, as identified in the introduction, is a response to her critiques of the collective potential of participation in communicative capitalist contexts. In 2004 Dean argued that the capitalist ownership of digital networks forecloses the potential for participation on them to lead to collectively empowering politics. In 2010 she

updates this argument by leaning into an argument of affect and desire. She argues that digital networks feed off our human desire for collectivity, claiming,

the very appeal, the affective charge, of the spectacle [of digital communications] is its mass quality, the way it makes us feel connected to a larger 'we' to which we belong... It exploits our aspirations for common being, uses them against us as a mode of communicative power (2012 p.151).

Dean's problem then is not in participatory action, but in the way that it is structured to hold people "captive while a very few profit" (2012 p.151).

The question we are left with is what kind of participation will make the difference to enable us to work collectively. Her initial response in 2012 is an argument based on the notion of digital networks as a common that is being exploited, and to break this exploitation we must "intensify the division of and in the common" so that it cannot be so easily surveilled and captured (2012 p.155). This is developed in her understanding of "comrade" as a relation based upon action.

Dean claims,

The term *comrade* indexes a political relation, a set of expectations for action toward a common goal. It highlights the sameness of those on the same side—no matter their differences, comrades stand together... Comradeship binds action, and in this binding, this solidarity, it collectivizes and directs action in light of a shared vision for the future (2019a p.2)

This form of political belonging is therefore premised on action, and commitment to the politics of collective wellbeing. In her etymology of the term she relates it to the Latin word for "room" and argues, "sharing a room, sharing a space, generates closeness, an intensity of feeling and expectation of solidarity" (2019a pp.2,3). This explicitly relates then to the mechanisms of the mass line to foster mutual intimacy. From this understanding the mass line is not a communist form of social relations, but as Pun Ngai explains, an "essential ingredient... of the construction of socialism" (As cited by Dean 2019b p.340). It should come as no surprise then that Dean recognizes the mass line as "indispensable" for a politics that aims towards the communist horizon.

## 2.5. Conclusion

Civil society models recognize the ideal of participation as a self-emancipation where one is empowered to understand how they are being disempowered and able to act discursively to address such conditions (Carpentier, 2016). Carpentier (2016) however notes that this empowerment, however, is dialectical tension with the ability to impact others' behaviours to affect social change. This tension is not only a weakness of the model, but it is also indicative of its conservative political stance in the wake of current asymmetries of social power from the global to the local level in the world's current political economy (Babe, 2009; Gilman, 2003). While framed in terms of resistance, especially as a specific critique of neoliberal relations, its theoretical dynamics give way to, as will be argued in Chapter Three, a temporality ideally suited for the speed-up of social time following digital technologies and "real time".

The mass line model, in comparison, recognizes the need to foster a recognition of mutuality between actors to influence the actions of one another; leaning into the structure/agency tension that civil society models struggle with. By associating this form of participation with the political belonging of "comrade", I aim to connect with its empowerment to impact social systems. Systemic change is affected through a process of helping to foster mutuality between the people and the leaders of a community that directs political efforts towards addressing collective wellbeing. This understanding of participation places the people as the revolutionary force to guide development.

The following chapter provides an account of how media ecologies support these contrasting political-economic forms of participation with an emphasis on how they relate to the social experience of time. It connects the civil society framework to an increasing emphasis on instantaneousness and in the moment participation. In contrast, socialist uses of media and treatment of time will point to the importance of sharing durations of time to affect mutuality. This contrast of the temporalities and the separate forms of participation effect will be used to help contextualize and interpret participants' responses in later chapters.

## **Chapter 3. Technology, Temporality and Mutuality in Being**

### **3.1. Introduction**

Building off the last chapter, which narrowed in on concerns over participation, this chapter discusses how media contribute to the organization of society. This discussion follows media ecology theory, which claims that the use of communication technology can contribute to systemic biases favouring different forms of social organization. This perspective helps to shape the research question to understand participation from the perspective of the activities that constitute the daily life of the village.

One of the crucial social organizational tasks that media are applied to is time reckoning. According to Barbara Adam (1990), time reckoning techniques developed in capitalistic societies emphasize universal and interchangeable quantities enabling them to both be quantified and exchanged for labour. She claims this technique of timekeeping follows the logic of clock faces physically denoting time as the passage of durations over space and calls it clock time. Adam (1996) goes on to identify dual colonial characteristics of “clock time”: socially into individual lifeworlds and geographically across international borders. She also tracks how the media used for timekeeping has moved to digital technologies leading to a shift, from a “clock time” emphasis on tracking the duration of time, to a “real time” emphasis of coordination in the immediate present.

In reform-era China, there are similar concerns that the CCP’s use of digital technologies for nation-building is leading to rapid and reactionary velocity. This trajectory is evident in government policies requiring officials to publicly respond to a crisis within 72 hours in the 1980s, moving to 24 hours in the 90s, 4 hours by 2008, and now the requirement is 45 minutes (Wang, 2020). These pressures to increase response times are also related to the quantification of government processes like the mass line, the logic of which can be related to China’s increased integration with capitalistic markets (see Thornton, 2011; Zhao, 1998).

Identifying how in the general acceleration of society, different class positions are giving rise to contrasting experiences of time, Susan Sharma (2014) argues that mediating the differential experiences of social acceleration between people of different class positions should become a research priority. Sharma's argument in favour of finding social techniques to promote mutuality point to the importance of linking technique to technologies. This perspective lays out a foundation for exploring how time reckoning can affect social organization in socialist societies and how mass line priorities promote collectivity through "shared-time". This chapter identifies "shared-time" as an aspect of socialist constructions and experiences of time meant to bring elites and ordinary citizens, especially those of the most exploited classes, together in order to build opportunities for mutual processes of conscientiousness.

This chapter's emphasis on class aligns with Yuezhi Zhao's arguments to reintroduce the concept in communication studies of China's national engagement with capitalism (2009; 2010a; 2010b; 2011; 2014). Following Zhao's lead, Jack Qiu (2010) identifies five basic practices to help elicit class concerns. Two are particularly relevant here: "monitor the communication landscape... that occurs beyond the official mediascape" and "focus on the communication of needs (or existential issues)" (Qiu 2010 p.535). A focus on time reckoning enables us to do this. In the following chapter, we will see the media used for keeping time in Heyang village has mostly been a secondary feature of predominate media from wired radio loudspeakers to mobile phones today. Second, the devices for time reckoning address the existential question of how to be and what to do with one's self in the present, offering us insights on daily negotiations of basic well-being, and inform participation in the village.

## **3.2. Media Ecology**

In examining Heyang's media infrastructure as a "media ecology", I am loosely following the media theory tradition instigated by Harold Innis (1971) and coined by Neil Postman (1993 p.18). Where this can often become a media-centric position considering the materiality of media, James Carey (1998) presents "media ecology" as an understanding of how media are integrated together with social environments. This notion of media as contributing to the production and normalization of social environments is based in Carey's notion of "ritual communication" which is concerned with "how society is symbolically connected, constituted, and called into existence, in a



way that makes the social order manifest, palpable, and actionable” (Pauly 2014 p.172). This analytical concept, along with “transmission communication” which focuses on the fidelity of communication between senders and receivers, were formulated by Carey not only to discuss how communication works but also to interrogate the research questions brought to it. The bifurcation arose from Carey’s concern that the predominantly empirical focus of communication studies through to the 1970s was too concerned with the efficient transmission of messages neglecting “the constructions of the forms of social relations into which people enter” (Grossberg 2009 p.177).

While Carey’s (1975) *Communication and Culture* essay has proven to be influential in communication studies in general, it has not had a strong influence on development communication literature. This lack of engagement is perhaps because development communication prioritizes interventions for social change, rather than finding ways to reaffirm community continuities. This stance, however, begs a whole host of questions: If development communication aims to empower the world’s most disadvantaged (Sparks 2007 p.1), should it not do so on the merits of their communities? If development communication aims to integrate disempowered people into mainstream society, why does it have a community media focus that is explicitly distinct from the state and market which represent contemporary social power? Overall, when examined, even community media solutions are only separate from mainstream media in terms of the content they produce. They are related to markets for procuring the materials used for production and in terms of the material-temporal constraints of community media workers (often volunteers); as they must meet the basic demands of selling their labour to afford food and shelter. Indeed, with the influence of Evert Rogers’ (1983) theory of dissemination, the modernist notion of access to technology is writ large in the participatory paradigm (also see Sparks 2007 pp. 126-148). Development communication from this perspective prioritizes transmission concerns: Do people get technology that enables them to speak? Do they learn the mores by which those with the power to judge will judge them?

Vladimir Lenin, in contrast, presents what may be read as a ritual theory of media for social change in his arguments for a newspaper to not only “be a collective propagandist, a collective agitator but also a collective organizer” (Hopkins, 1965 p.528; Hardin, 2010). Where the first two conditions are general transmission understandings of communication concerned with message movement and effective reception, the later concern for organization speaks to the pragmatic realization and use of a medium to

perform ritual based concerns of enabling conditions for participation in making society. This notion comes out in Lenin's argument about the impact that a regularly produced newspaper would have on the vast Russian nation,

The mere function of distributing a newspaper would help to establish actual contacts.... but (what is more important) an exchange of experience, of material, of forces, and resources. Organizational work would immediately acquire much greater scope, and the success of one locality would serve as a standing encouragement to further perfection (Lenin, 2008).

It is this function, what we might today consider a platform for socialist political organization, that Lenin argues enables newspapers to make a social order actionable in the manner described on ritual communication above. These concerns are specifically relevant for the case at hand because the CCP is a Marxist-Leninist Party, and its media systems are deeply informed by Leninist traditions (Zhao, 2008). In particular, and as will be demonstrated in the following chapter, the implementation and use of wired radio loudspeakers for supporting the collectivization of rural labour in China exemplifies Leninist uses of media to organize society (also see Hauck, 2020).

A media ecology perspective, therefore, need not be a simple techno deterministic question of 'what technology', but more appropriately 'how is technology used'. It is this latter issue that emphasizes agency and helps us to question the multiple uses that technologies are applied to in the organization and operation of society.

### **3.3. Time: A Mediation of Social Organization**

It is along these lines of seeing media as organizers of social environments that we can explore Barbara Adam's (1990) concept of "clock time" as the means of time-reckoning developed through capitalism.

She argues that clock time formed in Europe between the 14th and 19th centuries as mechanical clocks, railways, timesheets, and the like began to form the prevailing organizing forces of society. A crucial premise of this argument is the ability of a clock face to represent and measure not only standardized (abstract from nature) but also interchangeable (abstract from social meanings contextualizing units of time). Linked with the interests of those who exert social influence,

When the invariable time of the clock is superimposed on living systems, it tends to be the living systems that are required to adapt to the machine-time rather than the other way around. In other words, systems marked by variability and imprecision are asked to orient to decontextualized invariable precision (Adam 2006, 123).

This imposition is the first aspect of the dual colonial nature Adam and Sabelis (2002) identify in clock time. The decontextualization of time from nature, she claims, is part of its “quantifiable [and] divisible” nature enabling time to be “translatable into money. Only in this decontextualized form, as Marx... showed, can time become commodified, on the one hand, and an integral component of production on the other” (Adam, Whipp and Sabelis 2002 p.16). Here, her work intertwines with Postone’s (1993) own interest in the temporal implications of Marxism.

Postone’s focus is on how capitalist labour relations have come to give an objective character to social relations. Like Adam, he argues that labour becomes valuable in reference to time. He expands on this point by arguing that the “unit of time” by which labour is measured however is not standard, but fluctuates with productivity, ability to generate excess capital, the “use value dimension of” that labour (1993 p.194). This means that capital serves as a measure of labour time, not in terms of a simple duration of hours, but on the tradable value of the skills and knowledge deployed. Postone argues that when these relations are constituted socially, they rationalize material differences between people. In the process of capitalist accumulation and private reinvestment, these social differences compound overtime beyond a sense of social control (Postone, 1993 p.295).

Postone’s concern with economic structures leading social systems to speed up beyond political and cultural control is part of a body of theory that Susan Sharma (2014) calls “speed literature”. Identifying this body of literature as expanding in breadth and depth since the 1970s, she argues speed theory,

is concerned about how a culture of speed is antithetical to democracy. They share a similar cautionary tale: Speed is the commanding by-product of a mutually reinforcing complex that includes global capital, real time communication technologies, military technologies, and scientific research on human bodies. Democratic deliberation gives over to instant communication (2014, p.6).

Digital information communication technology, in particular, is linked to the development of instantaneous communication where “[i]nstantaneity means ‘real time’ processes across the globe coupled with the elimination of linear cause and effect relations” (Adam 2003 p.71).

Wayne Hope details the concept more specifically, “real time... is the marker of accelerating processes rather than a state of being” claiming it is an ideal associated with capitalism’s bias towards efficiencies and reducing time lags in production (Hope, 2016 p.71). He claims, “the primary manifestations of real time include ICT infrastructures, media institutions, finance culture, advertising, branding and consumption practices” (2016 p.69). In terms of its cultural influences, Hope relates real time to instant gratification, the spread of consumerist fashion and lifestyle practices most often associated with global cosmopolitanism (2016 pp.77, 83). In terms of economics, he claims that the incursion of financialization of increasing aspects of our lives in concert with ‘on-demand’ production and flexible labour pool management, “threatens the temporal autonomy of working life” where the durational sustainability of systems to maintain human living are outweighed by a system biased towards short term financial profit (2016 pp.106-128). Politically, Hope points to the “discursive formations of real time [that] often serve to naturalize prevailing relations of power by obfuscating matters of agency and historical context” (Hope, 2016 p.70). He argues real time discourse presents historical processes outside of their historical dynamics, but rather as permanent things, naturalized in their in-the-moment context.

These critical representations of real time identify it as part of the social organization of neoliberal globalization. In so much that real time denies the importance of durational, cause and effect, temporality with an ahistorical present, the critique of its social limitations is similar to the critiques that theorists of participation make of neoliberal society. In his critiques of neoliberalism, Nico Carpentier speaks of how contemporary digital environments invite users to engage them; users confront “minimally participative” conditions such as choosing from preselected options (Carpentier in Jenkins and Carpentier, 2013 p.274).

As critical as Carpentier is of the limits that digital platforms may put on the potential of participatory life (see Carpentier and Jenkins, 2013), his commitment to Mouffe’s postmodern ontology as discussed in Chapter Two, counting human society as

fundamentally antagonistic and decisions only agreeable in fleeting moments, lends his work to support the continuation of real time temporality. While Carpentier (2016) emphasizes balancing the power of all those involved, he sees this as happening within the moment of decision-making. This emphasis recognizes the power of simultaneous action afforded by information communication technologies enabling a “more participatory culture” (Jenkins as cited in Carpentier 2016 p.17). However, and as raised in Chapter Two, beyond the potential of providing platforms for simultaneous participation in decision-making, little is said as to how the position of all participants is to be made equal. Furthermore, Carpentier’s recommendation of indecisiveness in leadership speaks directly to what Hope claims are the temporal “shortcomings of real time – uncertainty and instability” that underwrites how the financialization of human activities is increasingly disconnected from human life-worlds (2016 p.276).

Rather than joining speed theorists to holistically criticize the acceleration of society in league with the political, economic and cultural uses of digital technology, Sharma (2014) calls for a balance of temporal experiences. Balancing temporal experiences aims to reduce the differences enabled when those with wealth in capitalist societies require workers to recalibrate and service their attempts to mitigate the hardships of social acceleration. Following the work of Harold Innis, this notion of balance is “necessary not only for a society to thrive but in order to both understand and change the political and social world” (2014 p.11). The concern of a lack of social control over the pace of temporal differentiation positions Sharma's work to address head-on the social alienation that Postone reads into the capitalist system of labour; an alienation that civil society theorists of participation also acknowledge, but fail to directly address (see Sharma 2014 p.13 for a separate critique of public sphere theorizing). This approach to temporal experience can thereby address the class relations that Qiu (2010) recommends are possible to examine by highlighting nondominant media uses.

### **3.4. A Timescape Perspective**

Building on the point that time keeping is a secondary use of media, we might also reflect that little of communication research deals with time as such. This neglect of time is not unique to communication studies, but according to Adam (2008), common to social sciences as a whole. She argues that contemporary social science disciplines largely do not give proper recognition to time, and thus how human systems are in

continual processes of change. She has developed a timespaces perspective to help identify the numerous ways in which time is constituted in research on people and what different elements help to draw out.

Adam (2008) lays out seven elements of a “timespaces perspective”:

*Time frame* – bounded, beginning and end of day, year, lifetime, generation, historical/geological epoch;

*Temporality* – process world, internal to system, ageing, growing, irreversibility, directionality;

*Timing* – synchronisation, co-ordination, right/wrong time;

*Tempo* – speed, pace, rate of change, velocity, intensity: how much activity in given timeframe;

*Duration* – extent, temporal distance, horizon: no duration = instantaneity, time point/moment;

*Sequence* – order, succession, priority: no sequence = simultaneity, at same time;

*Temporal modalities*: past, present and future – memory, perception/experience and anticipation. (2008 pp.7-8)

Before moving further I want to briefly lay out some specifics of the timescape perspective taken in this research.

**Time frame:** The following chapters investigate multitude of timeframes, from China’s initial engagement with capitalism, to different developmental projects conducted in Heyang, to the duration of my research. Primary are the time frames of the lifespans of the research participants, particularly those who are in their late fifties and above, who have strong memories of Heyang’s past collectivist economy informing their understanding of participation today.

**Temporality:** The media ecology discussion above identifies the importance of communication technology for organizing and coordinating society. Adam (2008) specifically links “temporality” to systems and processes, distinguishing it from both “timing and “tempo”. In this dissertation I am more faithful to Susan Sharma’s (2014) use of the term to understand the complex dynamic of lived time and the social power

differences experienced by people adhering to different timings being compelled to adapt to the timing of those with more social power than they.

**Timing:** This concern frames the roles of both wired radio loudspeakers and mobile phones play in Heyang as identified in Chapter 4. More broadly timing blends into Susan Sharma's concern with temporality as lived experiences of time and this is my basic entry point to examine political belonging from participation. As laid out above capitalist concerns with the duration of time are for exchange. As is demonstrated below socialist concerns with the duration of time emphasis its collective sharing. Both issues are examined in the use of time reckoning systems through Heyang's history to gain an appreciation of trends and the remaking of participatory strategies as political economic conditions shift.

**Tempo:** As much as this is about the rate of activity, Adam (2008) also argues that this is where temporality can help highlight power relations with the inquiry of who is required to (in Sharma's (2014) terminology) "recalibrate" to whose tempo. As such there is already a specific method to understand and critique class relations from what Qiu (2010) suggested could be done with a look at nondominated uses of media technologies. As discussed in Chapter Two the mass line helps to generate mutuality by requiring leaders to adapt and share in the temporal experiences of the people. How this does and does not become realized in contemporary relations, and there in impacts understandings of the politics of one's belonging is fleshed out in Chapters Five, Six and Seven.

**Duration:** As identified above, a key concern of this research is the purpose to measure and become involved with durations of time contrasting social exchange with social transformation. Following the development of how exchange functions in capitalism from concerns of durations of time to instant re-trading of values based upon an emphasis of choice in the moment I raise the developmental concern of "real time" to stand in starker contrast to the "shared time" generated by the mass line that is explored more in depth below.

**Sequences:** Sequence plays a key role in how the arguments in the empirical chapters are evidenced. This is particularly important for detailing the role that the people of Heyang play in governmental decision-making, to understanding conflicts in accepting

an invitation to participate in Heyang's cultural production, to appreciating how shared time is practiced by seniors today.

**Temporal Modality:** All told this dissertation is concerned with multiple temporal modalities, taking life in the village as a dynamic process in continual transition and contestation from its past, present and how these are informing future development in Heyang village.

### **3.5. Approaches to Socialist Temporality and the Mutuality of Shared Time**

When defining "temporality" Sharma asserts,

I mean for... [it] to denote lived time. The temporal is not a general sense of time particular to an epoch of history but a specific experience of time that is structured in specific political and economic contexts (2014 p.9).

Earlier in her book, she claims that temporality is "an awareness of power relations as they play out in time" (2014 p.3). These two definitions help to draw out a few points to further the current discussion. First is the importance of temporality as a lived experience. The quality of time that one experiences around other beings can differentiate us, and catalyze power imbalances when people are required to "recalibrate" to the speed of others, nominally service workers to help slow the pressure of the pace of life for those with the money to afford it. This relationship helps to illustrate the manners in which time can contribute to both alienation and mutuality. Experiencing a different pace of life helps to construct social barriers to mutuality. Likewise, sharing in experiences of time can help to promote recognition of the other and generate a sentimentality of mutuality (see for instance Peacock, Duggleby and Koop's (2014 p.120) discussion of Heidegger's concept of "being with" as a temporality that generates recognition). When those of a lower class are exploited by recalibrating to serve those who purchase their services, a power difference between them is made objective and furthers the difference of the experience. However, when the process is reversed, requiring leaders to recalibrate and share in the temporalities of the lower classes, we might find an inkling of socialist experiences of time.

Deema Kaneff's (2004) study of a village in post-socialist Bulgaria offers a helpful starting point for this investigation. Where Sharma claims that temporalities are "specific



political and economic context”, to show differentiation within a capitalist context, Kaneff looks to paint the general features of socialist time in opposition to that organized in capitalist societies. She argues that like the capitalist variant socialist time “result[s] from industrialization processes [and] is broken into standardized, invariable units” (2004 p.25). She refers to Adam’s work in this argument but hedges away from Adam’s argument that this is part of the colonizing nature of clock-time in general. Kaneff writes that any centralizing impacts of clock time diminishing and distorting other conceptions of time are only “speculation on my part” in a footnote to the argument that this centralization and distortion occurs in socialist time but not capitalist time. Kaneff’s most significant characterization of socialist time asserts that the present is a time for “social change aimed at the realization of a specific future goal – communism” (2004 p.8; see Croll, 1994 p. 6-7 for a similar account of China). This orientation gives socialist time a particular rhythm, and future orientation that Kaneff (2004) claims neglects the present as a lived time. While Kaneff makes a brief note that this “characterized” socialist time with “a high degree of self-reflection”, this point is quickly used to discuss how social power became a matter of the politics of interpreting the past (2004 p.25).

Rather than dismiss the politics of historical interpretation as Kaneff does, we might dig into the reflectivity of socialist time. In his reading of Marx’s theory of time, Heydebrand (2003) asserts that reflexivity is a crucial aspect of the social praxis of historical change. This reflexivity is based upon being aware of one’s standpoint and “to be able to look over one’s own shoulder”, but does not become transformative praxis until it is put into “creative and productive work as well as social interaction as the mutual recognition, cooperation and exercise of influence and power among persons and groups” (Heydebrand, 2003 pp 148-149). The self-reflectivity of socialist time should become politically relevant from this perspective because it will help contribute to the realization of the communist revolution.

Sabina Mihelj and Simon Huxtable’s (2015) examination of television in the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia expand these insights on socialist time and bring them to the issue of how technological environments contribute to them. First, they distinguish what they call “revolutionary time” from “socialist time”. Where the temporality of “revolutionary time” is focused on the self-aware experience of time moving towards the *telos* of a communist future, “socialist time” is described by them as the basics of “synchronizing... daily life with” this overall project. With these insights, they investigate the flow of television

broadcasting to understand the rhythms of public life in socialist systems. Their conclusion, they claim, is “ambiguous”, pointing to how regular TV content that focused on the revolutionary future made the notion of it mundane and “unremarkable”, and not productive of explicit commitments to the communist cause (Miheli and Huxtable, 2015 p.346).

On the other hand, Miheli and Huxtable put great stock into how the flow of television created social distinctions of work versus leisure time and contributed to “stability and a sense of collective belonging” (2015 p.334). This emphasis on belonging helps put Carey’s ritual communication concern of how a community maintains and reproduces itself into direct relation with Lenin’s argument that media should be used by the Communist Party to organize society and Dean’s emphasis of a political category of comrade belonging to socialist politics. However, where Kaneff (2004) helps to point to the socialist present as a place for reflection, Mihelj and Huxtable (2015) portray the rhythms of socialist time as specifically directed to demarking time for labour. They use this general focus to distinguish socialist daytime television showing how producers of daytime programming neglected housewives in the effort to project socialist belonging with industrial labour rather than with socially transformative politics.

Gail Hershatter (2011) brings these concerns about how socialist time is experienced and differentiated at the level of gender to rural China. In contrast to Mihelj and Huxtable’s “revolutionary time” Hershatter coins the term “campaign time” saying that “in rural areas [this] centred on the reorganization of agricultural production into progressively larger collectives” as premised on specific national political campaigns (2011 pp.25-26). While pointing out how the collectivization of rural labour brought women out of homes and into agricultural production *en masse*, she also depicts how women’s lives, compared to men’s lives, could be less connected to these public temporal periods, interspersed with birth, childcare and other gendered domestic labours. Campaign time is an important distinction because it helps to mark the pre and post-liberation national political and economic contexts making it an “obvious temporal divide provided in state language” and organization (Hershatter, 2011 p.25). Hershatter depicts the place of media as an organizing element in this political economic shift:

Throughout the 1950s, formal state campaigns rearranged the daily groups in which farmers came together to labour in ever-larger collectives, providing a timetable for progressing from one to the next: labour exchange

groups, mutual aid groups, lower and higher producers' cooperatives, and communes. Campaigns were heralded by state slogans and intensive publicity, marked by the arrival of work teams and cadres from outside the village. In the weeks after a new campaign was introduced, local leaders and visiting cadres engaged farmers (2011 p.66)

This depiction of how the CCP carried out political campaigns identifies publicity as a mobilizing element proceeding engagement by first outside and the local leaders. The media were not used by the CCP to substitute human engagement in synchronizing with the dominate political-economic context but rather as a means to facilitate and catalyze future and ongoing interaction between people, as a means to realize the political goals envisioned in the campaigns.

A vital aspect of the collectivization campaigns is how men and,

women were mobilized during the land reform of the late 1940s and early 1950s to 'speak bitterness,' narrating and interpreting the hardships they had experienced as children and young adults... Citing Liberation as a signpost in one's life meant organizing one's own memories into a personal and collective narrative of emancipatory progress (Hershatter, 2011 p.25)

This practice of speaking bitterness worked to help reinforce the idea of a temporal change and demonstrates the politicization of the past to inform contemporary practices for a communist future that Kaneff (2004) identifies in socialist time. More specifically, according to an internal CCP document, speaking bitterness was meant to "make peasants aware that there are only two groups of people in the world: one... 'the right' and the other 'the poor'; aware that 'all peasants under heaven are one family'" (as cited in Li 2013 p.164). The purpose of this, according to Li (2013) was twofold: the first to create alienation between peasants and landlords, or rather to denaturalize landlord interests, to mobilize commitment to revolutionary activities. The second, to foster greater integration between people of different families and standings based on their shared place in world history. In an unpublished study, Fangchun Li (2012) describes how speaking bitterness was an activity that CCP cadres had to work hard to make peasants do in collective settings (as many were worried about losing face). Cadres played a role here in helping peasants to see their past hardships not as an aspect of fate, but as a result of social circumstances, thus working to help build a shared class awareness. Li also notes how cadre's receptions of peasant participation in meetings by speaking bitterness helped lead to new appraisals within the party about the nature of this bitterness and how to address it collectively. Speaking bitterness thus was specific

in terms of the CCP's top-down efforts to produce socialist subjectivities. However, it also reflects part of the structure enabling these practices to turn into the bottom-up dialectical responses of the mass line's "from the masses to the masses" ideal. This process is what Kim (1973) argued was a primary way the CCP was able to make communism shift from an elitist project to a popular revolution, enabling peasants to feel like they are involved in shaping governance. Addressing Sharma's definition of temporality as the "awareness of power relations through time" (2014 p.9), Wingchung Ho argues that the linguistic formula of contrasting the past to the liberation present enabled peasants to feel like "the 'masters of society'" (2004 p.384).

The construction of this socialist subjectivity, a feeling and social context of collective, shared interests, mattering more than individual private ones, occurred through political and economic restructuring that involved continual dialogic engagement between cadres and masses. The activities of the mass line to generate this dialogic field for mutuality may, therefore, be said to work according to what Susan Buck-Morss (2010) identifies as the socialist commitment to "share time" (this is similar to Fabian's (1983; also see Hope, 2016) arguments to affirm coeval status but his argument was for academic justice and not identified as socialist).

It is relevant to mention here that Buck-Morss' notion of "shared time" was her contribution to the 2009 Birkbeck Institute for the Humanities conference *On the Idea of Communism*. Her work is thereby intimately linked with Dean's "project of reinvigorating the idea of communism here and now" (2019b p.338)

Making what she calls a "theoretico-pragmatic" argument Buck-Morss takes, "as a principle for action in our own era, that there is *one* time, in which all partake, inside and out, present and past, in ways that blur... hypostasized boundaries" (2010 pp.71-72). She uses Nietzsche's term "untimeliness" to describe how "aspects of the present moment... simply do not fit our established traditions or modes of understanding" and lead to "extreme discomfort" (2010 p.77). The difficulty in confronting the newness of the present is not dissimilar to the discomfort that McLuhan read into how digital technologies would bring humanity into the uncomfortable real time closeness of a global village- this uncomfortableness is the newness of our confrontation with others. According to Buck-Morss (2010), it is the task of communist theory to address this political difficulty and not allow newness to be interpreted and then selectively owned by

select segments of society as Dean (2004; 2012) depicts of communicative capitalism. Instead, the realization of moments and ideas of human progress gain “in value by being shared” (Buck-Morss, 2010 p.70). Sharing time, therefore may be understood as one of the actions Dean (2019a) reads into “comrades”.

This notion of sharing brings us to the mass line’s mechanisms for realizing a Marxist epistemology. The CCP’s duty is not only to learn about popular conditions but to then publicize them back in the form of campaigns meant to transform exploitative conditions (Mao, 1965a). This discursive movement, the ongoing dialogue and effort at receptive and transformative politics is an example of Buck-Morss’ (2010) socialist temporality in practice. Thus, Kaneff’s (2004) emphasis about the neglect of the present in socialist temporality may not be an accurate description of temporal experiences, or the now inherited meaning, of socialist temporality in China, as is Buck-Morss’ (2010) point of addressing our coexistence and work to share the contemporary more fully.

This interpretation of socialist time aligns with Sharma’s own Innisian social justice arguments for balance. Coincidentally enough, in his essay *The Mechanization of Knowledge*, Innis makes some of his most specific cases for a return of oral culture as a means to balance the monopolistic powers formed by the mechanization of communication systems in his time. It is here that he muses his work “smack[s] of Marxist interpretation” (1995 p.30). The importance of oral culture for Innis, much as it is later expressed in Freire’s mass line inspired critical dialogue, is for people to find sustainable ways of living that do not lead to the vast imbalances of social power. For Innis, this was a means to prevent revolutionary social change and chaos. For Mao and Freire, on the other hand, dialogue itself was a medium for the revolutionary change demanded by their contemporary historical circumstances. For all three, however, there is the socialist concern with the basic welfare of those otherwise without power in society. This concern for basic welfare puts our understanding of what a Chinese socialist temporality might be in dialogue with Lin Chun’s (2014) argument that China’s model of socialist development should be informed by *minsheng*, a concept of basic needs being met, and translated as “well-being”. It is also this point of well-being that Volkovich (2019) rests his argument for why China is illiberal. More than just an experience of time, the sharedness of socialist time that produces the qualities of mutuality giving daily participation during the collectivist era the meaning it has for evaluating experiences of village life today.

### 3.6. How this Applies to Later Chapters

This chapter provides a theoretical framework to begin to examine the production of time in China. By looking at how radio loudspeakers, in particular, contributed to the media ecology of post-liberation China and contributed to a socialist temporality, we will see that what participants remember is not so much the content of the communication but its rhythms and symbolization of social relations orientated to local collective production for the nation's development.

“Revolutionary time”, or “campaign time” does not play a substantial role in the reflections of participants as they use memories of their socialist past to evaluate and explain their current conditions in focus group interviews. Likewise, “speaking bitterness” was not commonly identified as part of what remains valuable about relations from this era. While it did come up in examples of what might occur in a mass meeting, this was presented more in terms of formula people had to do, rather than any qualitative impact it might have made on leader-society relations. This too then may be similar to the way Hershatter identifies memory as working in her interviews: the concern is not so much with the formalities of the system, but the way they became lived daily experiences (2011 p. 26). We might then link this observation the Milhj and Huxtable's (2015) distinction between “revolutionary time” and “socialist time”. It was not an explicit transmission of socialist ideals, but rather their ritualistic practice that produces the qualitative reflections of how participation is being evaluated today.

With reference to the different elements of Adam's (2008) timeframe perspective, I will show how participation is related to being recognized for one's stake in the village. The complaint about a distant relationship between local levels and forms of government and other residents is primarily premised on how the different temporal imperatives that villagers face in comparison to those with the resources to afford to become Village Council members and the Tourism Management Committee. Being a poor farmer does not yet help to contribute to a thriving tourist packaged experience for desired urban customers. Despite these conflicts, marginalized, and in particular senior, villagers find ways to maintain their homes and families; symbolically represented by mobile phone reproductions of hourly announcements of the time once ubiquitously heard throughout the village on wired radio loudspeakers.

## **Chapter 4. A Short History of Time, Technology and Social Change in China**

### **4.1. Introduction**

This chapter looks at the structural forces at play in shaping the time reckoning systems that have come to contextualize life in Heyang village. It begins with a brief analysis of how China integrated with Universal Common Time (UCT) and the interchangeable clock-time that Adam (1990) links with industrialism and is common to both capitalist and socialist development. I then move into a more detailed examination of how the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) used wired radio to create a general national media ecology that led to villages being directly connected to the 24-hour clock. Where clock-time is usually related to the tracking of durations to exchange labour, the use of wired-radios was linked to the CCP's efforts to collectivize labour and was used to bring about the mutual sharing, rather than exchange, of time.

Wired radio came to have its distinctive three broadcasts helping to order labour around meals is a result of technological convergence with broadcasts conducted over phone lines, and negotiations between the national, provincial and other local departments of the Ministry of Broadcasting and Ministry of Posts and Telecommunication. The differing interests of these two ministries, with broadcast departments emphasizing mass access and telecommunication departments prioritizing elite level connectivity, continued into the reform era with telecommunications emphasizing urban markets and broadcasting benefiting from widespread town-village enterprises which helped to provide advertising revenue for the multitude of stations which sprung up in the early 1980s (Zhao, 2000). This difference has shifted today, as reflected in how a majority of villagers have mobile phones and package their TV with telecommunication data plans. This shift reflects technological convergence and inter-ministerial competition renewed in contemporary contexts, but for ends refocused in China's ongoing engagement with global capitalism.

Putting this analysis in discussion with the development communication concerns raised in Chapter 2, current efforts to informationalize the countryside as part of the new socialist countryside (see Oreglia, 2015) appear to fit the access to technology narrative found in globalization literature. Success in capitalist markets enables people to choose

to participate in these new communication environments. However individual decision-making to purchase new commodities comes at the cost of the collective's ability to maintain what Zhao (2000) identifies as the social resource of communication as a shared good. It is in this context that I encountered Heyang and its residents' values and practices for participating as members of the village. Their primary concern is how to connect their needs for wellbeing with the overall development of the village, which I detail in the following chapters.

## **4.2. China's Initial Engagement with Capitalist Clock Time**

China's official integration with Western time is a useful starting point to grasp the relationship that changes in time reckoning have with political-economic and cultural transformation. This integration began with Qing Dynasty reforms in 1670 when the system of counting time during the day shifted from a dual 100-*ke*/12-*chen* system to the European 24-hour division (Wilkinson 2000, 218). These reforms were developed, in part, because of Europe's interest in Chinese trade, beginning in earnest with Portuguese traders establishing relations with the Ming Dynasty in 1513, and the missionary zeal of Christendom. Public intellectuals at the time, like Gottfried Leibniz, extolled that "a Chinese Mandarin will be delighted and amazed [by our]... wonderful machine[s]" imploring Christian missionaries to take telescopes and clocks with them to spread a sense of God within humanity" (Jami, 1995). This strategy was taken by Jesuit missionaries who impressed first Chinese diplomates and then the Emperor with mechanical clocks and then entered critical positions in the Bureau of Astronomy during the early Qing dynasty in part by winning a competition to produce a new lunar calendar able to predict eclipses better than the coexisting Chinese or Islamic calendars (Lu 2007).

The Kangxi Emperor's belief that western cultures had greater astrological precision and more efficient mathematics (Lu 2007), however, cannot be divorced from the economic boom of the massive influx of silver from Europe into China's economy. This trade had the impact of shifting tax collection from grain and labour to silver and provided the financial support for absentee landlordism and urbanization (Huang 1990, 48). Significantly, the increase in wealth (and new crops) influenced population growth. This growth put increased pressure on the imperial civil service examination, which itself was



becoming corrupt with families buying rather than earning a position. These changes contributed to the general rise and social acceptance of a merchant class (Jin 2005).

Heyang was not immune to these domestic impacts of international trade with Europeans as many villagers became prosperous merchants in domestic markets for indigo, paper, grain and other minor cash crops (Jin 2005). The wealth made through the late Ming and Qing dynasties was invested locally with families building elaborate courtyard houses and ancestral halls. This led to class divisions both within the village and between Heyang and other villages which did not prosper to the same degree. Inequalities in rural China rose to a head during the Taiping rebellion, fought in the name of Christianity, as much as the result of increasing numbers of poor and landless peasants. Bullet marks inside wealthy homes mark what would become the first wave of revolution, caused by political, economic, and cultural incursions from the West, to leave its history on Heyang's walls.

Turning back to time reckoning, it is probable that the merchants who travelled to the cities, and those who studied for the imperial exams, would have had some rudimentary knowledge and experience of the shifts in timekeeping from this period. Generally, however, there was little direct regulation over rural life, with scholar-officials at the county level representing the lowest position in the Ming dynasty and slightly more representation during the early and mid-Qing dynasties (Huang 1985, pp.85-105). There are general reports that some rural gentry and Buddhist temples might have had fire clocks like incense burners, but these would have been designed for the 100-*ke* and 12-*chen* systems of timekeeping and not the new 24-hour division. Notably, the *Wang Chen Nung-shu* (preface dated 1313) indicates that some villages committed to collective farming would keep time during the day with a drum to organize labour (as cited in Jami 1995, 174). Beyond this, historians describe rural timekeeping as general solar reckoning (Jami, 1995).

China did not see another major shift in time reckoning until the rise of the Republican government. Following the 1911 revolution, the new Republican Chinese government dropped the (Jesuit reformed) lunar calendar from official record-keeping, and the Gregorian calendar was adopted (Wilkinson, 2000 p.185). China's last significant integration, joining UCT, occurred in 1928, shifting the country from time measured by a solar account in Beijing to 8 hours off the Greenwich meridian, an adjustment of 8

minutes. This change, however, would not impact the daily time reckoning of Chinese villagers until after the CCP's revolution in 1949 and its commitment to disseminating wired-radio loudspeakers across rural China in the years and decades to follow.

Quite a few of the residents in Heyang are over 70 years old and spent their formative years telling time by the sun until loudspeakers came to mark it publicly. Elderly peasants in Heyang describe pre-Maoist timekeeping as watching the sun; which marked out meals and rhythms in daily labour. Explaining how this worked, the 70-year-old Zhu Long told me a pair of four-character sentences *"ri chu er zuo, ri luo er xi"* describing how one goes out with the rise of the sun and returns as it sets. "What about at lunchtime?" I asked. "You look down, and if there is no shadow on either side, then it might be time to eat," he replied.

This history thus gives us a few critical elements of the ongoing argument: the transmission of technology influences cultural change; shifts in Chinese engagement with world trade impact urban-rural relations and social epistemology; and the production of the historical landmarks that are now a nationally protected heritage site and at the centre of the contentions in Heyang's ongoing political-economic development.

### **4.3. Wired Radio as a Mass Line Organizer**

Four days before founding the People's Republic of China, in an affirmation of their revolution, a subcommittee of the CCP officially changed the name of the renewed capital city of Beiping to Beijing. "[O]n the same day Beiping Xinhua Radio was renamed Beijing Xinhua Radio (the predecessor of the Central People's Radio), which paved the way for the birth of 'Beijing Time'" (Guo 2001, 276). The 1955 "extension of wired radio stations to rural areas [that] was part of the leftwards turn in political and economic development" (Liu 1971, 119), would become the first time that hundreds of thousands of Chinese peasants would have access to non-solar timekeeping with daily announcements of, "The time is Beijing is. . .". The commitment to this development path represents a long-coming recalibration of urban and rural temporalities as all with access to loudspeakers would hear the same Radio Beijing broadcasts and receive its announcements of the hour at the same time. In exploring the relationship between the use of wired-radio loudspeakers and the mass line as a mechanism for communist governance from a temporal perspective, the qualitative question of "what does one do

with one's time" highlights the stark contrast in social relations during and following the Mao era.

Wired-radio loudspeakers are a prime example of Brock's (2012) argument of how the mass line impacted scientific development with innovations coming from the bottom up. Pan (2019) documents its innovation and growth alongside telecommunication infrastructure in Jilin province where the Japanese had temporarily set up a colonizing Manchukuo government and invested in electrifying police stations to ensure public order. Building on this infrastructure, Wang Binde, a technician, and Zhang Fengqi, Secretary of the Jiutai County Party committee, began to use telephone lines to install loudspeakers in oil processing factories in 1949 and then throughout the county (Pan, 2019). With support from the CCP, the Jiutai wired radio network became framed as a tool for "educating farmers" and "promoting agricultural production" rather than for entertainment, or for a few people (i.e. leaders) to receive information (Pan, 2019 p.96). The model expanded to other provinces, including Zhejiang by 1953, to entice farmers to join the cooperatives, and in 1954 Mao and other CCP members observed loudspeakers used to organize collective agricultural production (Pan 2019). This interest led to the 1955 annual broadcasting conference prioritizing the construction of a rural radio network and a sudden expansion of the technology nationwide. This expansion occurred because China did not have the industrial capacity to produce many transistors for radio receivers, but it did have materials and skills necessary for connecting loudspeakers to pre-existing and expanding telephone wire infrastructure. Berger argues this expansion, based upon local self-reliance, is an example of the mass line applied to economics (as quoted in Galtung, 1976, p. 207). Rates of rural wired radio loudspeakers increased over the 1960s and 1970s in conjunction with national campaigns promoting collectivization and agricultural production (see Eisenman, 2018), and plateaued with the late 1970s early 1980s shift to decollectivization (Chang, 1989).

Before the shift to wired loudspeakers, CCP radio broadcasting mostly focused on instructions for cadres and news transcripts to be recorded on paper by listeners and then read aloud to groups in a manner developed during the CCP's time in Yanan (Houn, 1956; Pan, 2019). Even after these early years, wired-radio speakers in rural China have primarily functioned to retransmit national and provincial broadcasts. Local announcements were always secondary and along the lines of dialect interpretation of programming or local announcements to organize village events and enforce local

policies such as announcing acts of “bad characters” (see Chang, 1989, p.161; Hornig, 1990; Yu, 1964).

It is the latter function of local broadcasts that is highlighted by the 57-year-old former village hear, Zhu Jia, along with other focus group participants in 2015 (Hauck 2017) and again in 2019, as crucial for village politics and keeping residents informed about local events and projects. In 1956 Jinyun county set up its receiving station with 320 speakers (Ji, Pan Ye, Fang, and Liang 2016 as cited in Hauck 2017). Heyang got its first big speaker in the winter of 1964, the same year that the village was electrified following the construction of a nearby reservoir. When the loudspeakers came into use, they only retransmitted central broadcasts. It was not until 1966 that Jinyun's county station began to broadcast its own hour-long program. By the 1970s Heyang had its own broadcasting room in a newly constructed village auditorium, and each family had a little speaker in their home.

Zhu Tang, a 76-year-old retired middle school teacher, remembers his role during this period of technological transition:

I was in junior high school in the 50s. When I came home from school on vacation, the township government organized returning students to take the news from the village to listen to and record broadcasts and return to read these radio broadcasts to villagers. This happened in 1956, 57, 58... At that time, the cooperative was set up. I do not know if they listened. Anyway, I just read it out.

Zhu Jia explains how the Village Council ran the broadcasting system while it was still in operation:

The village leader was in charge of the radio. Everything was announced by radio including rules and policies, as well as good and bad behaviour. Compliments and criticisms all needed to be announced... who broke the rules and needed to pay a fine... to reinforce the villagers' connection to the village... As the village leader for a time I got to decide what to announce... but the village accountant would write out the scripts.

The reporting of individuals' behaviour is part of the social pressure that Eisenman, citing Marc Blecher, points to as core to the Maoist emphasis on thought-work for building a collective spirit and catalyzing agricultural output (2018, pp.113, 128-9). In 2015 when I inquired about what was useful about loudspeakers during focus group interviews many noted that they were a way to know the time, with some reflecting that they served similar functions to both televisions and watches. Focus group participants in 2019

largely gave the same responses. While some remembered that “bad characters” might be reported when specifically asked, few were concerned with specific content. We might, therefore, look at these local broadcasts not so much at the specifics of the content they transmitted, but rather their presence in ritualizing the organization and rhythms of collective labour.

#### **4.4. Loudspeakers and Revolutionary Temporality**

A primary organizational use of local loudspeaker broadcasts is how they contributed to Hershatter’s (2011) concept of campaign temporality. Here their importance is not in the content broadcast as much as it is in their role to organize activities, such as political meetings, in the village. Zhu Lian, a farmer in his 50s, was in his teens during the Cultural Revolution, brings out this link of organizing in his memory of how loudspeakers contributed to village life,

In the 70s we would hold these assemblies all the time. At that time, when the village brigades made an announcement over the central broadcast, we would hold a meeting that very evening.

The meetings, especially during the Cultural Revolution, were primarily remembered as struggle sessions against one or another group of counterrevolutionaries. In his account of being responsible for directing people to attack the ancestral halls during the 1966 “Elimination of the Four Olds” political campaign, Zhu Bi, in his 70s, slipped into the local Jinyun dialect and was translated by another member of his focus group, “there were some people who were afraid to destroy [the ancestral halls]. I think, according to him, there was a fear of retribution”. Following the redistribution of these halls in the 1950s to serve as residence for poor farmers, this iconoclasm was part of national efforts to both ideologically and materially make Chinese society more socialist.

The process of *fanshen* “turning over”, as William Hinton (1966) famously documented, is a process of attempting to change social views at the level of individual subjectivity. This process continued from the early revolutionary period into China’s era of high socialism through the practice of speaking bitterness. Many of the research participants spoke of how the 1960s and 1970s were times when “we had to be careful about what we said” as there was “great anxiety”. At the same time, others spoke directly of “being turned over” and upon saying so, would have their memory given the same reverence

that such a claim of the social justice had in past “speaking bitterness” practices. This kind of moment is captured in 30-year-old Zhu Nien’s reaction to his fellow focus group participant, the 90-year-old Zhu Men’s claim of being “turned over”, “He is a real beneficiary, and his memory is the deepest”.

Reflecting the complicated social reality of remembering the Mao era, focus group participants could quickly shift from talking of people having to wear dunce caps, engaging in violence such as re-enacting “taking the plane” where people have boards strapped to their back and are made to run prone, and associating all of these activities with village meetings, to proclaiming that today there are only meetings for leaders because of dwindling democratic sentiments in society.

Zhu Zhang, a farmer in his late 60s, presents this notion of democratic sentiment, not in an institutional form but in terms of mutuality developed from collective participation, reflecting,

Back then, when we’d all work together as a production team, it was still the collective era, you would talk, and I would talk as well. But now... what can you accomplish on your own?

Zhu Lian, a farmer in his mid 50s, addressing the distance that he experiences with leaders today, adds to the notion that sharing time with leaders in collective labour contributes to unity:

Back then, if there was a meeting, that meant something was happening... So we’d work alongside them [the cadres] every day... Back then it was cadres who led the work, for instance, to plough new fields, it was all cadres who led and did the work themselves... But it’s not the same now.

Linking these experiences to local loudspeaker broadcasts, Zhu Tang explains, “At the time of collectivization, some things needed to be told to the villagers through the radio so that they could know what to do and what not to do.” When I probed, “Is there a relationship between loudspeakers and collectivization?” He responded,

Collective labour and collective production were related at that time because they required everyone to act together... When collectivizing, we must all come together. When the CCP divided the land by households, peasants planted their own fields instead of organizing together. So, the role of broadcasting is becoming less and less critical, degrading the quality of the broadcasts.

Wired radio loudspeakers might, therefore, be said to represent an example of participatory development communication, just as Everett Rogers identified back in 1978. However, they do not represent participatory communication in terms of their material form, what is more important is their use. Villagers' memories of participation were not specific to wired radio itself but descriptive of village life as a whole. Indeed, the loudspeakers appear to keep the tempo of the political urgency of remaking a society that Melhji and Huxtable (2015) claim became dull in the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia because of overexposure on TV. This communication was not just repeating messages, but messages to organize social activities.

The anxiety that participants imbued in such memories, might then be seen as part of Buck-Morss' (2010) concept of socialist temporality as attempting to address Nietzsche's concept of the present as "untimely" because it poses new experiences that do not fit traditional ways of knowing and must be confronted through shared social reflection as a way to break with past traditions rather than repeating them. Anxiety arose, in part, from not knowing if one would be targeted, or on what basis new lines of class friends and enemies might be aligned. This discomfort was produced through the political campaigns and meetings designed to provide collective ownership of "progressive historic events" (Buck-Morss 2010 p.70) that during China's period of high socialism was considered the CCP's liberation of China. While this sharing of progress also affected a denial of co-temporality for many in China at the time, it reached both class and gender intersections intending to give those historically disempowered in both categories more say and involvement such as participation in meetings (Hershatter, 2011; Lin, 2013, Hinton, 1966; Huang; 2018; Seldon, 1995; Wang, 2013).

#### **4.5. Loudspeakers and Shared Time**

In contrast to the campaigns that comprised Hershatter's (2011) description of revolutionary temporality in China, when asked, most research participants explained the place of loudspeakers and announcements as part of daily time reckoning. This timekeeping would often be the primary and unprompted theme by which villagers would explain loudspeakers to me. This was the case my close neighbor, Zhu Fanbing, a 54-year-old lady who moved back to the village with her husband to take care of their aging parents. During one interview I noted how there were few loudspeakers in the village these days, she smiled and nodded her head a little,

Yes, when we were young, phones and televisions were seldom available and only a few families had them, for us there was only the radio. In the morning, when the radio rang, women got up to cook. At noon, when the radio rang, the children came back for lunch. At that time, it was different. We were still very young. We didn't have any watches or mobile phones.

In 2015 many participants in focus group interviews,

highlighted how broadcasts would play only three times a day and were used as a village timepiece. Ms Hong, [in her fifties] claimed, "In the morning we would listen to the radio when we went to work." She explained, "We could hear the radio from the fields . . . [and] knew when it was time to return home to cook." (Hauck, 2017 p. 4448).

This primary memory associating the announcements with timekeeping is an often-mentioned characteristic of loudspeaker announcements in the literature but unexplored beyond occasional notes about the pragmatics of reaching the most people (see Liu, 1971; Jan, 1967; Chang, 1989; Lei, 2019). These theorists, however, have not taken up a rigorous analysis of how Lenin's theories of the press and his theories of media as organizers have informed China's media system. While there is no documentary evidence to suggest that Lenin's theories informed the deployment and use of loudspeakers, the above analysis demonstrates how loudspeakers were used as political organizers not only informing people but indicating shared activities.

In their rural context with three daily broadcasts, loudspeakers were intrinsically calibrated to the rhythms of agricultural production, the basis of peasant labour. However entwined the development of rural wired radio time may be with European clock-time, this rhythm makes for a temporality qualitatively different than the industrial abstractions of hourly "clock-time" suited for the abstract exchange of labour Adam (1990) identifies in western European development. The difference is that this time-reckoning serves to indicate shared activities, valued for their ability to produce a socialist subjectivity, as much as they were for any material outcomes. The local loudspeaker broadcasts promoted this sense of being temporally calibrated to the village as a collective in everything from agricultural labour to political campaigns, to the basics of wellbeing such as meals.

Pan's recent PhD thesis on the history of wired radio in China offers a pragmatic explanation for the three broadcasts. She explains that the fixed times for rural broadcasts began with Jiutai's model because county leaders wanted to limit their local monopolization of telephone lines (2019 pp.70-74). Whenever local officials used their



broadcasting system, they would interrupt the lines that connected cities on either side of Jiutai County. At the national level, the Ministry of Posts and Telecommunication held the responsibility for building, maintaining and managing telephone line infrastructure; this meant ensuring the availability of phone connections. In contrast, the Ministry of Culture held responsibility for overseeing the production of broadcast content on loudspeakers, made available through the countryside on loudspeakers connected to intercity phone lines. Pan (2019 pp.78-84) demonstrates how liaising between broadcasting departments and posts and telecommunications departments at the county, city and provincial levels led to different rates of success in disseminating the technology. Later, when new lines dedicated to radio broadcasting were put into use, they were installed mainly using the wooden poles managed by the Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications (MTP) (Pan, 2019 p.89). The acrimonious relationship between the departments continued through this development. Pan documents how cadres in the local department of posts and telecommunications from Jilin in northern China to Guangdong in southern China, would complain that local uses of the system for village announcements would regularly cut off long-distance phone calls (2019 pp.114-122).

The general lack of coordination between village broadcasts and official telephone needs can be traced to the primary differences in the way they managed responsibilities (Pan, 2019 p.87). Radio broadcasting was primarily a local responsibility. A 1963 announcement, for instance, asserted that county stations, which were mainly repeater stations and did little in-house production, should support themselves with installation and listening fees that county stations negotiated with local communes (Lei, 2019 p.44). In comparison, rural telephone infrastructure was developed and maintained at a loss and often used without expense by officials during the Maoist years (Harwit, 2004). Furthermore, from 1962, the government turned its attention away from rural telecommunications development and set its goal for network expansion again at the county, rather than the township, level leading to fewer resources at the village level (Harwit, 2004). In 1979 Deng Xiaoping marketized MTP's telephone services enabling them to collect revenues from individual users and international connections. Rather than encouraging growth, high connection fees of up to 3,000 *yuan* made rural phone connections a "luxury and symbol of power" (Qiu, 2009 p 52; also see Harwit 2004).

Zhu Weici, who at 47 is the Village Council women's leader and Zhu Ting, a housewife in her fifties, recount their earliest memories of phone lines in Heyang.

Zhu Weici: "Before, the calls would come to the village office. The village operator would have to run to someone's house to tell them they had received a message."

Zhu Ting: "Making a call cost 50 cents (5 *mao*) and going to answer the phone cost 50 cents."

Zhu Weici: "At that time one didn't always talk on the phone, it was more like a telegram."

These memories are of the early 1980s when many households had family members going out to migrate and who called back home. Zhu Weici recounts how her father was one of the first villagers to get a connection:

My father, a retired teacher, had to save up a few thousand... At that time, it took more than 2,000 yuan to install a phone in my home. There were very few people nearby with one. Everyone who made outside calls came to my home.

Though China's period of high socialism and into the first decade of reform and opening-up, rural telephones represented luxury and elite communications. While the mass dissemination of loudspeakers to repeat national broadcasts and large numbers of centres able to make their own broadcasts in the general form of public announcements represents what Zhao calls a commitment to treating "communication as a social resource" demonstrating "a commitment to democratic participation and public welfare in social development" (2000 pp.42, 44), these were, as one-way media, a limited communication form. The CCP however did not limit themselves to this media-centric view. Loudspeakers were used to facilitate participation in collective meetings and collective labour that, in requiring leaders to share conditions with others, helped to promote a sense of mutuality. Most participants who recollected the Maoist years are only able to reflect on their formative teenage years in the latter half of the Cultural Revolution. These experiences, such as sharing labour with leaders, has had a lasting impact on the values they use to understand life in the village today. These values are contiguous with the seniors who participated in this research, as seen in the representative voice of Zhu Tang the village's retired middle school teacher. The values and the way residents use them to understand participation in the village stand in contrast to the opportunities and paths for participation available today.

## 4.6. The media Ecology of Decollectivization

### 4.6.1. Part 1: Rural Decollectivization and Loudspeakers

This section aims to demonstrate how elderly rural residents are using mobile phones to, at least symbolically, reproduce socialist shared time. That this was an unlikely outcome is both a feature of the general priorities depicted in the inter-ministerial disputes depicted in the section above, and post 1980s reforms to the industries (Zhao, 2000). By continuing to follow high-level media policy decisions and their impact on village media ecology, I trace a general shift from wired-radio loudspeakers to mobile phones as the dominate medium for organizing social relations. This connection is related to the way timekeeping and information sharing are linked to the organization demands required for the shift from a collective economy to capitalist labour and commodity markets. While mobile phones are connected to the individualization of time reckoning practices here, Chapter Seven shows how elderly residents are repurposing them to reconstitute the shared time of mass line time reckoning. Research participants widely associated this time reckoning with maintaining collective basic wellbeing.

Deng Xiaoping's 1978 policies to reform and open-up China for more direct engagement with global capitalism led to the rapid decline of China's collective economy. This process occurred quickly in the countryside, beginning with 18 farmers in Anhui deciding to separate from their village collective and tend to their farms according to their households. This process became formalized as the household responsibility system and was encouraged through top-down initiatives. Xu Zhun (2013) identifies that decollectivization efforts in the countryside were initially more effective than urban reforms in part because around one-third of collectives were "not in good shape" (2013 p.29). He cites the work of Sulamith Potter and Jack Potter so show how rises in crop productivity were cancelled out by population increases through the 1960s and 1970s. At the same time, Zhun (2013) identifies how, in 1982, provincial leaders in Zhejiang province were concerned by a lack of progress in rural decollectivization. In response, they held several cadre level meetings to critique "the leftist errors in the agrarian reform" leading to more than 90 per cent of villages in Zhejiang decollectivizing by April 1983 (as cited in Zhun 2013 p.19).

Heyang was part of the initial wave with decollectivization occurring just after 1981 according to Zhu Tang. The stories of hunger that are associated with collectivization were not just limited to the three bad years of 59, 60 and 61, but, like Zhun (2013) cites, were rife from throughout the period. Zhu Tang does not think that hunger or food concerns drove decollectivization in Heyang, however. He notes that he was a production team leader during that time and was responsible for resource allocation. He attributes local increases in agricultural output to a new variety of rice introduced in 1978 and that in 1980 “our production team... could basically eat enough according to my distribution plan”. Despite this confidence, members of Heyang’s current Lotus Cooperative spoke of how people were already leaving Heyang to work in cities and engage in peri-urban shrimp, duck and fish breeding starting in 1975 and 1976. “Prior to reform fewer people [left]... but after reform, we left in droves”, claims Zhu Ce a man in his late 50s.

Hairong Yan and Yiyuan Chen (2013) describe how decollectivization led to a two-tier system of land rights with the village collective maintaining ownership and use rights divided amongst the residents. The effect of this shift, “hollowed the collective ownership right to the extent that the collective is left with little ability to coordinate village public infrastructure” (Yan and Chen, 2013 p.964). Identifying a decline of village coordination for development projects, Zhu Tang describes the decline of Heyang’s village broadcasts:

During collectivization, we must all come together. When the land was divided into one household, the peasants planted their own fields instead of organizing them. So the role of broadcasting became less and less important.

Wired radio loudspeakers, however, did not experience a steep decline in the 1980s following this reform. It was during the late 1970s and into the 1980s that many families purchased their own speaker and had it installed for a modest 30 *yuan*. These small plastic speakers with a volume control continued to be a source for information on the weather, news from Jinyun County and access to cultural entertainment even after 1994 when the first cable television connection was made in Heyang (Zhao, in Couldrey et al. 2018 p.38). Zhu Jia, who was Heyang’s Village Council leader during the 1990s, gives a more techno deterministic explanation for the decline in loudspeakers. He connects the end of the use of the village auditory room for village announcements in 1998 with the rise of television.

#### 4.6.2. Part 2: Did Television and Watches Replace Loudspeakers?

At the national level, the 1983 annual All China Radio and Television Conference saw two key developments with regards to television. The first was the formation of a new Ministry of Radio and Television, raising the governance of these technologies from previous departmental status under the Ministry of Culture. The second development is the devolution of the authority to operate a broadcasting station from the central government to four levels including: national, provincial, city and county (Zhao and Wu, 2005). The second impact led to a sudden swell of county and village level broadcasting stations financed through locally funded advertisements (Zhao and Wu 2005). The local surge of funds catalyzed an imbalance between broadcasting and telephone infrastructure in rural China as counties built their own broadcasting networks through the 1980s (Zhao, 2000). Because of costs radio stations were often built first and separate from television stations. By 1996 the Ministry of Radio and Television had been reorganized into the State Administration for Radio Film and Television (SARFT). It issued the “‘three-station merger’ (*san tai he yi*) reform... to reduce the number of broadcasting organizations by merging the radio, television (including educational stations) and cable networks into one broadcasting company” (Xin, 2006 p.32). The combination of these initiatives shifted the infrastructure for wired radio loudspeakers to coaxial television cables.

Unlike radio, television broadcasting took a long time to reach Jinyun county. A satellite ground station rebroadcasting CCTV 1 and CCTV 2 was built in the nearby city of Lishui in 1989 to supplement provincial terrestrial broadcasts (Ji et al., 2016). Ju Likai is a producer at Jinyun Radio and Television station whom I was able to interview one afternoon. He describes a reasonably continuous development from the station’s first radio broadcasts in 1966. He claims that they began to retransmit provincial television in the 1980s, but that most of the people from this time are retired, and he is not sure where there might be firm records. According to Ju Likai, Jinyun Radio and Television Station broadcast its first television program in 1998. Significantly Jinyun began its own broadcasts between SARFT’s 1996 three merger policy and its 1999 *Notice about Further Administration of Broadcasting Cable Networks* (Document 82) which aimed to concentrate television management into two levels reducing the number of local TV stations as a means to prepare for international competition with China’s entry to the WTO (Hu, 2003). Jinyun Radio and Television Station is, therefore, an example of the

political strength and financial independence of many county stations enabling them to avoid this amalgamation (see Sun, 2012).

Memories of early access to television in the village indicate only a few households initially had their own small sets. Within the first year, however, the Village Council purchased a black and white TV set and placed it in what was then the cultural centre where people could pay a fee of 5 cents to watch TV in the evenings. In describing the impact that Jinyun County's Broadcasting Department's technological shift to coaxial cable in the mid and late 1990s, local residents share stories of how those who were able to afford the TV connection were also able to install a new radio speaker, while those who did not pay for a TV connection would not have lines extended for them to only opt for a radio speaker. This depicts an essential first step in the individualization of media consumption.

Most research participants were not living in the village consistently during this time and, with few exceptions, the wealth necessary for a household to purchase individual commodities for the cultural and social organizational functions otherwise provided collectively in the village via loudspeakers was obtained while, and as a result of, migrating out of the village. Wristwatches in the 1980s and pagers and mobile phones in the 1990s were frequently associated with the requirements of adapting to the routines of urban living and labour, which as Zhun (2013) argues, were being disciplined for capitalistic market relations by a new CCP discourse of scientific management. Many migrants described purchasing their first TV set in the early 1990s while their families were in cities. These purchases and mediations of economic and cultural life enabled them to participate in the new cultural subjectivities oriented towards individual entertainment and wellbeing and away from collective lifestyles (see Zhao (2016) on the cultural implications of television in rural households).

Migration, however, did not guarantee economic success. This is especially true for those who raised aquatic livestock where fortunes were both made and lost. Raising shrimp was especially seen as a risky venture as many would lose entire investments and end up in debt. Many research participants speak of having to move from city to city responding to new environmental protections that might push them out of a location to new markets in other localities. This regulatory pushing is often what drove many to decide that they had had enough of trying to make money and retire back to the village.

Those who made money often reinvested this wealth in the village by building new houses both within and outside the historic village through the 1980s and 1990s (see Ploeg 2008 for a more international account of how rural migrants are reinvesting wealth in their home villages). This reinvestment helped to make differences in social being appear more objective as those able to adapt and succeed in capitalist markets are able to display the fact of their 'skills' through material difference.

While many participants described the 1990s as a time when wristwatches became a more common item, they were not universal and still functioned to represent class. I brought up the issue of owning wristwatches with one of the older men in the fire brigade and Zhu Funan, an entrepreneur in his 60s, one evening. Zhu Funan explained that in the 1970s it was rare to see a watch. In the 1980s some leaders would have them and by the 1990s they were more common. Contextualizing this Zhu Caixing stressed that watches were still an expensive item back then and many farmers would not ever be seen with one. Zhu Jia and Zhu Ban, an entrepreneur in his late 50s, talked about owning watches as one of their commodity purchases after becoming successful entrepreneurs in the 1980s:

Zhu Ban: [Originally] people wore mechanical watches. After 1986, many people used electronic watches.

Zhu Jia: It was about fashion back then.

Zhu Ban: Electronic watches were being smuggled in from Hong Kong and Taiwan.

Zhu Jia: The electronic watch cost more than 70 yuan each. I bought one... when I was 17 or 18 years old and working in Shenzhen, Guangdong.

Zhu Ban: At that time, the Shanghai brand was the best. The all-steel shockproof watch was 120 yuan which only officials could afford.

Zhu Jia: You couldn't simply go and buy one either, you'd need a ration ticket.

Zhu Ban: I used a ticket to buy mine, an ordinary Zhongshan brand.

Zhu Jia: The Zhongshan brand came from Nanjing and cost 29 yuan each, but only if you had a ticket.

This brief discussion helps to shed light on both China's early transition from a state-led economy with rationing tickets, and the very minimal costs that watches may seem in

hindsight to represent. However, these watches were a significant part of many household's re-entry into cash and commodity markets.

Zhu Haoqi, an elderly peasant farmer in his 80s who now spends most of his days sitting in the senior centre watching TV and smoking, represents this porous access. When he talks, it is mostly in the local Jinyun dialect through a raspy, gravelly voice. Despite linguistic barriers, he was often interested in my presence as a young foreigner in the senior centre and would often try to strike up conversation. One day I noticed he was wearing a watch and asked him about it. Proudly he told me how his son helped him get it in the neighbouring town of Xinjian. He took it off to show me how heavy the gold-coloured mechanical watch was. When I asked when he got it, he mused, "a long time ago, 4 or 5 years". I then inquired if it was his first, and did not get a definite answer either way, but more of a story of how farmers cannot wear watches in the fields because they get dirty and break, and there is not much use for them. He went on to explain that as an older man now it is nice to have a big shiny watch. Zhu Haoqi is one of many old farmers who has both a watch and a talk and text phone mainly because their children have bought them to find work other than farming. Indeed, Zhu Haoqi had neither a TV nor a radio speaker in his own little home. He told me that when the village became rich and neighbours got TVs, he could always hear the radio from their speakers. As for TV, there is one in the senior centre, so why get his own?

Given the differentiation in access to media commodities, wired radio loudspeakers have not been made technologically redundant in Heyang's media ecology. In 2018 I observed seven functioning speakers in the historic village (see figure 1), and multiple speakers in the newly constructed East side of the village primarily along an alley parallel to the main road going through the village to the town of Xinjian. These were in addition to larger speakers placed sporadically along the road and found in other villages that provide daily broadcasts but are maintained at the county level for emergency broadcasts during a disaster. All of these speakers play 101.98FM Jinyun Radio and



Television's local repeater for The Voice of Zhejiang, the provincial radio station, three times a day from 6 am-7:30 am, 10 am-12 pm and 5 pm-9 pm.



*Figure 1 Small wired radio loudspeaker*

Photo by author

The speakers that function are primarily small metal ones that have a volume control (see figure 2), differing slightly from the more common plastic ones that are now mostly broken (see figure 3). The broadcasts are not audible unless one is in their general vicinity and I found I would have to be within 5 meters to hear the broadcasts. The speakers along the road provide light ambience when they are on, but are generally unrecognizable parts of the background except when louder tones announce the hour, and this is only really audible outside and on the street, leaving nearby homes undisturbed. Perhaps the loudest and most prominent speaker is located on a light post just in front of the Village Council office and beside the main bridge linking the two sides of the village across a small river that cuts through it. The speaker's broadcasts are carried over the river waters and are quite audible if one has an open window in the bed and breakfast about 100 meters down and across the river from it in the morning, but by the afternoon other background noises generally drown it out from that far away. In warmer months from about April through October the bridge serves as a nightly gathering place during the evening broadcasts. Individuals, couples and family groups often go out and walk following dinner and groups of parents with young children, or

elderly men idle and chat on the bridge. Fewer women congregate here in the evening because many of them meet at the senior centre for a group evening square dance from 7-8. Another group of primarily elderly women have choir practices in another side room of the senior centre during this time.



*Figure 2 Example of a small loudspeaker that is still functioning*

Photo by author



*Figure 3 Example of small loudspeaker that is no longer functioning*

Photo by author

A popular hub, the radio speaker by the bridge is not the only place where groups of villagers congregate outside in the evening. Throughout the village there are regular

groups of families and neighbours who often eat a light meal outside, talk, chat and, depending on age and gender, either sit or engage in a little light exercise. Around these groups, there is frequently an open door allowing the sound of a TV in the background to filter through, letting people hear news or other items of interest. In winter months these groups move inside. When people gather for tea or cards, at least one individual puts on a TV half-watched while other activities happen. If children are present cartoons are often put on to keep them preoccupied. Televisions or little MP3 players are also often put on when women work together in small groups while they engaged in midday labour at home assembling small plastic goods.

While relating to rhythms of labour and leisure, these examples of loudspeakers and other contributions to Heyang's audio scape in common/shared village spaces do not contribute to shared time. They do not enable villagers to appreciate the circumstances of each other's lives, as was manifest by loudspeakers previously. In 2015 I observed villagers using one of the older plastic speakers for congregating in the morning. This speaker was above the doorway of a home near the centre of Yanshanxia. Situated adjacent to the village square, the location is a minor through fare for residents headed in and out of the village to work in fields or factories and other businesses. Through a week of observation, I noted that during the morning broadcasts this location is a place where people eat their morning meals, sit and rest while coming back from the fields, or meet to carpool to work elsewhere. While separated in their work, those that frequented this space demonstrated familiarity through brief or more engaged interactions while here. This rhythm represented ritualized communicative space, all be it a minor one, where social bonds were reinforced across different generations of adults and professions showing how loudspeakers and their collective temporality could function as part of a developing village. By the time I was able to return for more morning observations in 2018, this speaker no longer functioned, and I did not observe the same morning congregations in this location.

The decline of wired-radio loudspeakers in Heyang village thus does not seem to strongly correspond with simply either economic change away from collectivization or with initial and very class-based technological updates like TV.

Indeed the decline in wired-radio is not merely the techno-determinist answer many gave, that with TV there was no need for radio, but more accurately a story of how

television is accessed. The onset of television contributed to the decline of loudspeakers, but for many villagers, this decline was more noticeable around the 2010s than the late 1990s with the popularization of satellite television.

Sun (2012) argues that an illegal market for satellite dishes began in China in the 1990s and grew in scale with smaller dishes able to receive more channels at lower costs through the 2000s. The magnitude of this illegal market led the CCP to launch the ChinaSat 9 satellite in 2008 meant to provide free 48 free channels across the country (Sun, 2012: 65). The public service nature of the project ended in 2009 when the CCP scrambled the satellite's signals to obtain service fees, and the growth of the illegal satellite dish market continued to expand. What this means on the ground is that many homes with TV did not get the coaxial cable infrastructure to set up a speaker. As satellite dish costs continued to decline, people cancelled their cable services in favour of a satellite connection. Thus, there is no one to call to service a speaker when it breaks down, and past connections were cut with the ending of television service.

This process of switching from cable to satellites became increasingly common in Heyang in the leadup to and following Jinyun County's 2015 official switchover to digital cable. An increase in yearly fees and the upfront cost of purchasing a digital decoder (300rmb) were contrasted by many against the approximately 170 RMB cost of a satellite dish. When I returned in 2018, many research participants no longer reported getting TV via a satellite however, they had switched over to digital TV plans provided by their mobile phone subscribers packaged with their data plans. The result of these shifts is an increasing move away from paying cable customers and the associated servicing and activation of those connections. As Zhu Daiyang, a farmer in his late 50s describes the transition, "all the wires were pulled up as everyone got satellite broadcasts". We may, therefore, understand the general context when villagers claim that they do not know whom to contact or that no one is maintaining the speakers that stop functioning.

#### **4.6.3. Part 3: Mobile Phones and Concerns about Communication Media as Social Resources**

As indicated in the previous section, telephones were a luxury item during the first decade and a half after reform and opening up and the rapid marketization of the MTP. Where the four-level policy led to the rapid growth of county stations and rapid

deployment of cable connections so that when SARFT's Village to Village efforts to connect every administrative village to basic cable began in 1995, it was a minor affair of extending existing infrastructure. In contrast, "the ratio of villages equipped with landline phones was 45 per cent in 1985, 75 per cent in 1999, and 85 per cent in 2003," reaching 99.5% only by 2007 (Qiu, 2009 p.118). This continual spread of telephone infrastructure, however, was not at the same level as broadcasting, for as Zhao (2007) points out only one household needed to be connected and this would usually be the village administration office or a wealthy entrepreneur. As such, leading into the 2010s "The telephone...remains a symbol of social privilege. Cable television [and radio], in contrast, have been accessible to ordinary households in an entire neighbourhood" (Zhao, 2007b p.52).

That the CCP would prioritize the diffusion of broadcasting infrastructure is evident from the definition of broadcasts as the CCP's mouthpiece and the state-recognized importance for the Party's voice to reach people of all levels of society (Zhao, 2000). Indeed this is part of Zhao's (2000) reasoning for recognizing SARFT (now the National Radio and Television Administration (NRTA)) as representing socialist values in its institutional battle with the Ministry of Information Industries (previously the MTP and now the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology (MIIT)); in what Zhao calls a debate as to whether "communication as a social resource [will] shape evolving telecommunication policies in China" (2000 p.42). Zhao particularly highlights the telecom regulator's responsibility to the state as a ministry, and not the CCP in the manner that SARFT was, and high user fees as indicative of its difficulty to realize socialist ideals. Contextualizing this concern, in 1998, the CCP broke up China Telecom's monopoly. This breakup ended its position to cross-subsidize rural network expansion that was otherwise unprofitable (Liu, 2011), resulting in concerns "of a regression in rural telecommunications" (Zhao, 2007b p.111).

In 2004, in response to the Chinese state and the CCP's first No.#1 document on rural affairs since 1986, MII launched a new Village Access Program. Xia (2010) notes that this program was slow to take off because China's six telecoms (following the earlier breakup of China Telecom) were provided with regions to cover but no funding mechanisms to build rural infrastructure and that the CCP exerted political pressure in 2006 to meet goals. This political pressure came in part from the inclusion of "rural informatization" in the 2005 No.#1 document informing the background definitions of

“access and applications” for improving rural communications and can serve as a means by which observers can judge the success of the CCP’s new socialist countryside policy (Liu, 2013). As all of China’s telecom operators are led by government officials, their future political careers were given renewed political benchmarks on top of their reform-era market performance concerns (Liu, 2011). In successive years, the Village Access Program has been taken up by, the now, three telecom operators in China: China Telecom, China Mobile and China Unicom. All of them have surpassed their coverage targets (Xia, 2016).

While in the mid-2000s critics (Harwit, 2004; Zhao, 2007b) continued to express concerns over the high fees of a telephone connection, Qiu (2009) documents how the late 1990s through 2000s rise of domestic telecommunication equipment producers not only helped to drive down the costs of pagers and mobile phones but found their success outside of urban centres in periphery townships. Additionally, through prepaid phones (Qiu, 2009) and operators offering services below rates set by MIIT (Xia, 2006), the associated services are far more affordable for rural farmers. In their survey of four different kinds of villages Guo and Peng (2012) note that even in poor and remote locations, mobile phones have become a regular household item; even elderly villagers own their own.

This general shift in media infrastructure also helps to contextualize a slight shift I identified in research participants’ techno-deterministic reasonings for why loudspeakers are no longer needed. In 2015 most participants brought up television, and some brought up watches, as explanations for the decline. By 2019 the explanation was generally expanded to include mobile phones. Mobile phones and smartphones, in particular, were by no means uncommon in Heyang in 2015. Zhu Feng, a company employee in her mid 30s who has spent most of her life living and working in the village, described getting her first mobile phone in 2008 for work. She reflects that she got one comparatively later than others whose earlier ownership was most often related to migrating out of the village.

By 2019, however, almost everyone in the village had a mobile phone. Poor elderly farmers like Zhu Haoqi and Zhu Aiai, a widower, who, in her 60s, collects garbage in the new part of the village to pay for her rent, both have mobile phones. Theirs, like many other elderly residents’ phones, are not the smartphones that everyone else has, but

simple 2G devices (see figure 4). Many elderly complain that they cannot properly read the screens of their phones, but they know the time because of a standard app that announces the hour with the same “the time in Beijing” announcement heard over the loudspeakers. I discuss the significance of this announcement in Chapter Seven, following a more general investigation into how participation in village life today is understood and experienced.



*Figure 4 A 2G "old person's phone*

Photo by author

Every person I met who has a smartphone also has a social media WeChat account. Two women, Zhu Mai who is in her 60s, and Zhu Tai who is in her 70s, had smartphones specifically to have this program – the first to accept payments for a little shop she runs and the second to connect with her granddaughter’s elementary school WeChat group.

On WeChat, one can join different groups—many participants spoke of being in groups with family and past classmates, and a few hundred were part of the Heyang village and Heyang women’s league groups. One is also able to follow such official accounts as those of Jinyun’s numerous newspapers and the Heyang Village Management Committee’s account. These groups are particularly important because they represent a renewed commitment to inform residents of current events and policy changes in the village. When the village auditorium fell into disuse, the primary means by which the

Village Council made significant announcements was paper posters sporadically glued on the sides of buildings through the village. These posters continue to be used but are now supplemented by these social media groups. As described by Zhu Weici when describing her work as a member of the Village Council “we announce these things on digital networks, then even someone over in Canada like you can keep up to date on events in Heyang”.

Not only is the village government on social media, but the local economy is becoming increasingly digital. Many people paid for things like groceries and monthly electricity bills with mobile apps that scan QR codes. While there are two popular apps for electronic payments, WeChat and Alipay, most residents in Heyang said they primarily used WeChat because it is convenient and not everyone (including Zhu Mai) has Alipay. The one time that I ran into a little difficulty using electronic payments myself is when I purchased vegetables from farmers who would sell a few wares in an ad-hoc market in the morning. These mainly poor farmers would have me run over to the village meat seller across the street to whom I could make the digital transfer and the meat seller would pay the farmer cash.

There are two more significant ways that Heyang’s economy has digitized and integrated with developments across the nation. The first is the purchase of online goods from digital platforms such as Alibaba. When I first moved into the little farmhouse I shared with Xiaoxing Zhang, another visiting scholar at the Heyang Institute for Rural Research, I had to purchase appliances such as a fridge and washing machine. While there were stores in Xinjian where I could get these items, they were far cheaper online, and I was able to receive them within two days of ordering them. Many residents also do online shopping, and at least six delivery companies are working in Xinjian where packages can be sent and picked up. One of the little shops in Heyang also serves as a delivery spot where packages arrive daily. Zhu Haidi, who is in her thirties and works as a tour guide for the village, spends much of her leisure time on her smartphone looking for clothing, particularly for her daughter. Likewise, Liu Andi who, in his late 50s works as the security guard for Heyang Elementary School told me how he would use his phone to look at goods online, but that he was not sure how to trust sellers or what is a good deal. As such, he sends screenshots of things he wants to his daughter who will do the ordering for him.



The rise in food delivery apps is the second primary example of the digitization of Heyang's economy. Restaurants based in the neighbouring town of Xinjian use food delivery apps such as E Le Ma and Mei Tuan more commonly than the local Zhejiang developed app JiaoJi. These apps function with the same speed, convenience and 'real time' updates of when the food will be ready and location of the delivery that are found in urban settings. Local restaurants told me that the app was necessary to remain competitive. The owner of a noodle restaurant estimates that he does approximately 20-25% of his business online now. He is not a big fan of it, however, because of the extra costs the delivery services charge him, and talked about how that factored into his decision on which services to advertise.

Residents of Heyang are less likely to use food delivery apps, compared to online shopping apps. Villagers in their 30s and 40s told me they would use it, but no one had used it recently and many would end up explaining how easy it is to drive up (in a car or scooter) and get something oneself. When food delivery apps were brought up in one focus group in particular, participants demonstrated how these delivery apps are a relatively unexpected aspect of contemporary village life. This discussion occurred between Zhu Xiaolu, a college student, and Zhu Ying, who is in her 40s. Both do not live in the village but had returned to visit family during the Spring Festival holiday. When I asked if they have these apps Zhu Xiaolu's father, who was also in the group said that he thought these programs were standard on all smartphones. Zhu Ying responded "But they don't work in places like this. In big cities..." but before she could finish Zhu Xiaolu piped in, "They still work here. I have used them three times". While Zhu Ying was returning to Heyang expecting changes to her urban lifestyle, Zhu Xiaolu's experience points to her maintaining aspects of her urban lifestyle. This sentiment came through when Zhu Xiaolu described how her grandmother got an internet connection in the past year in response to concerns that the grandchildren would find it difficult to stay for more than a few days without it. She sees this as an example of her grandmother, and perhaps the village itself, "catching up with the times".

This rapid expansion of mobile phones and digital infrastructure is not, however, universally praised or accessed. As noted above, many with fewer financial resources or technical competency do not use smartphones. One place where this matters is with raising children. Teachers at Heyang Elementary School use WeChat groups, and other

more specialized apps to keep in touch with families and monitor student's progress with homework assignments. Appraising this practice, Zhu Feng asserts,

Before, students could just say that "they have already read" and that was that. But now, teachers check to see if there's any videos proving you've read, to see if you tried to cut corners, to check whether or not you were proper in your pronunciation when reading, this is really good.

She explains that the videos the students would have to submit would be up to 5 minutes long on an app called "Little Black Board". Zhu Feng surmises that the reason the teachers are proficient in integrating technology with their lessons like this is because "they are from the big cities, after all". Zhu Lisha, who is a 30-year-old company employee, noted that these apps were mandatory requirements by the teachers. Zhu Feng continued,

Yeah, some parents feel quite badly about this though. They work outside on their own, while it's the elders that take care of the kids. However, they don't have smartphones, and so the kids can't complete this homework. Meanwhile, teachers will be commenting in the groups saying so and so hasn't completed their homework. They're also powerless though. To be honest, elders aren't able to raise kids anymore.

This reflection on elderly people taking care of children is a crucial one because the elderly have become primary caregivers in many rural settings. Both the young and the elderly are often "left behind" when working-age parents migrate for labour (Silverstine and Cong 2013 p.46). The aforementioned technological shifts in rural education are working to disrupt this relationship and the point of dignity many elderly had found in contributing to family care.

In addition to parenting, the elderly also have difficulty staying in the loop about village events as well. With the decline of wired radio loudspeakers, Heyang residents began to be divided along class lines in terms of access to news related to the local county. This division is because the economic choice to opt for satellite television over cable television meant that one would not have access to Jinyun Radio and Television's broadcasts (Hauck, 2017). This change in infrastructure left many with limited resources and required extra efforts to learn about events through word of mouth or watching broadcasts at the seniors' centre. The county station is now available on the data plans that many residents use to access TV but this has had only a minor impact on bringing

elderly back into local information loops as they are less likely to have data plans on their mobile phones.

Zhu Kaizuo, who in his late 60s drives a small red pedicab during the day to raise extra cash, helps to explain this information disconnect. When I asked him about his memories of the loudspeakers he explained,

We [the village] used to have them, but not now. We don't have any. Now communications are developed, and they are all useless. Nowadays, young people are surfing the Internet, using mobile phones to surf the Internet, using Wechat... We [elderly farmers] won't use Wechat. We don't know anything. There's a fire over there. We don't know. Where there are floods and traffic accidents, the youth will know as soon as these things happen. We can only hear about it by word of mouth... It's equivalent to blind people. Can't hear, can't see, don't understand.

Zhu Tang echoes this intergenerational sentiment in his arguments for a return of local loudspeaker broadcasts. He is dismissive of the Village Council's current communication methods, claiming that when the Village Council puts up notices in the village, many will not notice them or understand their context and implications. He also thinks WeChat groups are mostly for those not over 60, or as he puts it, "for the youth". He underlines this generational divide with the reflection that "young people are not in the village, they are all out of town, and most of the villages are old people". This means that many people with a Heyang residency certificate and consider themselves as part of the village but live outside for work or studies can stay up to date on village events, but the elderly who live there will learn about these things by word of mouth often in incomplete and possibly even distorted ways. Zhu Tang argues that this is why Heyang should redevelop a loudspeaker broadcasting system; not for daily broadcasts of music or entertainment, but that there are essential issues in the village that everyone should be equally notified about so that there can be a broader and more informed discussion in the village.

## **4.7. Conclusion**

From Heyang's earlier disconnection from temporal changes in cities, to how its current integration with digital markets can surprise even those who return regularly, local media and systems of time reckoning have been in continual negotiation with China's national engagement with the expansion of global capitalism.

The CCP's revolution marked a dramatic change to communication and time reckoning in rural China, bringing peasants in sync with Universal Common Time and the modernity it represents. Rather than instituting time in the form of quantifiable and interchangeable periods of labour, timekeeping devices such as radio loudspeakers functioned to support the organization of a collective economy. This timekeeping helped to bring farmers and cadres into regular contact enabling mutuality in recognizing hardships as shared and collective conditions. These memories provided the conditions for farmers to value the importance of having their interests and material existence recognized and included as part of the village's ongoing development.

While developed to organize the collective economy, loudspeakers did not immediately decline with the decollectivization that followed the CCP's reform and opening-up policy shift in 1978. Television would not be explained as a reason to close the village broadcasting auditorium for another two decades. The ritual communication that wired radio produced by demarking rhythms of work and food functioned as a general means for time reckoning and provided information in a manner that would enable the residents to come together and discuss collective developments. This timekeeping function is in part why loudspeakers remained for so long into the reform-era despite the introduction of other 'replacement' technologies. Where Zhun (2013) identifies reform market changes as "disciplining" the labour force, Zhao (2016) argues,

the process of TV entering rural households is also a process in which villages and peasants lose their cultural subjectivity – because television brings about the transformation of rural cultural life from collective and community to individualization and entertainment.

We might read these developments from a perspective of continuity, rather than change, in the CCP's leadership. From a Leninist perspective, watches, televisions and now mobile phones are assisting in the CCP's reorganization of society. Rather than organizing society for a socialist collective economy, they are used to enable China to engage the political economic and cultural implications of global capital more directly.

The post-reform changes set the context for participation in communication developments to be mainly a matter of individual households purchasing commodities to access state-provided infrastructure. The result of these individual economic choices has a material impact on the village leading to the piecemealing of loudspeaker coverage. These increasingly individualizing choices have created institutional barriers to realizing

communication as a shared and collective good. This collective good is remembered by residents and used to evaluate participation in the village today. The next chapter picks up on how these technological economic and cultural developments contextualize avenues for and the appreciation of participation in collective village life for Heyang residents between 2015 and 2019.

# **Chapter 5. Focus Group Interview Results and Understandings of Participation in the Development of Heyang Village**

## **5.1. Introduction**

This chapter gives a rough overview of the project's two rounds of focus group interviews. The guiding focus in this chapter is how ordinary residents, Village Council members, and members of the Tourism Management Committee interpret opportunities for participation in Heyang's development. The analysis demonstrates a sensation of alienation that is manifest in class terms of how residents are economically adjusting to the village's development. The 'quality' discourse, especially in terms of maintaining urban aesthetics of cleanliness, reinforces this alienation. These factors produce a subjective standpoint justifying that many locals lack the capability to participate in local development. Showing that this is a complex dynamic rather than a generalized state, multiple values and rationalities highlight a complex mix of people who want the best for their village and to benefit collectively with it. However, where some look for more support to live amidst capital development, others look outside the village to realize their own attempts at improving their lifestyles and, in the words of a Village Councillor, "eat meat at every meal and not just vegetables".

The chapter begins with a quick case study review of the current outcome of the local interest in restarting a village broadcasting system. This study provides two key elements that provide insight into how development projects are realized or not. The primary factor is how "the buck is passed up" in explaining how projects are not realized, at least according to possible and desired time frames. Residents and local officials point to higher levels of governance for not granting approval or providing the necessary support. The second and interrelated character is how participants express this experience in terms of not being heard. There is some acceptance with not being listened to, and this relates to China's rural "left behind" population self-identification with and increasing socio-economic gap and its reification into social worth. The gap is depicted in material terms and political opportunities in this chapter and is studied in terms of cultural subjectivities more in-depth in the following chapter.

Two body sections follow this initial and short case study. They review feedback from focus group interviews conducted at the beginning of my fieldwork in 2015 and the conclusion of my fieldwork in 2019.

As introduced in Chapter One, the focus group interviews in 2015 were part of Yuezhi Zhao's *Global to Village* research team. By conducting these focus group interviews at the start of what would become six months of fieldwork over a period of four years, I was able to reshape my initial research questions to the reasoning, logics and issues that comprise Heyang. As will be detailed, the questions raised developed in response to concepts and topics introduced by successive focus groups. In these interviews, there was a perceived problem in communication between citizens and local government. This communicative difficulty was not expressed in terms of the technological difference identified in the previous chapter but related to a decline in village meetings following decollectivization and a corresponding shift in subjectivity. Coupled with the positive reports of sharing labour in the last chapter, this decline in meetings has generated a situation where those who depend on their village homes and have few resources outside of farming, feel that their conditions are not appreciated by those who make decisions. These concerns do not reflect disagreement with decisions as much as with how the implementation of decisions impacts residents' ability to sustain their daily livelihoods.

By concluding the study with focus group interviews in 2019, I was able to ground observations and issues back into the accounts of research participants. They present the opportunity for more in-depth understandings of events. The multiple layers of leadership whom I interviewed provide a rich and complex account of events in Heyang. This depth shows continuity in the concerns over participation and examples of a disconnection between Heyang residents. The processes that enable leadership to make decisions that deprioritize those with livelihood hardships are facilitated by the social alienation of capitalistic labour markets and the social objectification of its spoils.

By following participants' concerns I highlight two key issues. The first is an ongoing issue of village development about a plan for many residents to be relocated out of the heritage protection area onto 120 mu of land. The second issue relates to the constant concern about toilets in village developments. The case of the 120mu housing development, in particular, demonstrates how village leaders' social disconnect with

Heyang's disadvantaged enables them to deprioritize the disadvantaged in development projects. This deprioritization is coupled with a lack of appreciation for the conditions that generate poverty and a sensibility that if properly motivated, people should be able to develop alongside the increasing demands placed on those who live in Heyang village. This sensibility is a ramification of and indeed a driving element around the ideology informing current economically derived social distancing.

## 5.2. What Happened to the Loudspeakers

The last chapter helps to set the material and political-economic contexts of life in Heyang today. Where Zhu Tang the retired middle school teacher says he has been asking for loudspeakers for “a long time”, Zhu Tuba, a production team captain in his 30s, spoke in 2019 of a plan to have three large speakers placed in the village for local announcements. He claimed this advocacy went nowhere. However, a member of Heyang’s village committee said that in 2017 the Village Council began to explore this very plan. While no exact details of how this plan was arranged were revealed, it should be noted that Zhao’s *Global to Village: Grounding Communication Research in Rural* research project resulted in a series of policy recommendations offered to the Village Council, including a proposal to re-establish a village broadcasting system (Zhao, 2017). In the focus group interview with members of the Village Council, it was claimed that they sent the proposal up to the township cadre responsible for village affairs, but he never followed up after. Unfortunately, I was not able to follow up with this cadre based in the neighbouring town of Xinjian.

What this story exemplifies is how reports of “not being heard” can be coupled with concerns that “upper levels are not doing anything”. The advocacy of a return of a village broadcasting system is a case of interests funnelled up to different levels of government and inaction interpreted as not being heard. From a timescapes perspective, this demonstrates how the temporalities of those with governmental power differ from those without, as leaders are not calibrated with the residents’ needs. In terms of tempo this is not a case of the marginal being required to recalibrate their selves to the pace of governance. Rather the sequence of events from needs being identified, to being articulated into recommendations to government, to being left unaddressed factors into the ongoing trend of peasant exclusion in the considerations of how and why the village should develop. This is made even more evident in that it is over an issue meant to



increase collective awareness and hence participation in ongoing village developments via regular engagement over time, rather than the occasional poster or even rarer village meeting. It demonstrates how those in government have difficulty in creating opportunities to recognize and involve the village collectively in their developmental plans. That is, in leaders' failing to understand how share average residents' interests in Heyang's future they are failing to act as comrades. The following depicts the frustration that villagers have with the largely economic mindset of how village leadership assert their political belonging in Heyang.

### **5.3. Initial Findings of Distance**

#### **5.3.1. Part 1 Communication Technology**

Concerns that a social gap was harming communication in Heyang shaped social relations when I first arrived in the village. Part of my initial inquiry was to understand the implications that the reform era had on state-society relations which, at the time, I imagined to be very distinct from the collectivist era. I had hypothesized that with increases in material wealth and a decrease in high-intensity political campaigns that people would consider that relations with the government had improved. However, while the collective era is still described by Zhu Juanai, a farmer in her 60s, as a time of "great anxiety", many participants describe the reform era as a time when relations have become distant. What I did not immediately recognize at the time is that the distance research participants were describing in their engagements with the government were not a simple state-society or local politics. Their concerns with distance express a problem with broader social relations in the shift from a collective to a market economy.

In the initial eight focus groups, I asked participants a series of questions that began with how they currently gain information from the government and moved into probes about how participants, in turn, might communicate with the government. These built into a question asking participants about their thoughts of the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) mass line. The responses to this question encouraged an additional probe into the difference in the relationship between leaders and regular villagers since the CCP's reform and opening up. The interviews would end with inquiries about how participants imagined relations could be improved.

The descriptions of how participants accessed local news varied from Zhu Minger a factory worker in his 50s who complained “I don’t know anything about the government’s policies” to Zhu Weini a housewife in her 40s and Zhu Mali a housewife in her 50s who, in the same focus group talked about keeping up to date by being a member of WeChat groups for Jinyun County and the village. Most at this time identified television as their primary source of information. Where some like Zhu Houxi a worker in her 40s explained how she got various channels including Jinyun County and Lishui city’s local channels, others like Zhu Gaoyin a worker in his 40s, spoke how he didn’t have local channels but only city-based satellite ones. This point adds depth to Zhu Minger’s initial response of not knowing about local events. Indeed in his focus group interview, he went on to explain “Satellite TV only has provincial news so right now some homes don’t receive Jinyun news even though we want it”. Zhu Weini voiced her agreement to this statement reflecting “It would be good to be able to watch local news while cooking dinner”. Zhu Minger continued, “If you want local news, you have digital cable, but this is expensive. Zhu Siyin, a factory worker in his 40s, piped in “Some homes have it”, and Zhu Minger continued “yes, some have it, but there are other choices”. In a separate group, Zhu Sanhei, a farmer in his 50s, also stressed that satellite TV does not receive local news. Thus while some respondents did not go into detail about what news they might watch or have access to, others were very interested in stressing the impact of the difference.

To a lesser degree, these interviews also indicated a low level of WeChat use for local news. Zhu Weini and Zhu Mali as well as Zhu Jinyue, an entrepreneur in his 40s, and Zhu Jianli, a farmer in his 50s, all report using their mobile phones to access local news however no one considered this a sufficient or comprehensive source for news. When the idea was raised in his focus group, Zhu Zhang claimed that information on WeChat might get down to the township level, but was never really specific to the village, “and it won’t be about policies, but about trade. What can be bought and sold, or if someone is hiring, that kind of thing”. These responses represent a divergence in both how individuals are aware of and participate in different kinds of groups on WeChat. It should be noted that such groups are not posted publicly but can only be joined through invitation and thus are a reflection of social relations more than technological ability.

This interpretation comes out more strongly in how Zhu Minger and Zhu Siyin dismissed WeChat when it was raised in their group. One participant, Zhu Bi, noted that there might be some news via WeChat but he was too old to pay attention or know. Zhu

Minger and Zhu Siyin jumped on this, explaining that social media is for the youth and could not possibly help the elderly. Zhu Weini and Zhu Mali were especially dismissive of the idea of a village WeChat group to improve communication in the village when the idea was broached with their group. Zhu Weini reflected “It is a way to let us know information, but sometimes it is better if you don’t have to leave your name” concerned that this would be a means for village leaders to make announcements but not for residents to discuss issues. Zhu Xiaowen, a worker in his 40s, in the same group followed her commend noting, like others, “Young people use WeChat, but they don’t care about things in the village, and old people who do care don’t know how to use it”.

These accounts of varied access and literacy to use the many advancements occurring in the village’s media ecology informed accounts that there is less involvement in the village’s decision-making and policy implementation processes. Participants were quick to relate the feeling of being less involved to a corresponding reduction in village meetings. Zhu Xiaowen reflected, “it was better when the government gave us full accounts of their activities so we could understand all the details, then let us interpret and discuss it”. In a separate interview, Zhu Bi claimed, “Before, if there were something important there would be a group discussion. Now cadres don’t discuss anything with you”. Likewise, in her interview, Zhu Lili a housewife in her 50s commented,

This is why we feel far away from the government’s policies, we don’t know them. Since the 1970s there were meetings for production, but since reform, there are no meetings, so we don’t know a lot.

Zhu Ma a housewife in her 60s, explained some of the formal importance of meetings, “Before they had production team leader meetings and would publicly post the village’s finances and accounts”. This general practice was also recognized by Zhu Kaizuo who claimed, “when the last village leader came into office, he would show the village accounts in public but stopped this after awhile”. Zhu Bi believes that this financial accounting is part of the reason why there are currently fewer meetings. He explains

If all the team leaders and everyone knows about how much money things cost, then leaders can’t contract jobs out under the tables. That is how they earn money these days.

Zhu Lian offers a different take, and while his comments still gravitate around finances, the concern is not about personal enrichment as much as the difficulties of democratic decision-making,

They don't have meetings these days. They are afraid to have a meeting because usually when they ask us to donate money, the villagers will voice complaints and the cadres are afraid that this opposition will organize to stop initiatives.

This concern that local government no longer discusses political issues of development with residents as a whole, however, was not strongly related to corruption or opposition, but with the very question of being heard. Zhu Tuba explains the reason for a reduction in meetings from the 1990s to 2015 in this way, "They [cadres] don't want you to talk about your issues, just listen to their plans, If we raise an issue they do not answer." Zhu Niwei, a housewife in her 40s, explained this contrast more in-depth,

we know more information now through multiple channels... but the relationship between leaders and normal people is distant now... The relationship is distant because we don't know the government's policies... since reform, there have been no meetings, so we don't know a lot.

While her claim of "no meetings" is an exaggeration, it points to the sentiments of communications degrading despite improvements in material infrastructure. Zhu Ningfa, a farmer in his 40s, explained this issue of not being heard in reference to a problem that he had tried to raise with officials at the county level,

When I went to the county, everyone up there had a different opinion. The leader would not explain if my ideas were good or not, and in the end, all I accomplished was yelling and releasing my anger.

When asked if knowing a leader might help one have more voice, Zhu Ningfa, reflected "It doesn't matter they are a group and they work together. Whatever we say it doesn't matter they won't listen".

This broader explanation links up with who even is becoming a leader in the village these days. In explaining the voting process for the Village Council, Zhu Aiguo a farmer in his 60s, explained that there is an election every three years, and about ten years ago, money became a significant factor. According to Zhu Aiguo, this is, "because leaders spend money to be selected so people will go for whoever will give them the most". This reflection was agreed to in general by the rest of his group. It was also discussed by Zhu Bingwen a worker in his 50s and Zhu Chun, a worker in her 40s, in their focus group reflecting that "whoever has money can be a leader" and "if you don't have money, you can't be a village leader, no matter how good you are" respectively.

These local reflections that the wealthy become leaders are on the ground experiences of Jiang Zemin's 2001 Three Represents policy encouraging entrepreneurs to enter the Party and serve as government officials. Lin Chun (2013 p.79) describes this policy shift as part of how the CCP has worked to pragmatically adjust to the changing circumstances of China's society. However, as the testimony above indicates, this is part of how both the CCP and state actors have calibrated to a different pace of life that prioritizes market interests as much as it might be informed by a socialist past. As we will see, leaders espouse socialist values in their understanding of their relationship with the village's residents, this rhetoric is often counter balanced against material and market-based priorities. The concerns articulated around the governance of Heyang's development then is not merely a state-society issue, but as will be shown, grounded in the broader dynamics of economic relations as well.

### **5.3.2. Part 2 The Sewers**

The concerns about not being listened to in 2015 centred around two key issues. The first was a county-level project to upgrade Heyang's sewage system. Zhu Bolin, a worker in his 50s brought this issue up when responding to a prompt about how to improve communication with leaders in Heyang,

Take the sewer water management project, for example. Everyone is happy that this is happening. But because the leaders do not communicate with us well and there is no democracy, the problem can't be solved, and there is conflict.

Zhu Chao, a farmer in his 70s used this project as an example to explain why the Village Council is not practising the mass line.

We asked the leaders what the scientific way of doing this was, but they just did it. They did not explain the process, so how do we know if it is going to benefit us. To the masses from the masses is good, but things are not explained to us.

Zhu Deli a farmer in his 60s believed that the company contracted to do the job was based in the local city Lishui. He claimed that county leaders were in charge of the project. When asked if engineers from the company had come to the village to make their plans, Zhu BaoZhai a housewife in her 30s suggested, "They may have come over to design the plans. But if so, those designers were not in contact with the contractors who did the actual work". Zhu Dingxiang, a worker in his 40s, explained that it seemed

that “the way they designed the new sewers the construction polluted local water sources” believing that the methods they were using was contaminating groundwater in existing wells. In the same focus group, Zhu Cuifen, a farmer in her 50s, claimed that this lack of communication led to, “a fight... whatever people say is not useful because we do not have power”. In his group, Zhu Enlai, a worker in his 40s, explained “when they started digging the ditch there was no water, so we couldn’t drink anything. We tried to stop it, but this caused fighting. We had no water to drink”. Zhu Fengge, a worker in his 40s, mentioned how some residents tried to get the Tourism Management Committee involved, but that this didn’t prevent the eventual conflict that resulted in some protesters imprisoned.

This issue was ongoing while our research group was in Heyang. After our focus group, interviews had ended, and I continued to conduct observational research in the village, an official came down from the county to discuss the project with villagers. I found out about this only by stumbling upon a crowd that had gathered around a project area. During this encounter, what appeared to be an ad-hoc meeting, the official spoke to the group as they listened, shouted back, and talked amongst their selves. The official left before the crowd felt that their issues had been heard. Many residents continued to speak about the problem after her departure. Zhu Wei, a former Party Secretary for the village, talked to some of the last of the frustrated men, listening to their complaints late into the evening in his home. One of these men, Zhu Xiaowen, would confide in me later that this was basic ideological work letting them vent their emotions, and perhaps to assuage individual concerns, but it would not change how the project would be completed.

While this example depicts some of the apparent tropes of an authoritarian Chinese state carrying projects out despite local resistance, it also nuances this resistance, shifting it from opposition to a desire to have local concerns reflected in how projects are conducted. The problem lies in the validity given to local concerns against expertise in carrying out developmental projects judged for being accomplished more than the experiences of their enactment. By the time I returned to Heyang, this issue was a matter of the past and no longer discussed. A similar problem, however, had come up as the Tourism Management Committee was in a lengthy process of renovating the village’s communal toilets as is detailed below.

### 5.3.3. Part 3 120 Mu for Housing

The second issue which arose in the 2015 interviews, is not a limited-term project like the sewage upgrades, but an ongoing point of conflict around housing and the development of its cultural heritage protection area overseen by the Tourism Management Committee. This issue came up for Zhu Lian while discussing what the mass line means and how he thinks “leaders are separated from the people” today. He went on saying

If those who are in charge of the historic site want to do something, they just do it. They don't want to talk... The city, county and town have all sent leaders to our village to inspect the site, but they don't visit us. They don't tell us who they are and won't let us talk to them.

This was interspersed with dialogue with Zhu Lian as they both spoke highly of Xi Jinping going down to villages. Zhu Lian compared his ideal of Xi to his experience of local leaders,

Xi sometimes will just dress normal and go out to normal people's homes, and nobody knows. But the provincial, city and country leaders, when they come all the police cars surround them, and we can't get close.

As detailed in the introductory chapter, after obtaining heritage protection status for some of the buildings in Heyang in 2001, the Village Council tried to establish a tourism business. After a decade of unsuccessful development, the Village Council contracted the work out in 2011 to a state-owned tourism management company incorporated for the task, which, in turn, is overseen by a management committee. The Tourism Management Committee has overall responsibility for the development, and they invest much of their efforts on showing the village to other business and state institutions as a means to generate funding for the project. This work encompasses the visits by leaders that Zhu Lian was referring to above. The Tourism Management Committee and the village committee form an ad-hoc dual committee to coordinate tasks as needed. The ad-hoc nature of this arrangement, the Tourism Management Committee's ability to bring in funding for major renovation projects, and the central focus on the tourism industry as the key priority for village development have generated a situation where there is a lack of clarity over authority and accountability.

In this situation, many Heyang residents are left in conflicting circumstances. Those who live in the protected area can access money from the Tourism Management Committee to renovate their homes. However, they can only perform renovations if the Tourism Management Committee approves the design and materials as compliant with the protection of these buildings. Those who do not live in the protected area do not receive any financial support for maintaining their homes. This divergence results in feelings of injustice as those who do not get financial support feel comparatively burdened, but those who can receive support are often too poor to be able to invest any of their own funds to make a project happen. The experience of this comes out in a 60-year-old farmer, Zhu Ren's account of "not knowing where to live" because the roof of her protected heritage home leaks. She ended up spending money on an unapproved fix that was taken down at the behest of the Tourism Management Committee leaving her without the funds to do anything now. This story was not unique, and many other research teams during this fieldwork experienced similar complaints (see Zheng, 2017).

When our research team arrived in Heyang, the village was just in the early stages of a plan to develop a new housing project to move residents out of homes with cultural heritage protection status.

Zhu Bao, a farmer in his 80s, raised this plan when discussing the decrease in village meetings as he was concerned about the Village Council appropriating agricultural land for the project. Zhu Shuchun, a housewife in her 50s was responding positively to a prompt asking if she would want more village meetings when she brought up this project. She claims that there was a meeting at the beginning of the year about it, but as there was a lack of consensus the Tourism Management Committee bypassed the villagers and sought approval from the county to develop 120 mu of land to build up to 400 apartments. Zhu Yang, a farmer in his 60s tried to explain that there was not much support for the plan because "they use agricultural land, and this isn't good". At the point of these focus group interviews, months after the initial consultation, there had been no follow up village meeting to discuss the project.

#### **5.3.4. Part 4 Economic Explanations for Not Being Heard**

The exclusion that can be identified in these two projects might be read simply as disagreement with being kept out of decision-making forums. The sewage project



was decided at the county level and the housing project arranged by the state-run Tourism Management Committee. However, as with the sewage project, the issue is not opposition but the desire to have local interests shape how the projects are carried out over time. Here we can link disgruntlement with not being heard, with the issue that these projects create barriers for residents to be able to recognize their actions as direct producers of their and their village's circumstances. This move helps to shift the problem from the idea that poor rural residents are being left behind by the pace of development and required to recalibrate to current development, to the notion that development has become distanced from the people and that leaders both politically and socially are in need to recalibrate to the conditions of those who do not find success in capitalist market conditions.

The concern of not being able to find dignity as a direct producer of the village comes out in Zhu Ren's complaint that "Now everything [in Heyang] is related to the ancient housing protection.... When renovations are done, workers from other villages are called in". Zhu Zhang also narrowed in on the issue of labour discussing it as a factor of how relations in the village have drifted further apart. He claims, "before if you don't have a job, the government will arrange work for you and you can earn points." While this is not a wholly accurate representation of how work was arranged under collectivism the shift from an emphasis on manual labour to scientific expertise in Chinese productive development is evident in Zhu Zhang's ongoing reflection, "Before there was work on the reservoir and people could earn points. Right now, you have to have a certificate to join projects. At this point he was joined in by Zhu Dingxiang, "Right now we don't know who the workers for local projects are. We are not qualified to do this work, so we don't get to join the teams". Not limited merely to the labour of materially developing the village, Zhu Ren extended her critique of workers being brought into cultural activities. "When we have a festival, they need people to perform, but people from other villages are brought in... from rich villages". With these complaints, I connect the issue of "not being listened to" with a general sentiment of not being valued for one's ability to contribute.

When participants were probed as to why they feel local leaders do not listen to them, Zhu Fengge began, "I don't know why the leaders don't listen to the people's suggestions or opinions". After a moment's pause, he continued, "they get closer to people who have money. We normal people don't have money, so they aren't close to us." This account is like an argument made by Zhu Xulan, a housewife in her 50s, "Now

they don't listen to the people because they want to be the leader. Before when one wanted to be a leader, it was political, now it is economic". Responding to why not develop close relations with people without money Zhu Ru, a worker in his 30s, comments help move this discussion of distance to social relations in general arguing that this "is a problem with people's quality (*suzhi*)". Zhu Zhang also expressed the idea that the growing division between people in Heyang is more a social than a political issue. Responding to the general social distance in Heyang, Zhu Bao reflected "some people earn money easily, but for others, it is really hard".

These further reflections help to connect the dots between general sentiments and experiences in Heyang to those with China at large under reform, especially concerning the quality discourse. Villages who are unable to find success in labour markets find additional barriers to be involved in the investments occurring within their village. In Heyang these barriers are frequently expressed in terms of enjoying improved living conditions as a result of state efforts to restore protected heritage buildings, or in performing the labours involved in the restoration. Where there are funds to help improve the facilities, there are no mentorship or other educational programs to help bring residents into the ongoing and future development of the protection or tourism work.

When asked how relations could be improved in the village, suggestions primarily focused on the need to enhance social relations. When asked what they would do if they were a leader, Zhu Tao, a worker in his 40s quickly replied "have weekly meetings", and this was supported by Zhu Yang, a housewife in her 50s: "discuss important issues in a meeting with everyone". In her group, Zhu Song, a farmer in her 60s, replied "Respect each other. If there is a plan, make it public so people can talk about it and negotiate how it will affect them". Zhu Weini repeated more than once in her group that she merely, "wishes the leaders would come to the people to understand them and know them". The disconnect identified in Zhu Weini recommendation comes out even more robust in Zhu Sanhei's point, "if you trust me then I will tell you the things I am thinking, but if you do not trust me there is no use for me to speak". This issue of trust grounds Zhu Lian's account of relations,

It is all up to the leaders. You want to get close, but they don't. When you get close, there is emotion and feeling. Like us here today, we chat and feel closer...If you don't sit and communicate with us we wouldn't

know each other, we wouldn't talk with each other afterwards... You lack the airs of higher authority so we feel we can sit and talk about things and communicate and bring the relationship closer because you show you are listening.

This reflection on our research teams' efforts was an impactful one, but in hindsight perhaps easy to make. We were not in a position to effect immediate or direct change for the research participants and thus were in less historically and personally invested positions to listen and draw out multiple issues and perspectives. Local leaders should commit to projects and carry them out. When they engage with other residents their job is as much to listen as it is to instrumentally steer conversations to make attitudes amenable. The way this is perceived, however, demonstrates an increasing and generalized ideological shift away from socialism and towards individualism.

Summarizing this condition in the village, Zhu Lian argued, "people are selfish. They don't want trouble and to deal with things not related to their own work, so they are separated from the masses. It is better to have few issues, and rather than few issues no issues". Zhu Bolin took this point further saying

right now life standards are higher than before and society is stable... So people are going backwards. Our ideological education is not keeping pace with changes in material wealth. So there are problems.

While ideological education in China today might be best represented in the quality education that rural migrants often go through to become urban migrant workers (Wallis, 2013), Zhu Bolin's comment came up in the context of explaining that Mao won China's communist revolution by going to peasants and that this relationship between the Party and peasants has grown more distant. The ideological education he is referring to is socialism. The ways to improve relations in Heyang articulated above are the very kind of actions that Dean argues form comradeship, from the point of sharing time, to the notion that such engagements will coincide with the dissemination of knowledge about village developments, and that these poor villagers feel that they have and can contribute to Heyang's future.

### **5.3.5. Part 6 Conclusion**

The interviews from the pilot research conducted in 2015 establish crucial issues that contextualize this study. First, they highlight how improved technological

infrastructure for communication networks has catalyzed differentiation within the village because of the economics of their dissemination. Next, they identify that there are present concerns over the ability to participate in the village's development, pointing to the importance of participation as a research focus, but also providing context for how that participation is understood. The desires to participate more in the village's development did not engage a need to overcome a digital divide by providing more equitable access to communication tools, but rather take shape around the issue of social distance between people of different economic accomplishment. Where there is an emphasis on meetings and participation in decision-making, this is not primarily to voice opposition and alternative decisions but to adapt plans to the daily needs of village residents. This is expressed in terms of general liveability through development projects and opportunities to be part of the labour needed for development projects.

While the pilot research included initial introductory meetings led by local cadres and a focus group with leaders from various levels of government, these engagements did not generate sufficient data to address or adequately contextualize the issues and perspectives raised above.

In summary, the initial interviews help to provide a base context of Heyang village in its regional geography and history. They helped to steer my initial research question focusing on innovation in mobile phone use, to address the broader point of media change based on the village's history with wired radio loudspeakers. Additionally, I learned how the mass line is still a means for people to discuss their relations with the state providing me with the term to bring into focus groups as a specific prompt to engage state-society relations in a locally meaningful manner. This approach helped to elicit the communication emphasis of the discussion and ultimately draw out explanations of close relationships being created through trust, the sharing of emotion and ongoing regular engagement to enable a sense of socialist belonging.

## **5.4. Main Accounts**

### **5.4.1. Part 1 The Socio-economic Gap of Not Being Heard**

The initial 17 days I spent in Heyang with Dr Zhao's research team engaging in meetings with officials, focus group interviews and field observations help to provide an

initial context for how people participate in Heyang's development. In contrast, the focus group interviews conducted at the end of my fieldwork in February 2019 were informed by months of research over three years, and familiarity established by building relationships with many of the residents who would become focus group participants. As a result, and partly because recruitment for them shifted from random sampling to organized groups of coworkers and neighbours, the discussions were able to generate more depth and insight on the dynamics of participation in Heyang. Additionally, some of the participants in these groups also participated in the 2015 interviews providing continuity to follow events.

Reflections on, and the realization of, beneficial participation becomes evident in descriptions of wellbeing in the village. This focus narrows in on a key question guiding the thesis, if life has improved in the reform-era, why complain? The answer that began to form in the pilot interviews is that life has not improved in an equitable manner. When Zhu Ren complains that she does not know where to live because of the dilapidated condition of her home, she loses dignity in being a member of the village. Her attempt to address her living circumstances were rejected because they were not up to standard. This rejection means she is slowly losing her ability to sustain a livelihood within the village. It is the collective nature of individual stories like this that make the story of Heyang's *Guminzhu* (ancient households) expressed in local colloquialism as the *Kuminzhu* (bitter households) (Zhang, 2017).

In terms of political awareness and participation, there is correspondence between the reports given in 2015 and 2018. When asked who is in charge of tourism development in the village, this exchange occurred between Zhu Qinghong a farmer in his 90s and Zhu Peng a farmer in his 70s:

Zhu Qinghong: There are some relations between the management committee and our village, and we have to deal with them.

Zhu Peng: It used to be in the village, but now it's contracted out.

Zhu Qinghong: We don't know which things are managed by the management committee and which things are managed by our village. He (the management committee) can't figure it out for us.

Zhu Xifeng an entrepreneur in her 50s, was perhaps more ambivalent, "All the cadres make their own opinions. The villagers don't know at all". In response to if he knows

what the Village Council or Tourism Management Committee has done, he replied “I don't know. We are all at home. We usually don't go out. I go to the fields when I have time. I like to be in the fields (laughing).” This was followed by a quick exchange with Zhu Mingli a farmer in his 80s claiming, “the management committee usually doesn't inform us about what to do, so I don't know”, and then affirmed by Zhu Xifeng, “Without notice, they can do whatever they like.”

In their focus group, Zhu Jinshu, a worker in his 30s, claims that the distinction between the Village Council and Tourism Management Committee is “not clear”. This was followed up by Zhu Bai, a worker in his 40s, who identified recent renovations on the village's communal toilets as an example of a project that had happened recently. When asked about how the Village Council communicated these plans, he complained, “they all screwed it up. At the meeting, they told you how much the development fund is and how to develop it. That's all. What can we do with that?”, concerned with the project timelines and sometimes having multiple toilets closed at once during the renovations.

Members of another focus group are likewise discouraged. Zhu Lian asserted,

How the village develops, it's only the production team captains and representatives who know. Us villagers don't have a clue. We don't have the power/authority to partake in those meetings, and we don't know which way the compass is pointing.

He claims that it is up to these captains to transmit information back down to their respective teams, but like Zhu Xifeng, he attests “These things, us villagers don't really pay attention to anymore.”. In the same focus group Zhu Ce shared the sentiment, “We villagers have nothing to say anymore, we don't know anything, we know nothing”.

This sentiment is perhaps only rhetorical. After all, these participants did have strong opinions about the development. Zhu Ce identifies the problem with leadership. While he may not agree with all the developments, he wants the management committee to follow through on plans,

the Director has been changed, a new term, your plans were your plans, but now it's mine, I make a new plan. On one blueprint I'll spend a few million, maybe even upward 10million. Once these blueprints are complete, I'm no longer Director, and now it's my successor, he starts drafting his own plans, that's a few million, ten million yet again. This continues back and forth, and now Heyang is dry. All our money is spent like this. Tourism itself hasn't seen much development.

In this reflection, Zhu Ce does not disagree with decisions made, or actions taken, but with the experience of their implementation and realization – or lack thereof. In as much as there is ambiguity in these reports in terms of, which leadership body is responsible for what, there is a general notion of a lack of tangible results and one's relationship to such developments.

When questioned if there was a distance between people in Heyang, participants generally agree that there is a big gap between the rich and the poor. How this gap is understood differs based on participants' place in Heyang's political-economic makeup. Of those interviewed, the majority who have higher economic backgrounds and represented wealth by having new homes have affiliations with local governance. This general political-economic elite section of Heyang couched their recognitions of economic difference in the village by appealing to an increased bottom line represented in having enough food to eat. When asked about a gap between people Zhu Tang attested, "I don't think there's a big gap between people regarding eating and clothing and other basics for life... People can regularly eat green vegetables and light meals". On this, his account is similar to that of Zhu Zhang,

There's a huge difference. The poor are very poor. But 80% of the population is about the same. But for the minority that is very poor, their situation is usually because of their own lack of abilities, nothing much they can do for their livelihood, but at least they can still feed themselves.

This position is supported by Zhu Heng, a farmer in his late 60s, who added, "No one is starving". During my time in the village, I only met one transient person who was homeless, and while many were not rich, food and clothing were never raised as problems with wellbeing with one caveat, meat. The standard for doing well in the village is being able to afford meat regularly, and most families do not include large portions of meat in their regular cooking. When I worked alongside the mostly stay at home mothers and grandmothers who do piecemeal manufacturing of plastic goods the most common response about why they spend their time doing this is to buy extra meat and treats for children.

### **5.4.2. Part 2 Troubles with Housing: Livability, Beautification and Toilets**

Food and clothing, however, are not shelter, and this is where the economic difference is most keenly expressed in Heyang. Zhu Geming and his mother, Zhu Aiai demonstrate what happens when the family home becomes too dilapidated. When I visited in 2015, Zhu Geming and his mother lived in their old family home. Not one of the traditional 18 room homes this may have once been a grand structure but now looks like an abandoned barn in an overgrown garden. The roof over three connected rooms had half-collapsed. Like many other homes, there was a wood stove in a room that served as a kitchen and smoke would billow through the house if his mother chose to cook. According to Zhu Geming, his mother would often eat at rooms rented by his sister-in-law in another house nearby. When I returned in 2019 the family had wholly left the old home and were sharing the sister-in-law's rented rooms. As discussed in Chapter Four, Zhu Aiai can now be seen regularly working as a garbage collector in the newer East side of the village. Money she uses to contribute to the rent.

Zhu Bai's story is less desperate but demonstrates another layer of the housing difficulty. He was able to renovate his home with support from the Tourism Management Committee.

It's repaired, but it's still not enough to live in. For example, when my wife gives birth to a child, is this a suitable place to live? Many of these old houses don't have bathrooms or proper kitchens.

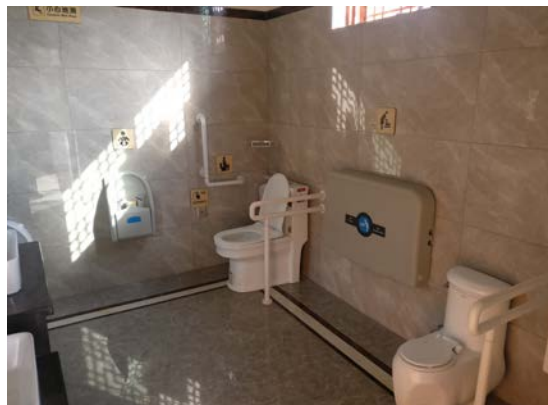


His comment on washrooms was a particularly pressing issue for those who live in old houses at the time of the interviews. During 2018 and into 2019, as part of the Tourism Management Committee's push for Heyang to gain a national 4A tourism location status, they initiated many projects including a renovation of the village's communal toilets (see figure 5 and figure 6). Like with the sewage system, the concern with this project was not if it should be done or not, but there were questions about its implementation and even prioritization.



*Figure 5 previously existing toilet featuring a frame for elderly to sit upon*

Photo by author



*Figure 6 Newly renovated toilets in senior centre*

Photo by author

Zhu Feng, a retired teacher in his 70s expresses the general confusion with the toilet renovations because this is one change that has continued to happen in Heyang.

The toilet in our senior centre was the first one rebuilt in our village. After it was built, all the [village] toilets were destroyed and rebuilt. Now the toilets have been destroyed and rebuilt again...It's a lot of money. We think its better, it is OK... but we don't understand the continual rebuilding.

Zhu Heng is also less than pleased with how local leadership has prioritized the project,

Several public washrooms together is over 10million... They have to be built into 4A level facilities, right? All public washrooms need to be reworked, so they invested some 10million... That's how they explained it, and then so basically there's no money left, they can't give out any red envelopes anymore.

The "red envelopes" that Zhu Heng is referring to is the annual return on profits that the Tourism Management Committee contracted to give back to the community. From Zhu Heng's perspective and as indicated in Zhu Feng 's take, the infrastructure investments are preventing this return. However, according to Director Liu, what is preventing the returns is that the tourism business is not rapidly increasing. The money that the Tourism Management Committee is spending is from sources they have lobbied from outside sources and is earmarked for capital projects like this.

These renovations did not take place all at once, and so while one washroom was closed another, a few hundred meters away, would still be open. This incremental approach, however, is still an inconvenience for a population comprised of both young children and ageing elderly. While this may be an acceptable inconvenience for a time, as depicted above, these changes are made regularly. Additionally, given how the village's population fluctuates with migrant labour, we might understand how this inconvenience is compounded when workers return home. Zhu Xifeng depicts this very situation in her experience

Leaders just do what they like. Such as with the toilets. They take them down on your side... and there is no place for people to go to the washroom during the Spring Festival.

When this regularity for changes to the toilets was brought up with Tang Fei, he framed the issue from the Tourism Management Committee's perspective: "Toilets will be replaced every couple of years, this is normal because we treat them almost like

consumables in planning”. This rather nonchalant attitude to the toilets and their temporariness, however, contrasts the benefit that others see in the improvement. Both Zhu Guotin, a worker in his 30s, and Zhu Weici focused in on the material progress in the most recent renovations compared to what they viewed as merely ‘pits’ before. Zhu Weici made the comparison in almost grandiose terms saying,

We used to have many pits. Now public toilets are more comfortable, better and more upscale than our rural homes. This is to revitalize the countryside.

Zhu Tang likewise links the renovated toilets to a general improvement in the village but looks at the issue more subjectively. He recognizes how many will voice complaints that,

‘The money is spent in vain’. ‘It costs so much money’. But after it was built, people felt different. How can you dirty such a good toilet? You’ll be conscious of it. Likewise, the roads of your entire village are now paved with stones and cleaned every day.

Zhu Tang then goes on to link this self-responsibility for cleanliness to a person’s overall awareness of environmental protection. His discussion, however, was little more than repeating a message delivered by the Village Council at an all village meeting held a week earlier. During this meeting, that was held to address plans for Heyang’s senior centre and is discussed in more detail in Chapter Seven, Heyang’s Village Council, including Zhu Weici, raised their concerns with how residents were treating the new washrooms. There was a problem of farmers trodding in dirt from the field and dirtying them. In response, the Village Council wanted to remind people to put more effort into keeping Heyang clean and beautiful. This request for people to keep the communal areas clean is part of the leader’s ideas of a moral subjectivity of self-responsibility that has strong links to notions of “quality”. It additionally comes from an understanding that these washrooms are also for visiting urban tourists. The inverse of this, however, is that it neglects the daily real-world experiences of the village’s residents and the kinds of wear and tear that occurs as a result of poor rural dependence on it depicting the issue as a clash between temporalities with the expectation that the farmers will recalibrate to the demands of the tourist industry upgrade. As Zhu Chung a farmer and former work team leader now in his 60s, would later quip, “who is going to take a shower before they have to take a shit?”

This conflict over the need and use of the communal toilets is not lost on the Tourism Management Committee, however. They explicitly link it to their understanding of the housing issues faced by those in the old homes. As Wang Zijie of the Tourism Management Committee puts it,

Yes, of course, villagers like to have houses to build, because the old ones can't be changed and [there isn't land for new houses] to be built rise... These conditions certainly can't be compared with the planning of the new district. In the new area, cars can drive in front and back of the mini-houses, and various underground pipelines are abundant so that any water can be discharged. With many of the old houses' toilets are not easy to install; domestic sewage is not easy to discharge and can be discharged into the road.

Tang Fei linked this to the reflection that planned developments were occurring slowly because “There is no money in the village”, a lack of coordination between the Tourism Management Committee and Heyang’s Village Council, and disagreement in the village in general. With reference to the plan to develop new housing on a 120 mu parcel of land, he noted there were still some villagers holding out and not agreeing to lease their use rights of necessary parcels of land. He argues that realizing more extensive plans like this now “mainly depends on the determination and ambition of the Village Council” to convince those holding out to join in. In these reflections Tang Fei sees little reason to attend or even appreciate the living circumstances of those who inhabit the protection area, this is not his job. In contrast he expects that the locally elected village representatives will do the work to ensure that locals do not interfere with the timing of the Tourism Management Committee’s plans to develop the tourism industry.

### **5.4.3. Part 3 120 Mu Three Years Later**

During the focus group interviews in 2019, I gained a better understanding of the 120 mu housing development project and the course of its progress. What comes out is a story of how distance is generated between people as a result of unclear governance and market prioritization of interests that enable residents to become more or less involved in decisions related to Heyang's development.

Zhu Yong, a previous director of the Tourism Management Committee, originally conceived the plan for relocation and development.

Zhu Haidi explains her understanding of this original plan from her position of having been involved with Heyang's tourism development from the beginning. According to her it began as a plan to

protect the old village, relocate, resettle, and tear down all the high rises. And then over in the new village, create an "experiential" area, an accommodation area. All food and drinks would be in the new village. Meaning the old village would just be a scenic spot... [Since then] It's changed. It has changed a lot.

When Zhu Yong was unable to quickly rally support for the development in the village, he was able to get it to the attention of Jinyun County Magistrate Wu Xiaoling. Who, according to Zhu Weici "took it seriously at the time". These events were the lead up to my first encounter with the issue in 2015.

It was at this time however, according to the current Director of the Tourism Management Committee, Xu Shoushan, that there was a "change of personnel... After [Wu Xiaoling] the county magistrate left... Jinyun's tourism department focused on obtaining 5A status for Xiandu" a nearby tourist village. Zhu Weici claims that the project is gaining ground now and that Zhu Renshu, the village Party Secretary has "put this matter first" for their yearly goals. Zhu Guiren, a member of the Village Council, account helps to fill in the gap between 2015 and 2019 asserting that after the last election cycle in 2017 "ideological work" had been conducted to make most households agreeable to sign over their land usage rights He concludes that,

There are still some [difficult] households remaining, but they're actually quite on the outskirts, so they won't really cause too much of an impact on our preliminary construction plans.

When asked how this ideological work to convince residents to sign onto the project occurred a few general details came out in dialogue with another Village Councillor,

Zhu Nuo: Well it's about land acquisition right. We would propagate the message one household at a time. During that period we really toiled night and day on this issue of land transfer.

Interviewer: How did you convince them?

Zhu Guiren: This was specific to each household.

Zhu Nuo: For example, we'd ask a household what demands they have, we'd ask them to bring them up. We'd try to meet the demands that we could, and we'd explain why other requests were beyond our capabilities

In depicting the mentality that they confronted in this process, Zhu Nuo explains,

Villagers are all clinging onto their farmlands, they all consider themselves farmers, the land belongs to their family, they're clutching onto this point. That's why there's a lot of work for us to do.

Responding to his own experience in signing over his land, Zhu Duyi, a worker in his 50s, attested, "It's not compulsory either... [but] if I don't give it to the village, we will definitely have no land. We all want land and a homestead" looking forward to a chance to build a new house.

Ultimately, the Village Council is renting the use of this land from households. According to Zhu Guiren, they pay "600 kuai per mu of land [per annum]... until 2029."

The primary barrier now, according to Zhu Guiren, is that they are waiting on the township government to construct a road through the land and no construction will begin until then. This bureaucratic snag is similar to that identified with the plans for wired radio where there is a lack of coordination amongst different levels of government. Adding to this is that where staff members of the Tourism Management Committee may have the impression that there is a lack of will on behalf of the Village Council, members of the Village Council claimed that they had covered the share of funding the Tourism Management Committee has promised.

For residents not in government, the project has taken on new reality where many now discuss this as an, if not positive, then a real, part of Heyang's future. Zhu Jingguo's perspective, as a worker in his 50s, depicts the most hopeful and ideal of these views,

Let me tell you, the last time when there was a batch of red brick factories. That batch of people [who made money from the factories], they had new houses, and it was their turn.

When he was confronted with the notion that these houses would still have to be purchased, he claimed, "No, it's house replacement. For example, if someone in the ancient houses asks for a new house... he can replace it". Understanding it less as an actual replacement but along similar ideological lines that this project would help those with the most significant housing difficulties Zhu Heng attested,

They told villagers, when everything is...[completed], those without houses, would be first in line. I heard this with my own ears. This is truthful. They can't lie about this

His colleague Zhu Lian was more sceptical about how the project would turn out in the end,

When it does get realized, whether or not it adheres to the date they tell us, I wouldn't know. This is hard to predict. If you suddenly fall poor and have no more money, no house will be given to you.

Zhu Lian followed this consideration venturing that as the project has yet to be completed there were still many ways that the final allotment would occur, possibly making it even more expensive.

Zhu Chenglei, a farmer in his 70s, shared this concern, reflecting,

If you sell post-construction, that just means that people with money will buy it. People with no money wouldn't have a chance/wouldn't be able to afford it. People with no homes would definitely be even worse off than now, wouldn't you agree? This is all reality.

These were no moot concerns either. While Zhu Weici at the time of the interview was also of the conviction that, "we'll definitely give those most in need... the first batch of housing", her fellow interviewee Zhu Qiaolian, a housewife in her 40s, was more sceptical, "The problem is if they can't access money how can they get preferential treatment?" This concern is raised because while Zhu Qiaolian and Zhu Ting, an artisan in her 50s, both identified that many people wanted to directly transfer their farming usage rights for a title in the new development, this process isn't possible. Such a move would involve transferring land back to the collective for redistribution, which would go against national-level policies restricting such actions (Brandt et al, 2002). Additionally, those who leased their farmlands for this development do not represent all or only those in the ancient dwellings. Zhu Chi, a Village Council member in his 30s, explained that even with transferring use rights of the old homes the lowest price a family might pay is 10 000 yuan. He believes the system is fair and just, "but if they [the people moving] don't work, then there's nothing we can do right?". Displaying how this plays out across the economic differences in the village Zhu Guiren added more detail,

If the village gives some to them, it might be around ten thousand, but if they want to get it through the market price, it's even more, tens of thousands. There are some people who want the land just to resell. They could make over 400,000 off it.

This point relates to Zhu Chenglei's concerns of presales, possibly increasing the price. Tang Fei adds to the reality of this possibility from his inside position. He identifies the

current uncertainty about the final reallocation and plans as part of their strategy to try and recover investment costs and to gain more money to further the development as it progresses.

These concerns of affordability and the difficulties of moving the poorest residents may, however, be for naught. In the days between these interviews and the final focus group interviews with the Party Secretary and Director Xu from the Tourism Management Committee, there was a new development. Director Xu had proposed in a meeting that in order to support the heritage development plans, those who had built new houses in what is now the designated ancient house area during the 1980s and 1990s- the houses that Zhu Jingguo was referring to when he compared this to a new opportunity for others to finally get a new house- should be prioritized for the first batch of houses.

Director Xu explained his reasoning,

Those new houses are actually old houses. They were all built in the 1980s and 1990s. They are basically cement slab structures...They are not strong enough, and some of them are too high, and [present a danger]...

He went on to explain that when “the new houses are demolished, the ancient houses in Heyang will improve”. He reasons that the ancient homes in the village add to the tourist attraction of the village even in their dilapidated state. The relatively newer homes, on the other hand, both detract from that aesthetic and present planning difficulties as the heritage site develops. These homes, however, cannot be demolished until their residents are relocated thus giving them, in Director Xu’s perspective of the tourism business, priority.

Party Secretary Zhu Renshu was also at that planning meeting and shared his unified stance with Director Xu’s plan. At the same time, he discussed the work that the Village Council had done to identify the families that would be affected by the7 demolition and relocation.

Last year, 108 households were identified. Overall [120 mu can accommodate] more than 400 households, so whether the home is replaced or demolished, the difficult households [can be solved].



#### 5.4.4. Part 4 Governance

Neither Zhu Renshu nor Director Xu said that those with the most need wouldn't also get priority, but it would appear that they will have to live with their current housing circumstances for longer than those who upgraded in the 1980s and 1990s. The process of this decision occurred in the closed-door meetings of the dual committee formed by members of the Village Council and Tourism Management Committee. How this committee mediates the relationship and understandings of responsibilities between the members of the distinct leadership bodies helps to provide insight into the ambiguity that ordinary residents expressed of the relationship above.

In depicting his understanding of the difference between the Village Council and Tourism Management Committee as it related to the 120 mu housing development, Tang Fei asserts,

The management committee is not particularly concerned [about the cost of the new homes for villagers]. The main concern of the management committee is the proper protection of this place.

While describing his place in helping in the planning and designing of the new housing development, Tang Fei explained how the Tourism Management Committee brought in professionals as consultants to help with the project. However, he is adamant that "the final implementation is [the Village Council's], the proposal should also be theirs". This responsibility, however, is expressed in a current unity found between the Village Council and the Tourism Management Committee as their members find commonality in a desire to push for faster specific development. Although Tang Fei shows certainty of who is responsible for what in the village, this certainty is not shared by many for the job of protecting the heritage buildings and promoting the associated tourism industry comes in regular contact with the Village Council's responsibilities for governing daily life.

Reflecting on the Tourism Management Committee's place in the village more broadly summed up the situation Liu Zian, another director with the committee, explains,

Although the... [villagers] want to develop the scenic spots in their hearts, they pay more attention to their immediate interests. So this contradiction is tough to solve. There are some things that we have done, and they think it's so bad. We also criticize and accept the poor performance, and when we initiate some projects that perform poorly, this forms a vicious circle... At present, Heyang lacks positive energy, to

tell the truth. We hope that through the establishment of 4A, including the implementation of relocation and resettlement, Heyang will truly develop.

Combined Director Xu, and Tang Fei represent the detachment from the local village that is indicative of their institutional place as outsiders. They are all from the local region, but not Heyang residents, and they understand their work with a touch of professional detachment focusing on development goals set in national policy frameworks such as upgrading from a 3A to 4A national tourism site. This difference in position between the Tourism Management Committee and Village Council is appreciated by Director Xu, who claims, “sometimes they have a better understanding of the villagers' situation in Heyang... After all, they are relatively grounded. We are foreign.” Positioning the current work, like Director Xu, as finally gaining momentum Director Xu reflects, “before last year, a lot of work was done through Secretary Zhu Renshu and me... Sometimes the efficiency is not high”. He claims that more work had been accomplished in the past year because the Village Council and Tourism Management Committee leaders have organized better and are finding ways to work around bureaucratic slowness with other levels of government. Following up later, I would learn that the previously mentioned Xinjian township cadre responsible for village affairs may have contributed to the discoordination that Director Xu identified in past projects.

In describing the relationship between the Village Council and Tourism Management Committee Zhu Chi, Zhu Guiren and Zhu Weisheng a Village Council member in his 60s, provided this exchange:

Zhu Weisheng: Our village must be assisted. The management committee is mainly responsible for

Zhu Chi: Assist in policy processing

Zhu Guiren: It's very difficult for them to deal with policies. We are more than them

Zhu Weisheng: Go to work with them at the farmer's house...

Zhu Guiren: Basically, how do their policies go? We are all cooperating

Zhu Weisheng: They plan...

Zhu Guiren: Just like every current construction site, it is designed by them. We will be responsible for land acquisition and policy treatment.

This exchange highlights the contrast between the professionalism and institutional authority of the Tourism Management Committee compared to how the Village Council interprets their responsibility to realize proposed plans. The depiction of Village Councillors' efforts to speak directly to residents here, and above in Zhu Guiren's description of how they secured the 120 mu for the housing project, speaks to the "groundedness" that Director Xu alludes to in his contrast of their positions.

This local connection is explicit in the Village Council members' discussion of how projects are prioritized. In continuing to detail, the relationship between the Village Council and Tourism Management Committee Zhu Chi explains,

They will consult us. There are some things we can't control. As our Deputy Secretary said, the upgrading of the parking lot in front of his door cost more than 300000 to add four additional parking spaces. We think it's unreasonable... [as we] have such a lack of money in our village.

This explanation grew into a broader exchange in the focus group:

Zhu Weisheng: They are working to obtain 4A status...

Zhu Guiren: They say that we have to upgrade to pass the acceptance inspection. We can't say [no to] that.

Zhu Chi: According to our idea, the money in the village should first be spent on people's livelihood. For example, the most realistic way is to let the villagers go first.

In contrast to these ideals and sense of responsibility, members of the Village Council also expressed difficulty with eliciting participation. This difficulty is mainly viewed as a result of the marketization of life:

Zhu Weisheng: Thought used to be better than now.

Zhu Chi: Now it's money.

Zhu Weisheng: It's like that, to tell the truth.

Zhu Chi: Because life needs a high quality of life

Zhu Weisheng: In the past, I didn't remember any migrant workers at all. There was no money... [Now] they don't remember to work. People in the past thought better than they do now

Zhu Chi: Because work used to be centred around farming, there was no comparison

Zhu Guiren: Entering the economic era, everything is linked to the economy...

The pragmatics of the marketization of life was particularly considered by Zhu Chi, who, as will be shown, plays a very active role in organizing activities in Heyang. Where he recognizes money is now a primary way that participation is negotiated in the village, he balances this with the reflection that residents,

are afraid of poverty. They haven't reached the level of developed countries like... Canada. They still have to earn money [to enjoy life] or be afraid of poverty.

He later expanded on how this economic reality impacted relations in the village:

For example, a group of young people are not in the village anymore. There is no relationship between the good development of the village and [their ability to make a living]. He [the average migrant] has integrated into urbanization. He is taught that maybe when he is old, he will think about where he was born. [Until then], whether the village is developing well or not has nothing to do with him. He just comes back for a few days during the Spring Festival. He doesn't feel it.

This appreciation of the continued threat of poverty for Heyang residents was not shared. Zhu Qiaolian, whose husband is on the Village Council reflects that the current generation of migrants have very different circumstances than hers did,

it's a little different because now they're not going out to make a living, they're showing their value. But we were different. We were going out to live because we couldn't earn food at home. Like our elders who had no property left behind, we had to build our own houses and make our own money. ... I had developed for several years outside, so I could come back and build a house.

While this is an apt description of the generational differences experienced by those who live in "new homes" in Heyang, it is by no means a fair description of the lives of those who never did move out of their ancient home or have done so only to rent out smaller rooms in other old buildings. This position informs a subjectivity of self-reliance that misrecognizes how conditions of poverty are compound and interrelated.

## **5.5. Conclusion**

This chapter has laid out a general synopsis of the problem of participation in Heyang primarily grounded in the politics of housing and its relation to heritage

protection and tourism as a revenue generator bringing money into the village. The village itself is divided along socio-economic lines that are reinforced through decisions on how to develop the protected area best. Where the material conditions of the ancient homes are making them unlivable, the extent of these hardships is not treated as a collective problem but individualized to particular households. While differences are recognized, the way they are systemically reinforced is not followed through and turned into affirmative action, as much as they are aesthetically lamented.

From these accounts, we learn that dialogue impacts participation. Participants from the first round of interviews highlighted this with the loss of valued meetings. The positive impact of having leaders join in on daily work detailed in the previous chapter is expressed in the social gap experienced in the individuation of economic wellbeing following decollectivization. This gap is expressed in the distance of the experiences of obtaining a new home. Those without a new home look for hope in the possible collective benefit of money invested into the protection of heritage buildings and generated through the development of the corresponding tourism industry. Those who have obtained new homes see their children as free from concerns of meeting economic necessities. This matter is in their past, and now they expect others to be able to demonstrate the same realizations of market labour success. These expectations particularly include the savings needed to invest in a new mortgage and not being dependant upon labour and toilets in a way that will sully collective resources used by urban tourists.

Likewise, the passing the buck up phenomena experienced with the wired radio loudspeakers in the introduction and the development of the 120 mu housing development appears to be akin to a generalized temporal experience of being left behind. To not prioritize these village-level projects in government leaves the rural behind, slower to develop while the state supports bigger more urban orientated projects. The local poor in Heyang who are being left behind as currently their most valuable contribution to the collective wealth of the village's heritage protection, moving out so houses can be restored, is not prioritized by leaders who are looking to promote a more uniform aesthetic in the village before necessarily addressing housing needs.

This temporality of being left behind is inversely related to the shared time of the mass line's emphasis on building close relations. It was expressed as distant relations in the

initial focus group interviews and recognized as part of a larger socio-economic gap in the village, especially in the concluding focus group interviews. Having distinct economic situations enables people to drift away from the lived experiences that shape by these differences. This drift is reflected in the deprioritization of people in ancient homes, many of whom would benefit more from relocation than those in relatively newer homes. It is furthermore reflected in the concerns for beautification and keeping the toilets clean. In the next chapter, the cultural ramifications of how this process impacts a sense of belonging are detailed through my experiences as a voluntary member of the village's fire brigade and dragon dance crew. Here the themes of being socially distant are reflected strongly in socio-economic differences and not spending the time in the shoes of the poor to understand how to address their needs in the process of collective development.

## **Chapter 6. Cultural Participation: The Fire Brigade are Dragon Dancers**

The previous chapter laid out some base understandings of participation in Heyang, drawing it out in examples of political participation around housing. This chapter shifts the focus to a look at cultural participation and the problem of not feeling included. Where the responses of initial focus group participants and regular residents motivated a focus on housing, this chapter follows the contributions of Village Council members and their accounts of how they try to galvanize participation in the village. Additionally, where the previous chapter is primarily based on focus group interview responses this chapter weaves some of those responses into the participant observation I engaged in during my stay in Heyang from August 17, 2018, to December 9, 2018. Specifically, my ability to become a voluntary member of the village's fire brigade enabled me to gain better access to avenues for adult males to participate in officially sponsored cultural production including the dragon dance.

The chapter begins by documenting a current and generalized resurgence in rural cultural production in China today. This context of top-down support for rural cultural production is used to explain the enthusiasm for such events in Heyang. Reviewing what kinds of cultural activities the Village Council organizes helps to identify some of the gender differences in participating in such events. This gendering contextualized my access and entry into the fire brigade. Participating with the fire brigade helped me to appreciate the experience and observe the multitude of rituals that become involved by participating in the dragon dance. I examine how these efforts are communicated and fit with general subjectivities to question why one member of the village, Zhu Geming declined to participate in the village dragon dance. In examining why Zhu Geming turned down this opportunity to not only engage in cultural participation but also earn a day's wage of 80 yuan, the discussion narrows in on the problem of eliciting participation from people who feel their contributions do not matter, and the differential access Heyang residents have in finding dignity in being direct producers of cultural experiences.

## 6.1. Rural Cultural Resurgence

Rural cultural production is resurgent in China. While the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) coopted folk cultural forms for propaganda efforts in the 1940s-1970s this practice ended with the end of the cultural revolution. Beginning in the late 1980s and early 1990s, however rural counties, towns and villages began to bring back other cultural practices that the CCP previously abandoned for their feudal connotations (Thorgersen, 2000). At this time most research on the issue identified this as an indication of rural resistance, or the rise of local family lineage power in a power vacuum left by a retreating party state (Anagnost (1994) and Perry (1985), as cited in Wu 2015 p.19). Today, Western commentators frame state support for cultural production as a renewal of authoritarian efforts for social control and governance (Brady as cited in Wu p.107; also see Perry 2017). In contrast to these explicit state versus society power dichotomies, Ka-ming Wu describes rural cultural production in China to be an example of late socialist dynamics,

reworked by the party-state for policy purposes, simulated and packaged by companies for consumption, fabricated and represented by urban intellectuals for heritage purposes, and still actively reenacted by rural villagers for identity construction and communal remaking (2015 p.21).

Looking specifically at the rise of rural spring festival galas in the countryside around Lishui city Yuezhi Zhao (2018) identifies where the city has billed these galas as part of its media branding. She notes that organizers view these as opportunities for “villagers finding self-worth” through their participation (Zhao, 2018). Zhao (2018) claims that these rural galas are a new cultural form. Just as the CCP’s national spring festival gala in Beijing began in the 1980s in connection with the popularization of television, these more diffuse cultural productions are realizable because of internet connectivity and the strength of the networks throughout the countryside. Zhao (2018) argues that state support for these rural productions is an indication of the Party carrying out the mass line. Evidence of this is found in the prominence media now give to the cultural consciousness of peasants; reflecting the direct production of many amateur performers and serving as a spectacle for other rural viewers to see their livelihoods depicted with state support. This recognition may then be understood as a continuation of the mass line work that Wu depicts of intellectual artists in the 1970s, who in,



stressing 'going among the people'... conflated the concepts of 'folk traditions'..., and 'the masses'... This conflation enabled them to explore folk art forms without being labelled as 'feudal' thus successfully aligning the CCP's cultural policy with understanding, instead of refuting, traditional knowledge (2015 p.49).

Wu (2015), however, is more critical than Zhao (2018), of the relationship that the current state support of rural cultural production has with rural subjectivity and livelihoods. Wu coins the term "hyper-folk' to understand the late socialist cultural condition in which the practice and representation of folk culture are no longer associated with any ritual reality, rural environment or cultural origin" (2015 p.20).

This "hyper" then is premised on Boudrillard's notion of "simulacra in which the sign of talk has not only detached from the original, but its meanings and circulation have exceeded the real" (Wu, 2015 p.21). In terms of temporality however, we might say that this process of becoming simulacra is part of the cultural shift to "real time". Not unlike the unrealistic demands Hope identifies "on demand" production systems have on labour at the global level, or the constant exchange of signs for instant gratification associated with global cosmopolitanism. Indeed it should be noted that the push for rural heritage protection in China corresponds with the CCP's attempts to exert more influence in global governance bodies such as UNESCO (Nicolai, 2017). These attempt to showcase existing culture however is, as demonstrated in the previous chapter often done at the cost of the everyday wellbeing of its citizens. Or to push the link with real time further, it presents an immediately recognizable sign of consumption that is divorced from the historical dynamics leading up to now and that will see Heyang's development into the future. In so far that participation in cultural production may be said to relate to Wu's (2015) "hyper-folk" concept, we will find not only diminished ability to participate, but a lack of appreciation of the opportunity to be involved because such an invitation denigrates the dignity of people through neglect and wallpapering of their daily struggles. This is not an issue of "real time" in terms of time keeping, but in terms of relations existing for immediate exchange.

## **6.2. Cultural Participation in Heyang**

Heyang residents engage in all sorts of hobbies and cultural activities. My scope of investigation here is the activities that are supported by the Village Council and recognized as part of officially supported cultural production. Some people develop their

own skills that end up becoming recognized by the Village Council and CCP after attaining recognition in regional competitions.

Zhu Ting, for example, is a paper cutter and has been featured in magazines and museums. She uses her home as a gallery where elementary schools have come for her specialized workshops. I even had the pleasure to join a workshop she put on at the Heyang Institute for Rural Studies when members from that year's cohort of Simon Fraser University and the Communication University of China's Global Communication double degree students came for the program's annual visit in 2018.

Members of the Village Council, most often Zhu Weici and Zhu Nuo organize village wide cultural activities. These range from significant events like the previously mentioned galas, to periodic fashion shows featuring Chinese Qipaos and Korean Cheongsams, both of which were popular fashions at the time of the study. When asked why they participate in such activities, Zhu Song, a housewife in her 40s, and Zhu Ruolan, an entrepreneur in her 50s, were somewhat ambivalent. Zhu Song claimed, "it is like a hobby for literature and art... that's all... there is no other feeling" followed by Zhu Ruolan who claims she participates simply because she "likes it".

This emphasis on the hobby like nature of the activities for the women begins to underline a critical distinction that is recognized by Zhu Weici. She understands that of the many people who can volunteer most are not required to do much work at home. While much of rural life includes idleness, many fill such time with minor at home factory production and the like, focused on their household's economic sustainability. Zhu Qiaohui is someone whom I spent much time with to help with this small production work (see figure 7). When I asked her why she or her daughter did not participate in the gala she smiled tiredly scoffing at the idea, "I have no culture, you need to be cultured to be able to do that kind of thing".



*Figure 7 Example of a women's at home work station*

Photo by author

I witnessed one of the galas that the Heyang Village Council organized as part of Xinjian Town's contributions to Lishui city's rural media branding (see figure 7). Organizers brought in paid hosts and a few professional performers to complement the local talent that was featured in dancing, singing and other skits. Despite the local presence, no mention of Heyang was made. Additionally, while the auditorium was full with over 500 people present at any one time, there were no tv cameras or other recording devices like that used for the live casting of the spring festival later. The skits performed reflected urban situations, and the songs were a collection of classical, revolutionary and contemporary songs. These performances were chosen and choreographed by rural performers. While locals who joined in are amateurs, many of them pursue these activities as serious hobbies others, such as a few of the young mothers, had to be convinced to join in on a performance, to help show the beauty of the village. Thus there is rural subjectivity and an attempt to show the local through performers. How connected this and other opportunities are related to the ritual communication of reproducing rural livelihood in the village is another question.



*Figure 8 Gala hosted in Heyang*

Photo by author

Besides the cultural knowledge depicted by Zhu Qiaohui, commitment to these activities can become time-consuming and expensive. Zhu Furen's daughter is a competitive dancer and had a solo performance during the gala. In the weeks leading up, her mother worked on her outfit, sewing jewels onto a white leotard. When I commented on her painstaking stitch work one night, she told me that she was lucky because she has a clothing store and knows about this kind of thing, if she had to buy one it could cost a few thousand.

Beyond these activities there are many other village cultural groups including but not limited to: a village drum group comprised of women; a traditional band that consists of a wooden sedan and lion that dances when ropes in the back are pulled, that is made up of both men and women-but significantly only those from comparatively wealthy families. There is also the village dragon that is organized by members of the village fire brigade. Where many of these activities highlight organization and participation by women, a trait that Zhao (2018) identifies as a legacy of the CCP's gender equalization efforts, the remainder of this chapter turns to the male-dominated dragon dance. As a male, the

dragon dance was more accessible to me to participate in and appreciate its importance for villagers.

### **6.3. How Does One Become a Member of the Fire Brigade?**

The fire brigade is a catch-all term for a group of men who perform a myriad of small jobs around the village and serve as a local security and inspection force for the Village Council. When I began my fieldwork in 2018, Zhu Furen had been the head of the fire brigade for two years. His predecessor, Zhu An, is currently employed as the security guard for the tourism site. When asked Zhu An why he is no longer the head of the team, he merely replied that that was the end of his term. Zhu Haidi, however, offered more insight on this claiming “a change in sovereigns means a change in ministers”. Consistent with this interpretation, Zhu Furen spoke on more than one occasion about his history with the Village Council head and Heyang’s Party Secretary indicating his loyalty to them. With a core team of ten, he manages a crew of approximately 30 men in Heyang who are signed up to work with the fire brigade.

Eight men cover the brigade’s day shift. This shift usually includes a morning inspection followed by odd jobs or idle play depending on the day. While there is no affirmed start or end time, shifts count as 12 hours with members mostly collected by 8 am and mostly dispersed between 4:30 and 5 pm when they go off for dinner. In the evening 1-2 men supervise the fire hall where there are feeds from a few surveillance cameras to monitor the village, a small fire engine, pumps and other gear. A shift pays 80 yuan—those who are signed on range from their mid-thirties to late-fifties. As evident in figure 9 no official attire for them while on duty except for some fatigue coloured hats with China’s National Fire Agency emblem on the front. Most members don the usual army surplus fatigues that are indicative of rural migrant workers.



*Figure 9 Members of the fire brigade on a patrol*

Photo by author

While some of the older members have only ever been farmers, the younger men have all migrated out of the village for labour. Zhu Furen's number two, Zhu Gao a tall young father, made enough money to get married and buy a new home, but returned to live in the village because of the lifestyle and plans to migrate out again once his money dries up. Zhu Chenglei also in his 30s, in contrast, did a little factory work and decided it didn't agree with him and "besides its better to live close to family so you can help your parents as they get old". While some of the men are married, the vast majority are not, and this reflects the general condition of being a working-aged male who lives in the village without his own vocation. Many of the brigade's members regularly migrate out for work and only join the occasional shift. About ten members work regularly-more than five shifts in a month. Some were members before Zhu Furen became leader, but a few like Zhu Gao and Zhu Chenglei were invited by Zhu Furen to join in because they are people he feels he can trust.

Zhu Furen began to take a bit of an interest in me when he noticed I was learning to speak the local Jinyun dialect. This started in the first week of October 2018. I had begun to pick up a few phrases from Zhu An and would often spend some time during the day at the ticket booth for the tourist centre practising little phrases with him. Zhu Furen, and the fire brigade crew that were with him, found my attempts to sound out words, like the days of the week, quite amusing. In a jocular fashion they began to try and get me to speak a few more colourful phrases. Before leaving one afternoon, Zhu

Furen informed me that he has people visit his home every evening for tea and I should come and join. This invitation was an exciting idea, but I didn't know where he lived.

It was not until a few nights later that I was out for an evening walk to observe the sounds and activities of the early evening hour that Zhu Furen saw me and called me into a home. This house is on the East side of the village and is his younger brother's new home where the family had just finished a big meal and were celebrating, in part, by lighting off strings of firecrackers.

After sitting around the television for a while, Zhu Furen said it was time to go to his house for tea. He jumped on a motorbike and had another brother lead me across the river to the family's ancestral courthouse. This traditional 18 room home is on the outskirts of the heritage protection area. The interior rooms have largely been renovated with Zhu Furen having both a toilet and a fully functional kitchen that one walks past to the back room. This backroom is set up with a television, a table and chairs that are used for meals and card games, and a lavish wooden desk that has a built-in water filtration, boiler, and tea serving station.

Over the month, I became a semi-regular visitor to these evening tea sessions. I gradually became familiar with the fire brigade members and other residents who would frequent the place. I would mostly sip tea and listen as best as I could to conversations that would centre around Zhu Furen and a prominent guest or two and the smaller ones that would break off between other fire brigade members who would show up. I would often be shown off a bit with Zhu Furen steering conversations to repeated topics like my attempts to learn the local dialect or comparing national currencies – with Zhu Furen either able to show off more knowledge of foreign countries each time or simply pushing conversations faster-cutting through my choppy and paused Chinese. One night when drinking with Zhu Funan, one of the more frequent guests, they had me practice the phrase “I am a Heyanger”, in the local dialect “*Dum zai wuyaoren*”.

It was not until the end of the month however, that I was invited to join the crew while they conducted their regular inspections. Zhu Furen, Zhu Gao, Zhu Chenglei, Zhu Duyi, Zhu Bai, and Zhu Chaoxiang, who is in his 50s, were walking down one cobblestone street as they saw me on my way home for lunch. Zhu Furen called out “Xiao Bai”, my Chinese name, in a sharp bark, asked if I was busy. I said I was not, and he gestured I

should follow along. I joined up and walked with the crew as they made their way through the heritage protection area.

When we reached one feature, the “Eight Scholar’s Gate”, Zhu Yue, a farmer in her fifties, began to yell at the crew. They did not pay much attention to her and went through the gate down the main Yuan Dynasty Street. At this point, however, Director Xu and Zhu Weici were coming up the street. They approached Zhu Yue to listen to her complaints, and the fire brigade crew went up behind them while I stayed off to the side with some of the other neighbours. The argument was entirely in Jinyun dialect, and I would not understand what was happening until about half an hour later after Zhu Yue had given an earful to Director Xu and Zhu Weici. They replied with calm, if not reassuring voices. Once Zhu Yue had been heard out, the village leadership headed back with Director Xu in front but mostly in an unhurried fashion with jocular conversation tossed back and forth amongst Zhu Weici and the crew.

I later asked Zhu Gao what the issue was, and he told me it had to do with garbage. He was casual about the subject but became rather heated telling me that Zhu Yue shouldn’t complain so much, and it isn’t a big deal. I independently followed up with Zhu Yue a few evenings later when I saw her doing some small assembly work. I sat down and joined her and learned that she was concerned that a village garbage bin had been moved to be closer to her home and, being positioned on a hill, some would drop out every time a small vehicle came around to collect the garbage. When I asked her if she expected the leaders to resolve her problem, she told me she had moved the bin herself and was angry it had been moved back, that she had voiced these concerns before but was never listened to. She complained that she was told some of these things had to be done in specific ways for the tourism development and expressed bitterness at feeling deprioritized against such plans. Shrugging this off just as quickly however she explained that leaders never listen and so one must look after their selves. In the end, it seemed that the bin was moved to a slightly different location, and I did not hear about the issue again.

#### **6.4. How Does One Become a Dragon Dancer?**

Despite being my first instance in joining the fire brigade crew as they toured Heyang, this was one of the more dramatic events that would occur during my time with



them. Another critical moment happened a week and a half after, on November 6. I came across the fire brigade crew just after 830 am, this time again around Eight Scholar's Gate. As had become usual when we crossed paths, Zhu Furen would call me over, and I would tag along and join in some idle conversation. This time, however, they were moving with a little more purpose. When we passed by Zhu Mai's small shop in the far west side of the village Zhu Gao paid for a round of red bull energy drinks. As we stood drinking these the Village Council head and another man whom I would later learn was with Xinjian township government drove up in their cars, and we split up into them. We were driven down the interprovincial highway that wraps around the west of the village to what I now understand to be the village limits and got out. The township leader pulled out a few legal-sized paper photos of the area and pointed out a few inconsistencies with the photo and what would turn out to be small structures used by farmers for storage or maintaining vegetable crops. It was our job to dismantle the structures. We accomplished this by dumping the materials in out of sight places. When I asked Zhu Chenglei what we were doing, he smiled at me and said, "Beautification, we are making the countryside look good".

At one point we had to tear down a small structure in the plots maintained in front of Yan Shanxia. An elderly man came out yelling and tried to protect what was left of it. He was confronted by Zhu Gao who yelled at him and shoved the other men to keep working. While I had been fully involved with the activity up to then, I felt it best to stand off to the side with the leaders. The elderly man later came our way, and the village head and Zhu Furen played a bit of good cop/bad cop with the man before the crew came back, and we kept moving along, leaving the elderly man grumbling and collecting what bits had been tossed nearest to him. As we walked away, Zhu Furen came up to us on a motorbike he had picked up and shushed the men a bit, having us move along.

The next structure we were to take down was along the small road that cuts between Heyang and Yanshanxia heading to the village entrance and on into Xinjian town. While the previous structures were mostly hap-hazard combinations of wood and plastic bags, this was a simple but elegant lattice with beans grown up and through it. I asked how taking this down could contribute to beautification. Zhu Bai looked at me with a shrug and said it was built without a permit and so it should be taken down, as he used a crowbar to tear apart a top joint. I would later learn that this was Zhu Bai's field and appreciated his fatalistic calm in the matter.

Once we had finished this beautification, it was approaching 11:30 am the time that the crew usually breaks for lunch and the team dispersed. I too went off and joined my usual lunch provided by the Tourism Management Committee in the village office. During lunch, my fellow visiting researcher, Xiaoxing, told me about his plans to observe the grand opening of a series of small artisan businesses happening later that day. I decided I would join him as he had become close with some of the young entrepreneurs setting up shop in the courtyard and figured this would give me a better vantage to see the festivities. When left lunch, we crossed back over the bridge leading to the heritage protection area and towards our rented rooms. On the other side of the bridge, buildings are lined up to face the river: first a general store, then the senior centre followed by the fire hall. As we crossed the bridge, I noticed many men in bright yellow outfits standing around the Firehall and decided it merited investigation. Before I got too close, however, Zhu Chenglei called me over and said I was needed.

I was brought into the crowded fire hall where some of the younger (under 50) men were joking and smoking while trying on synthetic silk yellow pants, traditional yellow shirts with red buttons knotted buttons, a red sashed tied on like a belt and a yellow scarf hat that was also kept on with a red ribbon tie. Older men both part of the fire brigade and other residents stood around partially attired more quietly and sombre. Zhu Furen, Zhu Gao and Zhu Weici were standing around a call list talking amongst themselves as Zhu Gao shook his head hanging up his mobile phone. Zhu Chenglei went up and presented me. Zhu Weici was a bit surprised and asked what I was doing there, to which Zhu Furen quickly said, I was one of them and had me say the phrase *Dum Zai Wuyohren* (I am a Heyanger) for Zhu Weici. She looked back with perhaps a bit of scepticism and nodded. Zhu Gao quickly passed me a set of clothing and told me it might feel a bit snug because I am fatter than everyone. I was to join the men of Heyang in the dragon dance, to *bao long*.

Before long, I followed the men as they moved to the village auditorium in the centre of the heritage protection area. Here, in a side room is the village's yellow and gold dragon that has 50 poles plus a golden ball and symbols which require people to make it come alive. I joined a line of men who were there early and were helping to bring it out and stretch it around the auditorium's lobby. As more men came up, yellow sacrificial paper was handed around. I was given a few sheets and shown by Zhu Tuba to light it and wave the burning paper under my feet and around my body to get the smoke

everywhere (see figure 10). I asked him about the significance, and he shrugged and looked to Zhu Ruolan's husband who in turn said, "its tradition". When I inquired about the clothing, if they represented some particular dynastic period perhaps, I was only told, "They look good, and we all have to look the same". Once we were all collected Zhu Gao and Zhu Chenglei came up in clean and sharp fitting fatigues with Zhu Furen in his usual leather jacket, and they lead us out with Zhu Gao at times speaking in a walkie-talkie and authoritatively directing the front of the dragon. We were led to the village entrance where we joined a parade of others including the traditional band and the women's drumming team among others. Residents not part of the performance came and stood alongside the road to watch, and a few waited with us for things to begin.



*Figure 10 Members of the dragon dance preparing in village auditorium*

Photo by author

That day we marched the dragon in a parade following the arrival of a provincial-level leader and an entourage of other local officials lead by Party Secretary Zhu Renshu and Tourism Management Committee Director Xu as they toured the newly established businesses and made speeches. As I would later learn, this provincial level leader had heard about Heyang and had visited it for a week the past spring. During that time, he formulated the plan to attract local artisans and entrepreneurs that resulted in this project. I was not privy to the speech he made, however, as I was waiting outside of the courtyard with the other performers. Following the speeches, the Dragon was led

doorway to doorway where it feasted on offered cabbage, and red packets were passed on to Zhu Gao who collected them for Zhu Furen. In the end, we spent about 3 hours in the afternoon sun. Most were tired at the end when we put the clothes away, and I would be asked in the next few days by different villagers if I had had fun and if I was fatigued afterwards. Indeed, this was a point of discussion that people, whom I was otherwise only casually familiar with, would call out and ask me about in warm welcoming ways.

My introduction to this is probably the result of a few different factors. I was known to the people organizing it and had just demonstrated my willingness to get involved in the rough work of taking structures down. Less complimentary is that I am a bit of a spectacle in the village. Being an overweight bald man, slightly higher than the average resident, I stand out. Additionally, because I hosted weekly English classes, most of the children were familiar with me and would call me out by a twist they put on my Chinese name *Xiaobai-tu* "little white rabbit". As such, there was some novelty in having me on the team and perhaps some demonstration of Zhu Furen's social status to be able to bring a foreigner on. More pragmatically, they were trying to find enough people to hold the 50 poles needed for the team and were calling up different people to see if they were in the village even after we left the fire hall and went to the village auditorium where the dragon is kept. Enough people were found, but interestingly enough, many men were not contacted to join, and the team appeared to be a collection of the fire brigade, and a few old regulars. While I was never privy to discussions of money, I did note the attention given to make sure all participants names were recorded at the start of this and the five other times I would join the dance. Zhu Jia would later tell me that people were paid 80 yuan -the equivalent to a days shift- for taking part in the dance. Members of the fire brigade discussed this activity as volunteer and unpaid, but it is unclear if instead, they counted this as being compensated for a loss of labour with a shift's pay. If money is doled out, bringing me on provided a means for those funds to be spent elsewhere.

## **6.5. Not Participating**

When Zhu Furen invited me to join the dragon dance, one thing that I tried to be sensitive to is if I was taking the chance away from others who would have otherwise liked to participate. As indicated above, my participation helped me to become more familiar with village residents whom I otherwise had minimal contact. In the final focus group interviews, the dragon dance was likewise brought up with connections of pride

and belongingness. When asked if any of her family is involved in village activities, Zhu Yu, an entrepreneur in her 40s, was quick to note that her husband would be joining the dragon dance for the lantern festival. When discussing their participation members of the fire brigade like Zhu Minsheng, who is in his 40s, claims, "Its fun. Participation is key, isn't it?" and Zhu Boqin, who is also in his 40s, notes "I have been outside [Heyang] for a long time. When I come back, I like to participate in these activities... When you are at home, it's meaningful to join in these activities... like the dragon dance".

When I brought up my concerns about others not being able to participate in private, they would be dismissed with the assertion that those who wanted to, could join. Many, however, did not participate.

Some participate in other ways. When there was a three-day food festival organized by the Village Council each day began with a large parade that would bring out many different groups from the village. Zhu Gan, who, in his 50s, operates a small restaurant where many will purchase breakfast, helped to carry a large red sedan carriage that featured a dressed-up young woman. Zhu Long was in the traditional band and would often pull the ropes for the sedan lion dance. But even here, many other residents would not take part in these events. The only member of the Lotus Cooperative, for instance, whom I observed participating in one of these village groups is Zhu Yue, who is a member of the woman's drumming team.

When I joined the dragon dance for the lantern festival in 2019, there was the usual last-minute scrambling for participants. While many people had come home for the spring festival holiday, many had already begun to leave. I was not very aware of this at the time however and was waiting for things to start outside of the village auditorium. I was talking with Zhu Geming when Zhu Weici approached us and began to suggest that Zhu Geming should join us too. He looked down, shaking his head and declined. I thought I could help convince Zhu Geming to join and said he should take my place because I am a foreigner and he is a real Heyanger. Zhu Weici corrected me saying they needed everyone and were trying to find more people, and tried to apply a little more duty-based pressure on Zhu Geming who by this time was beginning to meander off. Despite our attempts to talk him into it, Zhu Geming was adamant he was not interested and decided to leave. Zhu Weici shrugged suggesting some people have "no culture" and turned to join Zhu Gao who was on a walkie-talkie with last-minute organizations.

Later in the evening, after the dragon dance, I caught up to Zhu Geming in the slowly dispersing crowds that had gathered for the firecrackers and dragon dance. As we walked, he began telling me that some years back there had been a large white dragon in Jinyun county. He claimed it was so long that it went up and down the county streets and everyone, even he, had to go out and help carry it. It was special, not like the village one, he thought, because no matter whom you know or who you are, it couldn't happen without everyone taking part. I have no details on the dragon dances performed in the county seat itself, but this explanation seemed to serve, in part, a reason as to why he had not joined me and the others earlier. It harkens back to Zhu Sanhei's summarization of the social gap in the village raised in the previous chapter but worth repeating for emphasis, "if you trust me then I will tell you the things I am thinking, but if you do not trust me there is no use for me to speak".

## **6.6. Identifying Material Barriers but Misidentifying their Systemic Implications**

Zhu Geming is a member of the village and rarely travels out for labour, he has had an ongoing medical condition that in part, prevents him from holding a regular job. When he is in the village, I would occasionally see him collecting garbage in the east end of the village in the mornings like his mother. However, during the day he would either attend to a few small fields, rest in the senior centre's TV room or otherwise be unoccupied. He is an example of those who in the quality discourse, and as summed up in Zhu Weici's reflection, lacks "quality". Many others who do partake in the dragon dance come from similar enough difficult economic positions. However, they also represent those who have found some financial security in belonging to the fire brigade. Zhu Furen's youngest brother represents another stereotypical case of a villager who has "no quality". With minimal elementary education and perhaps some physical developmental barriers, he spends most of his days lounging around the general store at the village entrance waiting to give someone a ride in his pedicab. He is decidedly not a member of the fire brigade. When there is a dragon dance however, he will don the yellow clothing and man one of the small cymbals played at the front of the march. His familiar networks are strong enough to afford him a sense of belonging in this collectively celebrated activity.

Compared to Zhu Geming, I am a visibly foreign visiting scholar. A walking representation of the cosmopolitanism and institutionally recognized abilities that inform quality discourse. In entering the village as an invited visiting scholar to Dr Yuezhi Zhao's Heyang Institute for Rural Studies, I was immediately networked with members of the Village Council and Tourism Management Committee. These racial, class, and relational privileges provided me differential access to be brazen enough to participate in the dragon dance when offered the chance. Zhu Geming's sense of not fitting in with these people, and his evaluation of how to find dignity in being a direct producer of cultural performances like this, likewise colours his own refusal of the offer.

As discussed in the previous chapter, and presented above, the Village Council often confront barriers when they try to solicit participation in projects as diverse as signing off land usage rights to requesting involvement in cultural productions. Zhu Weici recognizes that many are in the position to require money to participate. This financial need is further evidenced by Tang Fei's recognition that when local labour is needed, the Tourism Management Committee pays the compensation in terms of "the costs of missed work". Party Secretary Zhu Renshu recognizes that there are financial disincentives to work in the village, but at the same time expresses frustration with the difficulties of being able to arrange local labour for projects:

After last year's [Village Councillor elections], I set up a system. Everyone in the village was asked to sign up. I [encouraged people to] join the village workers, because although our village wages are low, only 80 yuan a day, the work is very easy. I said, 'If you want to do it in your heart, register in the village, and the results will be recorded.' More than 200 people were recorded. When the village really needed them, I called... [the accountant]. He said that basically more than four or five people were called, and none of them would like to work. So I told them at the [elderly] meeting [we hosted the other] day, that, 'I... ask you to register with the village accountant. Maybe your speakers have registered, but did you join us when we called. On the one hand... I am not blaming you, but you must not blame our cadres, saying that we should call on whoever is close to us

In this account of how local labour is managed Zhu Renshu demonstrates the ongoing recognition of the material hardship of many villagers noting the minor compensation for village labour. At the same time, his desire to have a regularly available labour force is difficult to achieve. Residents may desire to join local projects, but like with the difficulty in recruiting for the dragon dance, they have irregular availability as men frequently leave the village for different odd jobs.

While the material reality of financialized relations is recognized, the broader systemic and ideological ramifications of this social transition do not seem to be appreciated to the same extent. This disconnect is apparent in how Zhu Weici appreciates some of the privileges afforded by the women who frequently volunteer, such as having less housework. Her language for how these privileges are reversed into barriers, however, is to associate such women with a lack of culture and education. This mirrors the language used by Zhu Tang in his depiction of raising villagers' consciousness to better appreciate environmental standards and cleanliness as an expression of self-responsibility as discussed in the previous chapter.

In as much as this subjectivity is present in the reflections of those who hold positions of leadership in Heyang, it is also rife in the reflections of ordinary residents. In reflecting on the social gap in the village Zhu Haidi reflects,

I think it is based on an individual's capabilities. We all come from our mother's wombs. For those who can rely on their parents, even that will run out after a generation or two, if after that you're desolate, then that's on you. That's an issue with your own abilities.

This sentiment is also found in Zhu Guozhi's position, as a worker in his 50s, "It's mainly because you have no ability... You can't blame others. If you can make money... where can't you buy a house?" Zhu Linda, a housewife in her 50s, pushed the idea further, connecting marketable ability with migrating out of the village in a manner similar to Zhu Weici's reflection, "To have the ability to earn money outside must make life better, right? Life must be bad when you stay at home and in the countryside". In this reflection, the rural is directly associated with a lack of acting on or benefiting from one's capabilities. Zhang Yee, in his late 20s, is one of the outside entrepreneurs to open a shop in Heyang to complement his online sales of cultural and artistic goods. He draws this connection between the countryside and a lack of capabilities more explicitly:

There is no taste of money in the countryside...Rural construction, rural entrepreneurs, all the money comes from the city. We go outside to earn money, and then come back.

In contrast to this notion that rural development comes from the city is Zhu Lian's reflection on why people migrate out of the village,



There's no future in farming. You can only make a few cents a day, that's why everyone leaves. Those with technical abilities, masons, carpenters, they stay at home. Others pretty much all leave.

This notion of who stays and who leaves was reiterated to me by Zhu Weici on a separate occasion when she spoke of why she and her husband continue to live in the village. He teaches at a local middle school, and she has a college degree in agriculture. In her account, they have skills that let them stay. She summed up her position compared to some others I commented on as, "those with capabilities will always find a way to succeed, while those who don't succeed should look harder to find a way to apply their self".

All told, this is the language of the quality discourse that has accompanied, and ideologically rationalized, the marketization of social relations in and of rural China (Day, 2013). As discussed in Chapter Two, Day (2013) argues that the quality discourse changed the relationship of the government of the CCP and Chinese state to peasants from one of support for an urban-rural worker-peasant alliance that functioned on a collective economy, to one where the CCP is responsible for enabling economic opportunity. Being successful is judged in terms of economic growth, and success or failure is thought to be a reflection of individual subjectivity and capability.

Rather than accepting this framework to understand nonparticipation as a lack, we can reframe it as positive refusal to engage in participation that does not empower. Looking at the sequence of events that surround Zhu Geming's refusal to participate in the dragon dance, we can see that the dance functions in the village in a manner akin to Jodi Dean's (2012 p.151) critique of digital networks: it taps into the desire for collectivity without delivering on that promise. For while the dance is a testament of wealth in the village and men working together, it can also be seen as a display of personal power by the members of the village council, with a temporary affective benefit of its display helping to promote a feeling of solidarity without providing lasting impacts. If Zhu Geming had agreed that evening, he would be helping the village leadership conduct their governance more effectively, being valued not for being there, but being there when other more preferable options were not. As such Zhu Geming's appreciation for a more collective approach to dragon dancing, requiring everyone from the very start, helps to demonstrate why he saw little value in this offered opportunity to participate.

## 6.7. Conclusion

As depicted in the previous chapter, Heyang is a village experiencing the dramatic ramifications of the marketization of the national economy. The CCP rolled decollectivization out under a policy of individual household responsibility. The sudden release of rural labour and ingenuity -such as the Jinyun speciality for raising ducks- has helped to bring capital into rural locations for development. It has also made capital a *sine qua non* for even participating in the national economy, let alone develop alongside it. The influx of money has contributed to a social division based on a dual mechanism of devaluing agricultural labour and prescribing value into capabilities verified by success in market economies. Where the last chapter detailed how this had material impacts in terms of the politics of local housing, such as having collective interests deprioritized, this chapter demonstrates how these divisions become inscribed into broader cultural understandings of belonging and choosing to participate.

Like Yan'an in Wu's study, Heyang presents a substantial case study to understand rural cultural production today. Heyang is host to specific state-supported cultural production, in its case heritage protection harkening back to China's imperial, rather than socialist, history, and can boast of an active and vibrant cultural scene with locals engaged in different production from form paper cutting, to galas and dragon dancing. As has generally been identified in the literature, the CCP and the state actively support this cultural production. In Heyang this support comes from the Village Party Secretary, Zhu Renshu's leadership, the Village Council and Zhu Weici specifically, and the Tourism Management Committee's projects more generally, such as with the grand opening of new commercial sections of the tourist site.

The ideological authority that is coupled with top-down support for cultural productions in Heyang is not explicitly connected to the legitimacy of the Chinese state or CCP. If anything, they fit more with notions of belonging to a specific locality -to be a Heyanger- within China. The notions of belonging and participation that correspond with this identity, however, are fractured on lines that intersect between class and social networks. While there is an expressed desire for comradeship, few are engaging on the shared political goals of comrades. As such involvement in cultural production presents a particular dynamic that both reinforces and challenges the current discourse of quality. Identification with market failures, stresses and a lack of institutionally recognized

knowledge, a lack of quality, corresponds with a lack of the belonging needed to support participation. Social relations intersect with this, as demonstrated with the fire-brigade members and other villagers who join the dragon dance, in part, because these bonds provide a sensation of mutuality. One does not need to have cultural awareness to dress up and carry a dragon, but one must feel part of the wider group.

The residents of Heyang accept the activities promoted by the Village Council for cultural production. When they do not participate as performers, villagers of all stripes involve their selves as spectators to one degree or another. Non-participation in these cases was not a rejection of decisions made, nor explicitly with not being involved in the decision-making process. Instead, it is manifest through material and ideological barriers reinforced by the economies that empower some to put these performances on and require others to focus on their family's wellbeing.

It is at this point that we can reengage Wu's (2015) theory of "hyper-rural" as productions of rural imagery that do not reproduce rural livelihoods. Fashion shows and galas require personal financial and time investments that people struggling to fend off poverty mostly cannot afford. Appreciate, yes, but from a distance that does not involve them as active or direct producers of beauty and its standards. Participation in the dragon dance may be compensated with a loss of a days' wages. The ability to perform it, however, is dependent upon having enough working men at the village, something that fire-brigade labour is not able to provide as only about ten of the members regularly work with others filling in semi-regularly. It is therefore grounded in rural livelihoods representing part of rural China's collectivist cultural history. As much as this is part of its grandeur, a long dragon, it is also a barrier that conflicts with the contemporary individualization of the village economy presenting organizers with the struggle of finding enough participants. Cultural production relates to people being able to share time. This time is strictly defined as leisure and voluntary time, however, and thus an affordance of time and wealth. In the case of the dragon dance, the main organizers and participants belong to the same labour organization, the village fire brigade, and as such employment obligations are enfolded into the ability/sense of duty to participate. Where there is no effort on behalf of leaders to provide such flexibility, participation is mostly represented by those with wealth.

The surface-level reality that Wu (2015) depicts of hyper-rurality intersects, is itself a manifestation of how the quality discourse can lead to a surface-level appreciation of the material realities of struggling against poverty but forecloses appreciations of the broader systemic impacts of such struggles. The result is that there is a village, and cultural projections of village life, but these projections are not reinvestments into the village's collective supports. These events, like those detailed in Chapter Five, appear to point out increasing postsocialist conditions in Heyang.

The following chapter looks at how many residents and village leaders recognize the need to share resources and time. It shows how the quality discourse is incomplete and can be worked around. It follows how a recognition of the importance of shared time is produced and reinforced at the grassroots level of ordinary citizens - especially the elderly who spent their formative years growing up through China's period of high socialism. It then tracks how Heyang's Village Council is taking actions to address the current need to reinvest in collective support for the village's residents in a move indicative of politics that have communism as their horizon.

# Chapter 7. The Elderly as Leaders in Sharing Time

## 7.1. Introduction

The previous chapters have helped to depict a context where:

- There is differential access to digital technologies, and technological changes in Heyang's media ecology accompany shifts in China's national economy
- Economic change distanced leaders from the conditions that contextualize the contributions of those who rely on the village in their individual struggles against poverty.
- Economic distance is experienced as social distance in terms of cultural productions supported by the village collective.

This chapter identifies where efforts are being made to mitigate increased experiences of social distancing and resulting struggles with the political, economic and cultural disenfranchisement highlighted in the previous chapters. Coincidentally this is occurring at both the grassroots level in terms of daily practices, primarily by those over 60 and officially recognized as "elderly", and in top-down efforts by village leaders to address elderly vulnerability and collective needs. Where the previous two chapters looked into social participation distinct from a detailed analysis of technology and timekeeping, they lay out the social ramifications of the current dominate system of individualized cheap technologies that help enable a person to be responsible to social commitments as regulated in a market economy society. The present chapter explores innovation in the use of these technologies to produce the shared time identified with loudspeakers during the collective era. I then reflect on how this temporality is expressed in other ways such as in socialization at the senior centre, village meetings and the hiring of a local musician who is synergizing cultural production within Heyang with its tourism business.

## 7.2. The Elderly

While culturally revered, the elderly represent a significant group of China's left-behind population (Ploeg ye Pan 2014). Officially one is recognized as a senior at the age of sixty, so this means there are many in Heyang which has residents in their late 80s and 90s. Of the total registered population of Heyang, 3780 people Zhu Renshu

claims that roughly 600 of the people residing in Heyang are senior citizens, or as Zhu Yong says “the elderly are the main residents” left living here. As discussed previously, unable to compete in labour markets, many elderly remain in their rural homes and become primary caregivers to grandchildren while parents leave for work. Added to this, when many people in their forties and fifties spoke of the reasons they returned to Heyang, a common factor was to take care of especially elderly parents living in the village. The elderly therefore represent a core demographic around which village life is constituted while at the same time demonstrating many of the same characteristics of lacking quality and not being able to contribute to future developments.

This demographic represents some of the starkest division in the village. It includes both those who have found economic success and invested it in their retirements in the village, as well as those who have never left Heyang and have only engaged in farming and day labour. Where wealth in Heyang is generally expressed in terms of living in new or old heritage homes, many elderly whose children have built new homes continue to reside in their traditional family homes. Zhu Weici, who is a primary caretaker for her elderly relatives, spends much of her time in the family’s well maintained traditional 18-room courtyard, preparing meals for the family here and frequenting it through the day. While it lacks modern facilities like toilets, “this is where they grew up and feel comfortable” Zhu Weici reasons, suggesting that the stairs in new homes presented a barrier for many. More than barriers or simple familiarity, there is also a sense of collectivity retained with neighbours continuing to keep accounts of one another in daily interactions within and around courtyards and other homes built up in the now designated protected heritage area, the traditional heart of the village.

Especially in warm and sunny weather, residents in these older parts of Heyang, but not in the newer Eastern section, will have light meals of a bowl of rice and mix of vegetables, standing outside their doorways. This is what I observed in 2015 when I noted how in Yanshanxia people took their breakfasts while congregating around the loudspeaker above a doorway. When that space changed with the disrepair of the speaker, other doorways, usually those where neighbours are collecting to do manual plastic assembly together, now serve as popular areas to find someone eating at mealtime. Farmers and the elderly often wake up with the sunrise and breakfast between 6 and 7 am, lunch from 10:45-12 noon and supper from 4:30-6 pm. These expressions of collective eating are accompanied by the custom greeting in Jinyun

dialect “have you eaten?” (*rzai gu mei?*). Similar to the standard Beijing greeting attributed to post Great-Leap famines (Cendrowski, 2015), the greeting and standard replied of “eaten” (*rzai gua*) or “not yet” (*hai mei*) depict ritualistic repetitions grounded both in the everyday routine of maintaining collective familiarity.

### **7.3. The Senior Centre as an Initial Point of Access to the Field**

Another means that the elderly can maintain a sense of collective familiarity is at Heyang’s senior centre. This complex is a two-story building along the north wall which encompasses a series of four rooms and washrooms on the north end. Two walls of the same height run along the east and west with doors serving as entrances. Along the inside of the East wall, there are some posters and equipment from the fire brigade introducing them and the general importance of fire safety. A long hall on the south encloses a sizeable open-air square in the middle that is filled from 7-8 pm in the evenings with women doing nightly square dancing.

When I first arrived in Heyang in 2015, I was unfamiliar with rural China. I had only ever visited the occasional village on a tourist outing, and a guided tour of a few model villages along the border shared by Zhejiang and Anhui provinces in 2010 conducted by an international summer school hosted by the University of Nanjing. This excursion was my first time to become exposed to the daily routines and rhythms of village life and negotiate village space as a long-term visitor (this first stay, as noted earlier was slightly less than three weeks). At this point in time, I had access to the bed-and-breakfast where we stayed and whatever I could identify as a public space to conduct observations. As such, I walked around the cobblestone and concrete streets and alleys of the village listening to and seeing the material and social environment. In 2018 I would develop more personal relations and familiarity so that I would be invited into homes and would walk through the semi-private courtyards to gain a much richer appreciation of life. Until I reached that level of familiarity and continuing through my fieldwork, I found the senior centre to be the kind of semi-public space that an outsider like myself could observe media use and interactivity in the village.

In 2015 the long hall on the south end was divided into two primary functions: a flatscreen tv was on the east side that had a cable connection and would be used to

watch several various programs especially galas and signing competitions. The west side also had a flatscreen tv, but this was connected to a DVD/VCD player that would be used to view mostly cultural revolution era revolutionary operas and recorded performances of more traditional Chinese opera. Both televisions displayed subtitles along with their audio. The middle of the hall was crowded with upwards to 60 chairs, and benches pointed at the separate screens with the middle three rows a scattering of turned chairs depending on how they had last been used. Upon entering the mix of the audio and general murmur of small side, discussions made it hard to distinguish anything with clarity. However, once seated, one could pay attention to the audio of the screen they were facing.

I tried to spend at least an hour or so a day here but would follow everyone out at 11 am when most returned home for lunch, or at 430pm when again most would vacate for dinner. In my visits, I found that there were usually 20-40 people in the hall at a time. Usually slightly more than half would watch the cable tv broadcasts, while those watching the DVDs included more women who usually comprised a quarter to a third of the audience at any one time. Where many would leave at mealtimes, people came in more sporadically and often on their own. Upon entering, they might nod to a particularly close associate and sit and talk a bit, or simply sit on their own or into small clusters of two and three people. Those who sit at the back are more likely to talk amongst their selves. At the same time, others are as apt to nod off a little as they appeared to be engaged by the aired programming.

On the other side, most of the doors were closed shut. I noted a Ping-Pong table in a large centre room but did not see it in use. To the east is a small long room where two square wooden tables are set up with chess boards. Each table has four wooden stools, which would usually be occupied by two players, observers and there would often be a crowd of 6-8 others standing and commenting on the games. The occupants of this room were primarily composed of men and would include not only the elderly but other men in the 40s and 50s. I did not frequent this room often or for prolonged periods because of the heavy cigarette smoke that hangs in the air for most of the day. Men would occasionally smoke an idle cigarette in the south hall but would as often as not walk out into the square before lighting up. The wide, open entrance to the hall also provides enough circulation keeping the smoke from accumulating.



In 2015 I was an object of curiosity, and my entrance to the south hall would garnish looks that would often turn into long or frequent looks over at me, an unfamiliar presence. I was rarely approached, and much of the conversation was either indistinct or in the Jinyun dialect. After the research team held our introductory meeting with the village and we had begun conducting the focus group interviews, some residents would identify me as part of Dr Zhao's group, informing others who were not involved in the research that I was a Canadian. There were still looks, sometimes almost asking, why would this young foreigner spend his time at the senior centre.

I would not spend time in the senior centre again until I returned for my primary fieldwork in 2018. By this time the south hall was entirely dedicated to the east-side TV with cable broadcasting (see figure 11). Where seats had faced the other way, there were benches and desks stacked up as if for storage. The DVD/VCD player was moved to a small room on the north end. Here there were six rows of wooden benches that could seat about six people each (see figure 12). Along the East end is a row of lawn chairs perpendicular to the benches. The first two rows of seating in front of the tv place on the far north wall are also lawn chairs. I would also learn that the room with the Ping-Pong table is used by a choir composed of older ladies and taught by Zhu Tang in the evenings.



*Figure 11 The senior centre TV room*

Photo by author



*Figure 12 The senior centre DVD room*

Photo by author

In the mornings, a small group of elderly men will usually form around the tourism centre close to the back entrance of the senior centre. They will wait until the senior centre is opened at 9 pm. Between 9 and 10 pm, the various rooms of the centre will begin to fill according to similar ratios that I observed in 2015. By 10:30 am some people will usually start a slow pre-lunch trickle out of the centre. It is relatively empty between 11:30 am and 1 pm with some lone people, usually one of the younger unemployed men occasionally sitting watching tv during the noon hour. The afternoon is generally busier than the morning, especially the chess room. By 4 pm, however, people are again checking the time, telling each other it is time to go, with the place emptied by 4:30pm. In the evening the DVD room will be in less demand and sometimes goes unused. There will usually be between four and ten men in the TV room and a crowd in the Chess room, the activity will pick up at 7 pm when the choir starts their practice, and other women gather for square dancing. By 8 pm, these activities will be wrapped up, and Zhu Wenming will lock up the doors for the evening.

#### **7.4. Building Relations with Seniors.**

I returned to Heyang in 2017 from March 26 to April 14. This time was spent mostly on observation from the perspective of a visiting tourist as I was in the accompaniment of my mother, partner and infant daughter. As noted in the introduction,

having my partner, who is Chinese, and daughter with me proved to be an essential step in my relationship-building efforts in the village.

During this mid-spring season, the weather had begun to heat up and was in the mid-20s with lots of sun. My partner and I dressed our daughter in light, loose clothing not wanting to overheat her. This, however, is not the custom in Heyang. Most infants under a year were still being bundled up against possible chills and cold winds. As a result, when my family would walk around the village, and especially in the early evening when everyone was out eating or sharing company after a meal, we would frequently be stopped. The people stopping us were old ladies with concern and authority, sometimes speaking half in the local Jinyun dialect and being translated into Mandarin by their adult children: “How could you dress your baby in such a way?” “She will catch a cold!” “Bundle her up tight like this...”. We would stop and listen and bring out a light blanket we had and pull it tight as shown when approached, but these efforts would often be temporary catching the notice of other elderly women who would come and tell us what to do all over again.

This interaction was a fundamental shift for my exposure to the village because while some elderly women had participated in the 2015 focus groups, they were a section of the population that I was largely cut off from. Generally, language barriers would make it easier for me to speak with their adult children, and many elderly simply wouldn't feel the need to say much to me. Upon seeing a child they felt was in need however, many were motivated to intervene. Identifying my wife as Chinese (and not knowing she couldn't speak the local dialect until she spoke with her northern accent) they acted out based on an understanding of social relations that situated them with power and the privilege to say something. This reversed many of the other cultural semiotics that usually positioned me, a mid-30s white male, who was possibly a tourist but seen as “definitely knowing things so what could I tell you about anything”; as I was more than once rebuffed by a resident declining to participate in a small interview.

These interventions were remembered by a few of the women when I returned in 2018 and helped to affirm continuity in my presence in the village. More importantly, though they influenced my methodological approaches to engaging elderly Heyang residents, to demonstrate some of my own vulnerabilities and need for local knowledge and coming to appreciate the development of the village from their vantage. One means of doing this

was through learning the local dialect. When I first learned the local *Zrai gu mei?* Have you eaten? greeting I was pleasantly surprised to find that my rough approximations of the phrase were more readily recognized by the elderly, than by other residents in the village, who were expecting me to be speaking Mandarin Chinese. By using this greeting I was able to move up from eye contact, nods and waves, to spoken greetings with many elderly who in turn would often invite me to sit with them if they were spending their time with others along a cobblestone path, or doorway. Many of the conversations that would grow would begin through me asking for help to expand my vocabulary by pointing and asking names of things and then how aspects of the village have changed over their lifetimes. Through a combination of demonstrating my efforts in being a regular daily face and learning the dialect, I was able to achieve a minor level of familiarity if not intimacy with many elderly residents. Upon the basis of this familiarity, I would work to establish the limits of my knowledge and help to frame our relationships with them as power holders.

In the give and take of the knowledge exchange, I would regularly share accounts of Canada to build a conversation out of comparisons and addressing mutual curiosity about life in other places. Often my position of being a university student interested in how people use technology to communicate was misinterpreted with the expectation that I could troubleshoot technical problems. At times I could help with minor issues of resetting a phone, resigning into an account, or turning up the volume on a phone's settings. This was the case with Zhu Mai who has a small iPhone 4 look-alike with WeChat because many of the tourists who frequent the little shop she runs prefer to use mobile payments. On nearly a weekly basis she would ask me to help her view if a payment had gone through, or what her total account was, and so forth. In other cases, I was unable to offer any assistance, such as on September 20th 2018, when Zhu Delun, who is in his 80s, invited me to sit in his entrance one morning. Situated on the outside of Yanshanxia Zhu Delun has a large and relatively new four-story home. He, in his 80s lives here with his wife and their children, work outside of the village. While sitting and talking intermittently about our families his wife, Zhu Huan would come out to offer me some juice, little cookies, seeds and other things which she left for us on a small table between the short bamboo chairs we sat upon. When I began to say my goodbyes, Zhu Huan tried to give me some of the cookies to take and brought me into her kitchen. Here she showed me an old and worn landline phone. It seemed no sound would come from

the phone's speaker. Zhu Huan showed me a small plastic box that was connected between the phone and the wall explaining this had been installed last time, and she thought it was a problem with that equipment. I fumbled around a little until we all agreed that her daughter could call the phone company to come and take a look. More frequently, I would be recognized as a visiting English teacher running classes in the village for someone's child, or grandchild and as often as not be asked to speak with children if they were present. This assisted with the familiarity with which small groups of residents would welcome me to join them if only to sit and listen while others continued their conversations.

## **7.5. Elderly Mobile Phone Use**

As introduced in Chapter Four, there is differential access to technology in Heyang. In 2015 this division was most evident in the distinction between who could afford cable television and have access to locally produced news and other television broadcasts, and those who opted for satellite television. In 2018 when most residents got television packages through mobile phone data plans, I found the division was being manifest in a new way. Now division is apparent in the type of mobile phones owned with most elderly residents owning second-generation (2G) talk and text mobile phones. As such, these phones are colloquially known as 'old people's phones'.

Heyang's Village Council have been shown to adapt to the use of digital social media platforms like WeChat for organizing participation in the village. As discussed in Chapter Four, this leaves elderly residents out of the loop from, knowledge about local emergencies, to being able to help children with homework offered organized on digital platforms.

A discussion with Liu Andi regarding his position as a guard at the elementary school, helps to shed further light on how this differentiation plays out. When I asked him if he used WeChat or other applications for financial transactions with his own smartphone he shrugged, "That's mostly for younger people. Sometimes I have money there, and then I will send it to my daughter."

When I asked how he would collect money in his WeChat account, he continued.

Well all the teachers here are young and from the city. They don't carry cash. So sometimes if there is a fee for a school activity, students will bring in cash... not every family can pay this with a digital transfer right, so they bring cash, and the teachers can't make change. So, they will come to us, and I can give them some small bills, and they will transfer the amount to me.

While perhaps a minor inconvenience, this additional activity demonstrates how students of caretakers who do not use mobile phones are put out of synchronization with the general operations of a contemporary rural classroom.

This story of differential access to mobile phones, however, is not merely a story of rural populations becoming ever more defined through frameworks of lacking in comparison to urban-orientated standards (Rist and Camiller, 2015 p.9). Indeed it is also not a story of how technologies developed and designed first for urbanization and displaying elements of what Raymond Williams identifies as "mobile privatization" (2003 p.19), are necessarily used to reproduce the conditions for which they were intended. As introduced before, these "old people's phones" have an application that announces the hour. The audio announcement of, "The time in Beijing is" on 2g phones', recalls an era when such announcements on wired radio loudspeakers were *de reigeur* and formed the shared audio environment used to organize collective labour.

The first time I noticed this announcement was on September 28th when I was talking with Zhu Kaizuo and a group of mostly elderly neighbours. They were relaxing from their farming, pedicab driving and housework by sitting outside in the late summer evening warmth. In the middle of a conversation based on teaching me about China's history since collectivism, with the point, that past times were not harmful but lower levels of development that must be passed through, I suddenly heard "the time in Beijing is eight o'clock" and half a minute later "the time in Beijing is 20:00" come from Zhu Kaizuo's pocket. My startlement disrupted our earlier conversation, and one man and a lady showed me their "old peoples' phones" telling me that the phones come preprogrammed to make the announcement. Our conversation then shifted to the use of phones to which all present attested to a variation of the notion "they are good for checking the time".

When I inquired how participants of all ages check the time in focus groups in 2019, most answered, with their phone. When asked when they will check the time most often in a day, the majority answer came out as mealtimes. Mealtimes are when people would associate their selves as being busy, such as those responsible for school children

indicated in Chapter Six. Likewise, I observed that the hourly announcements would more often be preceded or followed by visual checks of the time on phones around 11 am and 4 pm, key times that the elderly would return home for lunch and dinner (10:30-11:15 am and 4-4:30 pm). To be busy, in terms of coordinating with other people, was often associated with the notion of needing to be aware of the time (also see Schultz, Luhmann, and Giddens as cited in Cheng 2017 p 140). This connection of being busy to knowing a precise time in the day is not linked to the business of farm labour par say, but social interactions from meetings and meals during collectivization to school, labour and meals today. That is, the requirement to be in particular places at particular times because of social obligations. Unlike the other considerations, meals are not a specific time, but, as introduced above regarding the local greeting “have you eaten”, part of an expression of collective wellbeing.

This reproduction of Maoist loudspeaker announcements of the time then is not merely a means for individual people who have poor eyesight to know the time, as reasoned by participants in focus group interviews, or necessarily a way to be responsible to social obligations. It is also functioning to reproduce, if at a minor level, the mass line temporality of shared time identified in the use of the loudspeakers in Chapter Four. The temporality of this shared time is produced by grounding people in the same space and time. This positioning enables a mutuality based on recognizing the humanity of those whom one is with, in terms of beings with basic needs for wellbeing. This is played out through minor daily ritualistic communication promoting a “socialist time” of the daily synchronization of society for collective wellbeing that Mihelj and Huxtable (2015) distinguish from a more robust “revolutionary time” of the socialist future being inscribed in everything in the contemporary moment.

My afternoon visit to Heyang’s senior centre on October 13th, 2018, helps to demonstrate the sequence of this temporality. There is nothing unique about this day other than its descriptiveness of daily routines. The following is from my journal notes from that morning.

Zhu Wenming, 87, wears a light purple fleece coat and sits bent over a small tin of small square sheets of thick silver paper; folding them without needing to look, into the shape of ingots, a traditional sacrifice to burn in the memory of ancestors in this southeastern Chinese village. Zhu Wenming, like a few others in the room, is only half paying attention

to the grainy 1960s era movie playing in front of us on a video compact disc (VCD) player hooked up to a flatscreen TV. All told there are 13 of us sitting in our coats scattered about on four rows of brown wooden benches and a dozen or so lawn chairs. I stand out, not only for my foreignness but also my age as everyone else in the room at that time was well over 70 years old and had lived through the entirety of China's history of socialism. Zhu Cai, another member of the audience, leans over to his neighbour Zhu Hong, to clarify what had just happened in the last scene. He does not hear so clearly, and his Mandarin is not as sharp as it used to be. Zhu Hong replies in the local Jinyun County dialect. I manage to catch the phrase "*gui ke*" (return home) but am unsure because I do not understand how it fits the movie's storyline. A few moments later, a feminine electronic voice calls out at the volume of a phone ring, "The time in Beijing is 4 pm". Before it finishes three other hourly alarms go off, and two more go off in the seconds after, all with the same, "The time in Beijing is...". These collective alarms ring from their individual mobile phones. Zhu Wenming turns to her cousin Zhu Ling, pats her hand and says that it is time to go home and eat dinner.

A few people had already left, and others go in dribs and drabs with only four of us staying until the end of the disc. Zhu Deng, the man who usually takes care of these things, ejects the disc, puts it in its case, and presses the VCD player and TV power buttons off. He looks at me still sitting with my laptop typing away my observations and barks with smiling jocularly, "Time to eat". I follow him out to the courtyard of the village Senior Center, empty at this point except for us. Zhu Wenming waits outside and closes the door after Zhu Deng nods that it is empty. He then heads off for a dinner already prepared by his daughter in law. Zhu Wenming, in contrast, heads to where she lives alone to eat a small meal of rice and veggies from a dish she had prepared earlier.

The shared time signalled through phone announcements of the hour is only a minor aspect of the collectivity shared by seniors at the centre. Zhu Wenming likes going to the centre because here she can meet and converse with other people. She told me she will ask after a few others who, like her, live on their own. She tells me that if she does not see a regular for a day or two, she will go and find out what has happened. When I asked her the last time this happened, she said her cousin Zhu Dan had just gone to the city to visit her children, and Zhu Wenming had forgotten about being informed about the trip. She is beginning to lose hearing in her left ear, and this, she explains makes it harder to follow the movies which she is fond of watching. When I asked her if the



subtitles help, she gave me a bit of a wily smile and with a wave of her hand said it doesn't matter. She can enjoy them regardless. While observing the audience dynamics in the DVD room, I noted how many elderly at different points might point at the screen and talk to their neighbours in the local dialect. I later learned there were often explanations of scenes or simple reminders of who particular characters are as viewers would assist one another to mitigate failing sight, hearing and memory. This conversation is on top of other small side discussions of idle banter or catching up that are also common to the TV hall.

In the senior centre, and through mobile phone reminders of the time via announcements that recall collective action, elders in Heyang are demonstrating efforts to share circumstances that enable recognition of basic needs and opportunities for mutual assistance. From reminders of meals to helping in the battle against the loss of sight, hearing and memory, the frailties of being human over time and often without family at home, are seen as a reason to collect and be together.

## **7.6. The Meeting**

As identified in Chapter Five, one of the reasons why ordinary Heyang residents often feel a distance with village leaders is because of asymmetrical information conditions. As identified in Chapter Four and above, the elderly are particularly prone to having a lack of information as they are not integrated into the digital networks that are becoming primary ways for village leaders to communicate and organize village affairs. In this situation of asymmetrical information, rumours start, and this increases the distance and mistrust between people within the village.

Rumours, regarding the Village Council's stoppage of annual pension payments of 100 yuan for everyone with a village residency over the age of 60, sprouted up in late 2018 and early 2019. The Village Council had made these payments with a fund established by a handful of entrepreneurs from the Zhu Clan Association. According to Village Party Secretary Zhu Renshu, "a large part of them [villagers] said that the money had either been used up for us cadres or that we were reluctant to give it to them". The decision to stop the payments, according to him, is that there was concern at higher county levels of government about money being given out by family lineages in this individualized manner. In response to top-down policies, Heyang's Village Council worked with the Zhu

family clan association (lead by Zhu Renshu's brother) to pool these funds for a renovation of the senior centre to include a cafeteria and other facilities for elderly residents. To address the rumours of mismanaged funds and to bring everyone on the same page there was a village meeting held on the morning of February 15th 2019.

Zhu Jiao, who, in her 60s, is a senior, and Zhu Ruolan who cares for her elderly inlaws, explain how they heard about the meeting:

Zhu Jiao: Notice from the senior classes. Notice on the blackboard... [then word spread] You tell me, I'll tell you.

Zhu Ruolan: Usually, there is a monitor in an elderly class. The monitor sticks an advertisement or a blackboard to inform them when to go to the meeting. They will know that the elderly are all concentrated there...

Zhu Jiao: I heard about it [on the day of the meeting], some didn't. I was [that way] to boil some water.

Their depiction shows a general appreciation for how information usually spreads in the village from officially posted announcements to word of mouth. This account is particularly interesting because it highlights the senior centre as a place where information is posted and shared, indicating that seniors can sometimes become prioritized for information dissemination. However, this instance of being informed is intertwined with space and thus the mobility to attend the senior centre. Their reception of the content of the meeting did not focus on the issue of the non-payments. They focused in on how the village's development plan was laid out and how Village Councillors appealed to them to invest their selves in such efforts by helping to keep the village and its facilities tidy. This dialogue ended with a self-assertion by Zhu Jiao, "I'm sure my door is clean. The front door and the road are clean. It's not dirty" appraising her own sense of self-responsibility for the village's collective presentation to tourists.

Zhu Heng in his late 60s expressed his concerns with direct reference to the stoppage of old-age pensions,

To us, the 100 kuai really doesn't matter, right? But if we are kept in the dark, and suddenly we can't even get ten kuai, then, of course, everyone will start talking, of course, we'll be saying, the more we develop, the poorer we're getting; the *guminju* [ancient dwellings] is now the *kuminju* [bitter dwellings], this is how this saying came to be

While acknowledging the communication problems with this issue, Zhu Heng was also impressed with how the village meeting to address the concerns was conducted:

Well just t[the other day], Heyang held that large seniors' assembly right? This was actually quite well done. Do you know why? All citizens above the age of 60 who attended represented their entire family... They [the leaders] explained everything very well to the seniors. I do admit that this was done very well... Things/issues that relate to our families/households, we were able to hear directly and know how to proceed.

Zhu Heng's appreciation of the meeting then was not merely an issue of finding out what is happening, but that the broader content of the meeting highlighted how elderly could and would fit into the ongoing development of the village.

The meeting itself was held in the same large village auditorium that is host to events such as the spring festival gala and home to the now-defunct village broadcasting room. In attending the meeting with my research colleague Xiaoxing, we found that it was filled to capacity with people standing in the back of the room (see figure 13). Party Secretary, Village Council Leader and Zhu Nuo, who is also on the Village Council, sat on stage behind a desk and talked with the audience, mostly in the local Jinyun dialect. There was a bit of a casual atmosphere as people from the audience would sometimes call out, leading to some back and forth and then shared laughter by the audience and leaders alike.



*Figure 13 Villagers in attendance at village meeting to discuss seniors' issues*

Photo by author

In reflecting on the meeting, Zhu Renshu exclaimed that he was surprised at the large turnout of the meeting. Only 60 to 70 people were expected to show up, not a few hundred. Indeed, as Zhu Ho a Village Council member in his 60s had reflected in his focus group, “Now when you hold a villagers' meeting, there are fewer people in the daytime. They all have to work”. Show up they did, however, and all agreed that it helped to bring relations closer with Zhu Renshu musing about holding such meetings on a more regular basis. Zhu Renshu also explained that while he tries to know what is happening with Heyang, it is not until a public forum like this is produced that many individual issues can be identified as collective concerns. He claims that he had learned a lot from the responses of those present.

One elderly resident who did not attend the meeting is Zhu Tang, whose explanation for his lack of attendance helps to explain how so much participation was generated:

He wants to pay 30 yuan per person so that many old people will go (laugh). If you don't have money, how many people will go? I won't go either. I didn't go because I couldn't get that 30 yuan. My household registration is based here... So I didn't attend.

While born in Heyang, Zhu Tang obtained an urban household registration as a result of his work as a teacher. His exclusion from this issue is therefore intertwined with the different privileges he has afforded by choosing to switch household status. He indicated as such by couching this response with the reflection that he does not receive payment for the work that he does for the senior centre and lives comfortably on his retirement pension.

The point that the Village Council felt it important enough to share information with village members to pay for less than three hours attendance, at a rate that is less than a day's wages, but also far more than what might be made in a day spent on plastic goods assembly, demonstrates a particular appreciation of social relations in Heyang today – money matters. In recognizing and highlighting aspects of senior's involvement in the development of the village, they were able to construct a sentimentality of mutuality. This meeting left participants, at least in the days that followed, with a distinct sense of shared involvement in official development plans. A subjectivity that contrasts starkly with the general sentiment of feeling distant.

Liberal participation theory might point to the above efforts as an example of propaganda and leaders playacting villagers rather than seriously involving them in decision-making processes. However, from the vantage point of producing what Kaneff (2004) identified as the reflective quality of “socialist temporality”, the way the core issue of seniors' wellbeing was related to these general concerns represents a recognition of collective needs and worth. The plan to develop the senior centre addresses the recognized need that there are elderly without families and the importance of addressing their individualized needs, that were not being met with the annual pensions, through a collective solution. From this perspective, the meeting, and the senior centre more generally, promote a sense of collectivity in hardship and wellbeing. This is part of what Buck-Morss (2010) claims is the socialist commitment to share time, in this sense helping to provide collective realization of material security that others in the village have achieved.

## **7.7. The Tearoom and the Musician**

It is worthwhile to note that the above meeting did not involve members of the Tourism Management Committee. The money at issue was not from the development of the village's tourism, but rather from wealthy entrepreneurs who have made their wealth in business outside of Heyang. At the same time, the meeting helps to demonstrate the distinct relationship between the Village Council and the Tourism Management Committee as Village Council members informed villagers of plans and current difficulties conducting positive public relations for the projects that the Tourism Management Committee oversee. By using the local Jinyun dialect, the Village Council members were able to maintain an informal atmosphere that would not be possible from the Tourism Management Committee members who, while from the county speak with slightly different variations, and were never observed as speaking in anything but standard Mandarin in their official capacities.

This is not to say that the Tourism Management Committee has not taken actions itself which recognize the importance of both elderly and sharing time. The best example of their contribution to the opportunity to share time is not based on generating a temporality where collective hardships are used to motivate commonality in action, but rather a complementary characteristic of creating community. While less intrinsically connected to the processes of producing rural livelihood, it does provide an example of

what future actions to promote sharing time, might look like in the context of Heyangs tourism development and the ongoing interrelations of urban and rural co-development.

In early November the Tourism Management Committee hired a local musician, Liu Meng. Known as a “one man orchestra” he plays a self designed instrument with drums, gongs and bells that he calls an “instrument frame” (*yueqi jiazi*) Liu Meng is in his 70s. He is mostly blind with a sunken jaw that emphasizes his age. He was hired as part of the Tourism Management Committee’s effort to bring local talent into the village to add to the villages’ attractions. His place in the village, however, was not entirely planned out. For the first two weeks, he sat on the covered benches which form the entrance to Heyang’s tourism centre just after the main village entrance gate. I would find him here surrounded by a group of four to ten other villagers, mostly elderly men, but also a few women. Many of these people brought their own Erhu (a two stringed Chinese fiddle) with them at times listening and at times playing in on different traditional folk songs. Liu Meng’s presence brought these people together in a common activity in a way that wasn’t present in the village before. It additionally had a positive impact on tourist interactions as many would form groups around the performers listening and even joining in to sing when a melody was familiar, or after someone would shout a recommendation.

Liu Meng’s location shifted by the middle of the month from the tourism centre’s entrance to a teashop that Zhu Chunhua, an entrepreneur in her 50s and her husband have renovated in their ancestral home along Da Yuan Street and had opened along with the rest of the new shops on November 6th. This teashop is wide open along the street and features a small stage with lights and sound equipment that was changed and upgraded throughout November. Zhu Chunhua invited Liu Meng to play in her shop, and she soon acquired a pair of microphones and books of traditional folk songs for people to read and sing from. During this time Zhu Chunhua asked to apprentice with Liu Meng and became a regular player with the group demonstrating her musical ability on various instruments (see figure 14). In this setting, other residents became regular visitors. These visitors are as varied as Zhu Bo, an entrepreneur in her 50s, who worked with Jinyun’s cultural department in her youth and now enjoys singing in high operatic keys and Zhu An, the security guard, who can be found in the tea room in the late afternoon belting out a strong baritone accompaniment to the instruments. Not only bringing

villagers together, the teashop has become a regular stop for tour groups who curiously watch on or after flipping through some music join in to sing and drink tea.



*Figure 14 Local musician playing in tea shop*

Photo by author

This example speaks to the vitality inscribed into culture through direct production. The cultural talent that is valued, displayed and tested here, however, is grounded in specifically rural aesthetics of amateur folk music. Residents with wealth can invest their cultural leisure time in pursuits linked to the geographies which they live. What is more is that the synergetic nature of Liu Meng playing in Zhu Chunhua's teashop is that there is both revenue being generated for local business, but also there is a reproduction of cultural ability with regular practices and apprenticeship. Thus this example demonstrates where a lean into not only rural aesthetics but elderly talent as a means to build for future cultural growth, exemplifies some of the grounding that Wu's concept of hyper-rurality, as a critique of other top-down sponsored cultural production, seeks to realize.

## **7.8. Conclusion**

In the above examples of mobile phone announcements of the hour, the social space of the senior centre, the village meeting to address resident pensions, and the hiring of a musician who has helped to invigorate artistic production in Heyang, we find elements of shared time. This shared time, to a greater or lesser extent, reflects the

socialist temporality produced via the mass line. It exhibits characteristics of synchronizing rhythm to common activity, reflectivity on collective hardship, and belonging in being a direct producer of life in Heyang. All told these examples of shared time point to efforts aimed at addressing well being from material basics to cultural enrichment and engaged participation.

These examples stand out because they all gravitate around the elderly and express means of social organization informed by the socialist ideals of its past collective economy. In as much as these practices are a combination of bottom-up and top-down practices, from using the audio time app to hosting a village wide meeting, they indicate that China is not a post-socialist state where the government has retreated from its socialist past in all but rhetoric. Rather they point to the vitality of socialist ideals for confronting capitalist development, and help to contextualize a growth in socialist minded responses to China's capitalistic reform-era developmental model from Bo Xilai's mass line experiments in Chongqing (Huang, 2010; Zhao, 2012) to an increase in villages recollectivizing their economies in Zhejiang province.



## Chapter 8. Conclusion

### 8.1. In Summary

I first entered the village and engaged participants in focus groups in 2015 as part of the *Global to Village: Grounding Communication Research in Rural China* project led by my supervisor Dr Yuezhi Zhao. At this time, I was motivated by research indicating that urban led projects had not increased internet literacy and rates in rural China (Fong 2009; Sun and Wang, 2005). Rather, China was proving a prime example of the global phenomena of how rural peoples were bypassing early Information Communication Technology for Development (ICT4D) efforts of internet cafes with the widespread adoption of mobile phones (Heeks, 2008; also see Qiu, 2013). When I began the first period of fieldwork in 2015, I was driven by the research question of what innovative practices were occurring with mobile phone use. What I confronted, however, were participants who had many complaints about communication, but little specifically to say about their phones. The communication complaints primarily gravitated around a perceived gap in the village between the haves and have nots, a gap that has implications on local governance and the future development of the village.

In the article that I authored in 2017, as part of Dr Zhao's special edition of the *International Journal of Communication*, I linked the socio-economic gap in the village with changes in Heyang's media ecology with a focus on access to local news. The historical transformations of Heyang's media ecology began in 1964 with the installation of its first wired-radio loudspeaker. This and the multitude of speakers installed in every home through the 1970s enabled a real time connection to national events from news, to political campaigns and speeches. They also enabled access to the initial hour-long broadcasts from the local Jinyun County radio station beginning in 1966. In the 1970s Heyang built its own broadcasting room to coordinate activities in the collective. The use of the radio broadcasts, both the local announcements and the rhythm of the three daily broadcasts, enabled a sharing of time between the residents and leaders who were mutually organized into collective labour. While remembered as a time of hunger, this period of Heyang's collective economy is also remembered as a time when one's participation in constituting the village merely by being a member of the collective was appreciated.

Heyang's economy was de-collectivized in 1982. By 1994 Heyang was first connected to cable television. In 1997 Heyang's Village Council stopped using the local broadcasting room because there was no more felt need for coordinating village activities. As television became increasingly popular in the late 1990s and early 2000s a notable division arose. Few could afford a television, among those who could, the wealthiest paid annual cable connection fees, the majority, however, opted for grey market satellite dishes. Those with cable had access to Jinyun Television's station, however, those with satellite dishes only received major city and national channels that used satellite broadcasts. A steady decline in functioning radio speakers shifted access to local news from a collective good to a commodity that objectified and compounded the economic divisions within Heyang.

More than merely an issue of technological change, these shifts were symptoms of more profound political-economic shifts in the country. In particular, changes in how the CCP conducted its governance in accordance with the mass line. In the lead up to the 1949 revolutionary victory and the decades spent trying to collectivize the economy after, the mass line informed the close relations that CCP leaders were meant to have with the masses (Blecher, 1982). This is how the term "cadre" became synonymous with "leader", as the term connotes the stress on an ability to mobilize people into collective actions and defined leaders who shared in manual labour (Kim, 1974 p.192). Following Deng Xiaoping's Reform and Opening Up policies in 1978 and the de-collectivization of the economy through the 1980s, the CCP reinterpreted the mass line to fit the new political-economic direction. Namely, there has been a switch from emphasizing qualitative closeness between leaders and the people, to national level public opinion monitoring (Thorton, 2011). At the local level, this means CCP members and government officials often have professional metrics to meet that reduces the time they might spend with the people and reduces the value of local villagers' input.

Together, the changes in Heyang's media ecology, and in national-level policies regarding the nature of governance and political participation, have contributed to a generalized sense that one's involvement in the village is not appreciated. This is especially voiced by those whose families have not found success in capitalist markets.

Research participants express social participation as becoming meaningful when it is premised around the intimacies of having close relations and notions of mutuality as

described of the collectivist era. A focus on senior residents and how they integrate new technologies such as mobile phones into the village's collective media ecology helps to draw out how past practices to organize shared time are symbolically reproduced within Heyang. It also opens insights into other state-society efforts to share time.

The examples of how shared time is being reproduced do not stand in opposition to the ongoing technological development of Heyang. Instead, they are indications of the importance of agency in the deployment and use of technology. The instantaneous real time afforded by digital communication technologies can blend with applications aimed at sharing time. Wired-radio stands out as a prime example of how these functions can be intertwined. As introduced in Chapter Four, wired radio loudspeakers shared speeches and time announcements across China in real time, providing rural residents with access to the nation and national belonging in ways not previously possible. This real time function, while capturing the fascination of, especially Western researchers, who have frequently harped on the lack of connection broadcasts had for rural lives (Houn, 1956; Jan, 1967; Liu, 1971), is but one aspect of how the loudspeakers were used. Just as important was the organization it lent to village organization, and the collective nature of the activities that people were altered to via time and other announcements. It should be little surprise then that the next major and popularly accessed technology enabling real time communication, mobile phones, are also being repurposed to share time.

## **8.2. Recounting the Timescape Perspective**

Introduced in Chapter Three, I have summarized the various elements of Adam's (2008) timescape perspective through the presentation of the development, lives, and events in Heyang detailed in Chapters Four through Seven. Here I go back to each of the five elements in turn again to review how this perspective enables my analysis of the trajectory of the political belonging of the people of Heyang.

**Time frame:** Time frames consider the duration of events, institutions and lives. The most expansive time frame in this project is China's early engagement with European missionaries in the mid-1600s to the present day, tracing the impact that China's national engagement with European politics has had on timekeeping within the country. At a more specific level, the time frame this thesis deals with is the evolution of the

CCP's development from the late 1920s when the Party retreated from urban centres and developed its mass line in Shanxi as discussed in Chapter Two. Following this is the time frame of the lives of the participants of this research which span from before the Revolution to today. At this point, I begin to contrast the time frames of Heyang's experience wired radio and the collectivization of its economy, and its post-1980s decollectivization. To this contrast of particular periods of national political economics, I also investigate time periods related to the introduction and rise of other specific technologies, including television and mobile phones. Finally, and perhaps the most crucial time frame I discuss is the experiences and concerns of research participants during the four years that this project was conducted.

**Temporality:** Temporality comes up often in this project. Adam (2008) focuses on temporality as a means to approach “processes” such as how “identities are formed” or to “grasp the significance of time for... personal, public, political and institutional wellbeing” (2008 p.10). It is in this nugget of social process, or rather the “lived experience” of participating in social processes, as Susan Sharma sees participation (2014 p.15), that is at the centre of this research. Sharma argues that different political-economic positions entail differing temporalities. I push this observation further with the argument that other political-economic systems display contrasting temporalities as a result of how time is kept and used to synchronize society. In this work, I follow Adam's (2003) and Hope's (2016) identification of the shift in capitalist temporality from clock time that enabled the quantification, abstraction, and exchange of durations of time, to real-time, that privileges immediate communication, pushing systems to move faster than human capacities to mediate them. I identify how liberal theories of participation, rather than intervening in this transition from their place of critique, they support it through shared base assumptions of social interaction. In contrast, I identify how the mass line enabled a socialist temporality of “shared time”, which in comparison to the notion of exchange, or instant interaction, emphasizes transformative experience based on engaging other people in everyday circumstances. This is akin to the “common time” that Bernard Aspe identifies as “an experience of time generated and enjoyed through our collective being-together” (as cited in Dean 2019a p.6); the temporality that Jodi Dean (2019a) associates with the political belonging of comradeship.

**Timing:** The main finding of this research is how the elderly are using a mobile phone app to establish a sense of synchronicity around mealtimes, to create a sense of

collective wellbeing. Two essential points should be raised here. The first is that Adam stresses that “it matters greatly what kind of time is used as a timing and synchronizing medium... equally important is the social, political [and] economic... context of timing” (2008 p.8). Chapter Four demonstrates that since the late Qing Dynasty, Chinese governments have employed clock time developed in European settings. The CCP was the first to make this time widely available across the countryside via weird-radio loudspeakers. In using loudspeakers as the medium however, time was not tracked in abstractable durations as Adam identifies of the capitalist usage of clock time. Instead, the announcement of the time indicated periods and reasons to come together in collective efforts to address basic wellbeing.

This meaning, of coming together to share circumstances and purpose, is not only a result of the use of the time announcements but also in their rhetorical form, “the time in Beijing is...”. When time announcements were made, they connected all of China in a real-time network linking every locality to the nation’s capital and the seat of political power. This engenders the “to the masses from the masses” dynamic of the mass line, authority of central power is linked and inscribed into local practices. This is even more expressly so when we consider that most radio broadcasts at the time were from radio Beijing and used to announce political campaigns that villagers would discuss how to carry out in meetings that same day. The purpose of this time reckoning, how people come to know the time and know how to synchronize with the imperatives of existing social systems (Adam 2006 p.123), in the countryside served for the sharing, rather than the exchange of time, and the notion of comradely political belonging based upon Party support at the national level. In this context, the title of Hu Feng’s epic poem extolling the new relationships and hopes for the future at the birth of the PRC ring loud, *Time Has Begun*. This adds to Ho’s (2004) insights on the linguistic formula of speaking bitterness as a means to understand the post Revolution era as a new time.

In the current iteration of this time reckoning, what is essential is not the few remaining loudspeakers which continue to announce the hour with the announcement “the time in Beijing is”, but rather elderly residents’ use of 2g mobile phones to reproduce these announcements. No longer is this about direct top-down engagement in peoples everyday and political lives. Rather these announcements are understood as a means for people with failing faculties to use the devices. The standard explanation for their use is that it is easier to hear the announcement compared to looking at the screen. At a

more collective level, they continue to be used to indicate mealtimes and are integrated into the systems of care left behind elderly residents use to look after one another's wellbeing.

This speaks to the second point Adam (2008 p.9) raises with timing, that generations have different temporal needs; a senior will have different needs to synchronize with than an infant does. Chapter Six identifies several practices by which time is being shared in Heyang, but these all gravitate to the elderly. This is an important demographic to consider as they are amongst the most vulnerable of villagers. However, the imperative to share time is not limited to seniors and may be related to broader political issues of governmental priorities for Heyang's development and the framing of its resources.

**Tempo:** Tempo is intrinsically related to timing, but brings more attention to the fact that different domains of life have different temporal paces, and that the speed and intensity of such tempos are related to the expression of social power (Adam 2008). Adam argues that this is how a focus on time can shed light on the dynamics of power relations with the inquiry of "who has to do most of the adapting" (2008 p.9). Here her work links up with that of Susan Sharma (2014) who argues that different political-economic positions within society lead to different experiences of time, or what she identifies as "temporality", and that we should work to harmonize these experiences.

This lack of harmonized time, or the priority that those with social power should require others to adapt to their pace, is at the root of the problems with participation and belonging in Heyang. As identified in Chapter Five, the most pressing concerns for villagers revolve around housing. Housing is a concern primarily because of the influence of the heritage protection, restricting what kinds of repairs can be done to houses and where homes can be built. Those who are unable to afford to make repairs etc. under these restrictions are being left behind in the pace of Heyang's development. The planning of the heritage protection has also led to the development of a new section of housing however the politics of who will have what kind of access to the new housing is again leaving those who have not afforded repairs behind. Thus, to participate in sustaining housing in Heyang, residents are being compelled to meet the pace and intensity of capital marketability set by the Tourism Management Committee who are responsible for the heritage protection. This is also seen in the maintenance and

upgrading of communal washrooms where the tourism management committee sees upgrades as a regular part of business, compared to local residents who find such work, while in progress, degrades their wellbeing.

This need for those who are materially and socially disadvantaged to adapt to the tempo of leaders is a recognized aspect of development today as I laid out in Chapter Two. In Chapter Two, I also demonstrate how the mass line works in contrast to this function with its emphasis on the need for leaders to share in the conditions of the disadvantaged. This contrast in the social organization that is fostered through the use of time to require segments of society to adapt to the needs of prioritized groups grounds the central thesis of this dissertation. Residents in Heyang use the mass line as an ideal to interpret how participation in local development can be empowering, seeing a need to be treated as mutually involved in the village's ongoing existence.

**Duration:** As indicated above, duration is contrasted with instantaneity. Adam (2003; also see Hope 2016) argues that capitalist systems are shifting to instantaneous real-time mechanisms and priorities. She points out how instant time is harmful to human needs expressed through durations of time. I add to Adam's argument which focuses on real-time technologies, by examining the quality of participation that is theorized as possible and desirable in current conditions, noting the similar commitments to instant interaction between real-time and Carpentier's (2016) theory of maximal participation. Real-time is therefore not only an aspect of technological material development but also part of the social change which Western theorists promote as part of development communication. Heyang's current developmental path based in the socialist legacy of collective ownership as much as it is on reinvestment of capitalist market wealth and now heritage protection informed by the success of the associated tourism industry. These latter two aspects are especially related to the dynamics of real-time: from market conditions that treat migrant labour as flexible leading to the chaotic rise and fall of worker wealth that can be reinvested in individual households, to the market conditions which deem the value of the cultural capital Heyang can trade its preservation of historic buildings for, which are subject to the whims of on-demand consumer-orientated market choices.

Focusing in on duration again, Adam argues that under the capitalist deployment of clock time, durations are interchangeable and abstractable units used for exchange

(2006 p.119; also see Postone, 1002 p.205). In contrast, the mobilization of time alongside the mass line does not emphasize durations for exchange. Instead, as discussed above with “timing”, time is marked out to organize collective activity such labour and political meetings with the goal of producing mutually transformative experience to affect a common political purpose, as Dean (2019a) describes of “comrades”. This again intersects with the dissertation’s central thesis of how participation is understood in terms of having human needs while acting through time. That time reckoning practices can be used to promote mutual recognition of that humanity and in turn affect the content and slant of decision-making by the Village Council and Tourism Management Committee.

**Sequence:** The central thesis of the dissertation is informed, in large part by the attention paid to sequence. My claim that the mobile phones’ announcement of the hour is not merely an aesthetic reference to the past, but is also used to reproduce a sensation of collective wellbeing, is premised on my observations of seniors use of the time where knowledge of the time around meals was often related to efforts to look after one another.

Sequence also underlines the importance of duration for the shared time of the mass line. This is because while decision moments are still important, they are balanced out by an emphasis on dialogue of how to carry out decisions, and the methods taken to mediate impacts in the implementation of decisions. This dialogic process is the “from the masses” aspect of the mass line “from the masses to the masses” maxim of mass line decision making that goes to inform future decisions and actions.

**Temporal Modality:** This dissertation is not a simple freeze-frame of one point of Heyang’s development. It places Heyang’s media ecology, resident practices, and values in historical context, and it traces how these dynamics are used to inform understandings of the village’s collective future. There is not a simple before and after, but a process of historical change and adaptation. This can be found in the historical accounts of collective timekeeping in rural locations placed in conjunction with the collective nature of collective cultural production like the dragon dance which requires over 50 people to be involved as performers and continues to be an essential element of village life today. The collective practices of the mass line likewise are not depicted as part of Heyang’s past but adapted to meet the changes in national political economic



shifts. As such this study aims to address Adam's goal of a timescape perspective, "to understand relationships, interdependencies and embeddedness... connect[ing] process to structures as well as macro and micro perspectives of social change" (2008 p.10).

### **8.3. Reflexive Considerations**

In addressing the subjectivity for making decisions, the mass line, as an ideal, ought to function to help leaders appreciate the conditions of the popular classes through mutual experience. Mao (1965a) argues that this experience helps to generate a praxis by which leaders become more in tune with those at the bottom of society, and society as a whole can work to address social ills. Compared to capitalist markets which are premised on the exchange of durations of time, this system is premised on the sharing of those durations. As such, it is specially aimed to address how Postone (1993), for one, argues, alienation is produced within capitalist systems.

A primary critique of the mass line is its relationship to democratic centralism, the notion that once a decision has been made, it should be followed through (Hearn, 1978; Dittmer, 1977). This critique is a standard liberal critique of the authoritarianism that the CCP has long been cited to assert (Houn, 1956; Jan, 1967 also see Vukovich, 2019). However authoritarian versus not authoritarian was not the most pressing issue for my research participants or my research focus. I stand apart from such normative applications of western theory by leaning into the question of what are the socialist ideals that not only enabled the CCP to rise to power (Hinton 1966; Lin, 2013; Seldon, 1995; Wang, 2013) but also remain fixtures of the CCP's continued claim to legitimacy (Lin, 2013; Wang, 2013; Zhao, 2011; Zhao and Wu, 2018; Zhao and Wu, 2020). The above chapters have aimed to address how these ideals become potent and how are they valued and reproduced in contemporary relations, from grassroots symbolic acts of mobile phone use to top-down local all village meetings to air out understandings with local development. The evidence depicts a normative evaluative use of the mass line to understand how relationships and hence decisions should be produced springing from the mass line. In terms of social organization, the mass line operates to create opportunities for all of society to share collectively in the conditions of those who are most disadvantaged. And rather than commit to a notion that this will be the perpetual place of merely workers and peasants, Mao (1965a p.119) emphasized that the mass

line would function in a spiral logic where new marginalization would be produced requiring renewed attention.

Seeing their selves as marginalized by current social systems, many participants in this project identify with the mass line as a positive form of participation. This stands out in contrast to present opportunities and the recommendations of western literature.

Carpentier's theories of participation, are, as indicated in Chapter Two, widely influential in communication theory and development communication specifically. Charpentier's (2016) efforts to develop his understanding of an ideal "maximal participation", in particular, helps to establish a direct theoretical link between participation and temporality, that has been observed in Heyang's media ecology. Heyang's media ecology has become, what Jenkins tries to define as "more participatory" (Carpentier and Jenkins, 2013 p.266), with individuals becoming more independently in control of the media content they consume, and social groups that they contribute towards. Carpentier's work mostly associates contemporary digital networks with minimal participatory conditions, such as choosing from predetermined options, rather than, having decision power over what options are even available (Carpentier and Jenkins, 2013). This is part of the paradox that Heyang residents are dealing with; they have more communication tools but are confronting barriers in what otherwise seems to be a more participatory media environment. These barriers are the individualization of communication and concern that Dean (2019, pp.99-160) identifies of communicative capitalism and its entrapment of our communication rooted in a desire to be part of a collective.

While Carpentier (2014) argues that the way to surpass participatory obstacles is to provide more moments for participatory decision making, this research indicates that the ephemeral nature of temporary decision-making is a structural part of participatory barriers. Here again I follow Dean's (2012 p.144) lead critiquing the privileged place that choice has alongside participation in liberal theories of political belonging, aiming to understand participation from processes of recognizing mutuality, or what Dean (2019 pp. 10, 84) identifies as the actions of a comrade. This widens the concern of participation from involvement in particular decisions to the issue of how one's daily living is included (or excluded) from shared understandings of how the village is constituted and can continue to develop into the future.

This then is a question of the politicization of daily life, or rather how everyday life can become part of the political consultation of the people to inform CCP and government policies. It is exactly on this point, that Lin Chun (2019) makes her deciding remark that the mass line is functionally dead in China, arguing that market reforms have removed top leadership from the concerns of the people. Her position enables the conclusion that China is fated for a postsocialist future.

#### **8.4. Towards the Communist Horizon?**

Heyang is undoubtedly experiencing the postsocialist conditions of the state's reengagement with global capitalist markets. The Tourism Management Committee as a representative of the state at the provincial level is helping to facilitate a commodification of Heyang's common architectural resources. While profits from the venture are earmarked to be shared with village residents, the project is not yet working for the people. The processes of its implementation, as demonstrated in Chapter Five, continues to privilege those who already have found success in capitalist markets, in the name of finding more success in capitalist markets. The Village Council uses the language of collectivity. However, they are struggling to promote collective solidarity in the village with many feeling excluded from the processes of Heyang's development. Examples of the work performed for the 120 *mu* housing project demonstrate an individualized approach to implementing policy. Additionally, the disposition of members such as Zhu Weici points to how the quality discourse is normalized in leader-people relations. At the same time, their efforts to address senior needs both through the collective solution of improving the senior centre and by proceeding with that decision via an all village meeting speak to actions to carry out the mass line at the level of local governance. If postsocialism is really a reevaluation of what socialism is and how it can relate to other world systems, and as Dirlik (1989; and Day, 2013) claim, and not the rejection of socialism as such, then we might again say that Heyang is experiencing postsocialist conditions with multiple layers of governance balancing capitalist market priorities against those of socialist leadership.

This sense of postsocialism as ongoing reevaluation, however, sidesteps the commitment to communism that was struck at the 2009 Birkbeck Institute for the Humanities conference *On the Idea of Communism*. It blunts the possibilities of socialist relations and the material contrasts they offer in comparison to engagement with and dependence

on capitalist markets. If socialism is only in rhetoric, then the CCP, as the governing body of China, will not be able to attend to the ongoing social division that has occurred since the onset of reform and opening up. If China's president Xi Jinping is correct in arguing that the Mao-era and reform-era are not contradictions in the CCP's leadership but a continuous struggle for socialism why is it that socialism vanguardism is most evident in the people? If communism is something to be worked towards, then a firmer commitment to it and its differences must be staked out.

This is what I have attempted to do with this case study of Heyang and the identification of the continuation of time reckoning practices to maintain the collective affect of the shared time of the mass line. Rather than asking if socialism or the mass line are alive in China with an individuating focus on the CCP, and in doing so divorcing the people of China from their position as a revolutionary force to be guided, I have instead looked to identify what socialist values, be they the result of transformative practices from China's collective era, or aspects of collectivism that has historically been part of China's culture (from the dragon dance to collective timekeeping), are present in the people. I am not neglecting the CCP in this examination but instead focused on the local level where the mass line has been best identified as being enacted such as in Meisner's (1974) account of Dazhai, or Blecher's (1983) and Selden's (1995) respective research projects on China's countryside. The conduct of how the heritage tourism project, as identified in the introduction, is linked to the central government's efforts to revitalize the countryside, which itself was a response to the growing urban, rural division that has been catalyzed by reform and opening up. Another part of this revitalization has been the central governments to informationalize the countryside, that as identified in Chapter Four, has enabled widespread access to telecommunications networks, commodities and innovations in the communicative practices of village governments. These broad overarching policies demonstrate that the central government is not wholly separated from the concerns and needs of the people; however much Lin Chun (2019) argues to the contrary.

On this point however, I must be frank that I have been less concerned with the CCP than with the people of Heyang. In choosing what practices to highlight and investigate, I have ranged from the seemingly apolitical question of time reckoning to the most contentious politics surrounding village development. I have gone to lengths to draw out how time reckoning is deeply rooted in how political and economic systems order society

providing opportunities for contrasting forms of participatory action. It is here that I identify one of the most political acts of Heyang's seniors, promoting collective wellbeing in the context of being left behind by the pursuit of capital by society at large and often their very family members. This is the political position of comrades. These actions will not be recognized as political as such have been noted by village leaders who have identified senior needs as an essential issue in Heyang's ongoing development. Likewise, their strategy to respond to concerns about the cancellation of the senior's village provided pensions responded to the divisions in the village with a response grounded in collectivity, recognizing the need to share time and discuss this and other village issues.

If the mass line is the "from the masses to the masses" dynamic, then the people's revolutionary potential must not be excluded from the question if the mass line is dead or not in China. To the point that the people can promote these practices and values back up into governance in the form of more meetings at the local level, or in national policies targeting inequitable development, then we must respond that the mass line continues in China. In as much as the mass line exists amongst the people able to make a government listen and reformulate socialist policies, there are still paths to the communist horizon in rural China.

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