

**REFORMING LIFESTYLE IN CHINA'S ECONOMIC REFORM IN
THE EARLY 1980S: CONSUMPTION AND THE ANTI-SPIRITUAL
POLLUTION CAMPAIGN**

By

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Abstract

This thesis studies one economic factor, the consumption, as an important force in shaping the social transformation in the early stage of China's economic reform. It reviews the developing process of consumption activities in China starting from 1978 and the interactions between consumption and political movements in the first half of the 1980s. From the sociological theory on the function of consumption and the history of political movements, this thesis argues that the development of consumption in its early stage was influenced by the political decisions made by the Chinese Communist Party, and the further development of consumption gradually formulated a force to pushing the social transformation in China.

By studying the case of "Anti-Spiritual Pollution Campaign", I demonstrate that the development of consumption in China was once regarded as a potential threat to the ruling communist government. However, the party failed in stopping the process to establish a commodity economy in China, so they changed their strategies to balance the economic reform and the political reform.

This work also attempts to evaluate the relationship between economic development and political liberalization in China's reform era. It argues the separation of economic reform from the political reform resulted in a long-term hurt to the comprehensive social transformation.

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Introduction

This thesis focuses on one signal consequence brought by China's economy reform in Chinese society: the rising consumption activities in the society. From this case, my research tries to draw a clear picture of the interaction between the economic reforms and political movement in the early 1980s. The economic reform was the major part of the systematic social transformation in China, but the 40 years history of China's economic reforms shows that there is no pure economic decision made by the central leaders in the Chinese Communist party (abbr. CCP). Rather, the reforms in economic affairs are always accompanied with political considerations. The beginning of the "Reform and Opening-up Policy" can be regarded as the CCP's reaction to the political crisis in the late Mao Zedong Era. Many new phenomena during the later social transformation would cause some unexpected political consequences, which influenced every single step of China's political reform.¹ On one hand, the first ideological emancipation in 1978 removed obstacle for social transformations in the first 5 years of the economic reform.² On the other hand, the adherence to socialist ideology actually limited the range of further reforms.

Since China began its market economy reform in 1978, the CCP gradually broke away from the communist ideology of the Mao Era. Deng Xiaoping's pragmatic ruling style broke through many forbidden zones, for example the "market" and the "private ownership". When

¹ [Jishen Yang]杨继绳, *中国改革年代的政治斗争* [Political Struggle in China's Reform Era], (Hong Kong: Excellence Culture Press, 2004), 3-20.

² The first "ideological emancipation" stands for the "Discussion on The Standard of Truth" in 1978, which broke the personality cult of Mao and confirmed the economic development as major aim for the party. See [Licheng Ma]马立成, and [Zhijun Ling]凌志军, *交锋: 当代中国三次思想解放实录* [Bout: The Records of Three ideological emancipation in Contemporary China], (Beijing: Today's China Press, 1998), 1-9.

China turned into the post-Mao transformation, which abandoned the Maoist class-struggle principles in both social and economic developments, the political and ideological liberalization still remained in slow and careful procedures. In the era of China's reforms in the 1980s, the party's central leaders in the Central Committee divided into different factions. Two major factions are the conservatives, which was led by Chen Yun, Deng Liqun and Hu Qiaomu, the innovationists, which was led by Deng Xiaoping, Hu Yaobang and Zhao Ziyang.³

China's social transformation as a long-term process lasting for 40 years, was full of unpredictable turns and kept vacillating for decades. One famous "annual rule" describes the big swings between the CCP innovationist faction and conservative faction: "For every even year, the liberal faction spread, for every odd year, the conservatives fought back".⁴ Driven by the factional conflicts and changes of the international environment in the 1980s, the CCP launched several mass political campaigns and inner-party struggles. At the end of the decade, the 1989 Tiananmen Protest marked the termination of political liberalization, but the struggle between two party factions impacted every aspect of the social-economic changes in the following decades.

The Anti-Spiritual Pollution Campaign (abb. ASPC) was one of the major political movements raised by the CCP conservatives in 1983. It was the fourth round "even-odd rule" in factional struggles inside the CCP, which aimed to criticize the liberal trend among

³ The two fractions are divided from their general political opinions during the whole 1980s, but in many specific issues, they sometimes jumped into the opposite side. For example, Deng Xiaoping was often an innovationist accompanied with Hu Yaobang in economic reforms but he kept a very strict conservative attitude towards the political and ideological issues together with Deng Liqun, see Ezra F. Vogel, *Deng Xiaoping and the Transformation of China*, (Cambridge: Harvard Uni. Press, 2011), 593-596.

⁴The rule was summarized by Deng Liqun, see [Qingquan Xu]徐庆全, "'八老'与 1980 年代政治格局"[The Eight Elders and 1980s Political Pattern], in 炎黄春秋[Annals of the Yellow Emperor] (10) 23, 2015.

intellectuals.⁵ Although the major targets of this campaign were the arts and intellectual circles which were absorbing the liberal bourgeois ideologies from the west, the term “Bourgeois Spiritual Pollution” originally meant the “bourgeois lifestyle” in its first appearance in the party’s media.⁶ This campaign continued for only two months before it become a mass political movement like the Cultural Revolution. It was the signal to begin the debate on “Whether threats from economic field would affect the political stability for the party?” This question went through the whole 1980s and influenced all major political movements.

By reviewing the process of China’s economic reform and especially the changes in consumption, this research tries to analyze the interaction between the reforming measures from above and the reactions from society. Consumption in the early 1980s was a dynamic signal to show the effect of the economic policies while it was also a carrier of new urban culture,⁷ which was influenced by the political movements at the moment. The deeper analysis of consumption activities in China will explain why the CCP held such contradictory attitudes towards the liberalization of economic activities during the tortuous process of social transformation in the first half of the 1980s.

⁵ Yang, *Political Struggle in China's Reform Era*, 9-10.

⁶ The first appearance of the term “spiritual pollution”(精神污染) was in *People's Daily*, Apr. 30th, 1982, page4, it was used to criticize Chinese athletes who enjoyed material comforts.

⁷ Deborah Davis, and [Hanlong Lu]卢汉龙, “消费文化与消费革命”[Consumption Culture and Consumption Revolutions], in *社会学研究*[The Study of Sociology], (5) 2007, 117-125.

Chapter 1 - The History and the Theory of Social Transformation in China

1.1 China's Reform in the Study of Social Transformation

This study of the interaction between this specific political campaign and the changes in consumption is embedded into the macro project of Chinese social transformation. The theory of “social transformation in China” is established by western scholars from the late 1970s. Then, it was localized by Chinese historians and sociologists since the 1990s.

Some western scholars try to build a macroscopic theoretical framework to include Chinese cultural traditions, political characteristics and economic environment to explain the dramatic changes in the society after Mao Era. The first big school on Chinese social transformation is the political sociology school. Some famous sinologists like Martin King Whyte and William Parish, focusing on the interaction of power and society, studied the political influence on both rural and urban society. They noticed the Chinese society in the first 30 years of PRC was a combination of modern forms of the socialist organization and substantial traditional social agnation.⁸ Later, Andrew G. Walder, based on his neo-traditionalism theory, claimed that China's successful reformation and development mainly relied on its political stability, which was the consequence of their inner political operation. When the resource allocation and distribution system was included into the bureaucratic system.⁹ These scholars all emphasize the importance of political orders in accelerating or

⁸ William L. Parish, and Martin King Whyte, *Village and family in contemporary China*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978)

⁹ Andrew G. Walder, *Communist Neo-Traditionalism: Work and Authority in Chinese Industry*, (Los Angeles:

slowing down the steps on social transformation, namely that the centralized power had determined major social changes in the past and will decide China's further transformation too.

The other major school comes from the economic sociology. Victor Nee in his article "A Theory of Market Transition: From Redistribution to Market in State Socialism", argues that the market economy is totally different from the redistribution economy (planned economy), because consumers and producers could directly meet each other in the market, which gradually weakened the power and interest of the distributors (the government).¹⁰ From the economic sociologists' view, when the transformation in economic foundation happened, the power base would also transfer from the government to the producers. According to Nee's theory, the rising free market consumptions would impair the government's control on social resources and then challenge the superior authority, which as I concern can partly explain the CCP conservatives' worry on losing power. However, later studies on the interaction between Chinese government and the market show that Nee's prediction may not come true, because the role of government in China had entangled with the market in reforms. Parish's "political market theory" suggests the multiple social consequences of market reform are too complex to provide a single direction for the government transformation.¹¹

On the social transformation in the European socialist countries, the New Budapest School offers a good example on analyzing the interaction between the market turn and power transformation in socialist countries. Iván Szelényi focuses on the structural objects, like the

University of California Press, 1988)

¹⁰ Victor Nee, "A Theory of Market Transition: From Redistribution to Market in State Socialism", in *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 54, No.5, (Oct. 1989), 663-681.

¹¹ William L. Parish and Ethan Michelson, "Politics and Markets: Dual Transformations", in *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 101, No. 4 (Jan. 1996), 1042-1059.

formal organizations and political system in post-communist countries.¹² His research on Central Europe countries underline the role of social elites and their view from above, which shows how efficient formal political reforms would help in formulating a market economy in post-communist society. The capitalist economy could be developed without a capitalist class as long as the institutional foundation is settled.¹³ However, the China has never officially dissevered from socialist ideology and rules, so the Eastern European case may proof the difficulty to achieve total transformation in China from a contradictory side: the lack of formal political reform may be the reason.

On one hand, Chinese scholars agree that these western schools stand at the “outsiders’ view” to offer a theoretical framework that helps in an objective analysis. On the other hand, starting from 1990s, the post-modernism context called upon more localized voice and self-criticism on this topic. To respond to the Western schools on Chinese reforming history in the post-Mao Era, and to clarify some key divergence in the historical writing between “observers” and “participants”, scholars like Sun Liping and Liu Shaojie try to set a different view on social transformation which contained more attention to the Chinese legacy of history and culture. Sun’s article suggests a new way to study “transformation sociology”, whose main argument is to against the “end of history” theory and “one modernization” model by justify the “modernization with Chinese characteristic” as an alternative way to continue social transformation.¹⁴ In other words, the ultimate aim of Chinese social transformation is not to

¹² Gil Eyal, Ivan Szelenyi, Eleanor R. Townsley, *Making Capitalism Without Capitalists: Class Formation and Elite Struggles in Post-Communist Central Europe*, (New York: Verso, 2001)

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ [Liping Sun] 孙立平, “社会转型：发展社会学的新议题” [Social Transformation: The New Issue on Sociology of Development], in *社会学研究* [Sociological Studies], (1), 2005, 1-24.
Download from <http://www.shxyj.org/Magazine/?Year=2005&Issue=1> (accessed in May. 25th, 2018)

build a purely liberal society with democracy and free market. Rather, the ongoing transformation is discovering a new way to modernize the country.

Chinese scholars' analyses also point out that the biggest difference between Chinese transformation and European socialist transformation is China has "a gradual social transformation under the political continuity". There are three major characters for this kind of "gradual transformation": First, the socialist political system is continuing in China, which means the transformation cannot violate the ideological limitation but rather must depend on its self-adjustment within the socialist system. Second, the gradual transformation in China resulted in a power continuity. The market transformation in Eastern Europe came together with regime change, which reduced the old power owners' chance to keep their superiority in new economic fields. But power continuity in China ensured the old social elites(bureaucrat) remaining powerful in new market economy. Finally, under the limitation of socialist ideology, many transformations could only appear in informal ways without institutional legitimacy.¹⁵ Chinese scholars notice that there was not such a stable and long-term institutional foundation to maintain the transformation in both political and economic fields, so comparing with the New Budapest School's "view from above", the study of Chinese social transformation needs to take notice of the informal level and give enough attention to practical movements.

1.2 Consumption and the Theory of Consumerism

The market transformation changed the economic life for the Chinese people. Accompanied with the growing social productivity and foreign trade, the Chinese society had

¹⁵ Ibid.

gradually developed into a “consumption society” since late 1980s. Before discussing the development consumption in China, it is necessary to clarify the terminology of consumption and the consumerism.

Consumption is a basic activity in the capitalist economy, which according to Marx, is one of the fundamental chains in the social reproduction process. In “Preface to A Contribution to The Critique of Political Economy”, Marx argued that the consumption and the production are coexisting to each other. Production creates the object for consumption, while consumption is the purpose for production. The production process is meaningless if there is no consumption after it.¹⁶ My research on consumption in China will include many related objects: the people who consume, the goods to be consume, the place where consumption happens and the economic and social meanings behind consumption activities.

The theory to study the consumption culture and consumerism as a special social phenomenon or even an ideology was built by generations of scholars. Baudrillard defines consumption from a semiotics aspect, which means consumption is not only an objective economic action, but a social movement to maintain the connection between people and society. His study aims not just to analyze the consumption activities and the commodities separately, but also hopes to define them as symbolic signs that changed or limited people’s lifestyle. Baudrillard’s definition of consumption goes beyond the basic value of use, and it touches its deeper value of culture. He argues that because production is sufficient enough fulfill people’s basic life needs in a highly developed capitalist society, the profusion made consumption no longer just satisfy life needs, but more important to fulfill people’s classification of different

¹⁶ Karl Marx, “Preface to A Contribution to The Critique of Political Economy”, in 马克思恩格斯全集[Works Collection of Karl Marx and Frederick Engels], vol.12 (Beijing: People's Press, 1998),733-762.

social status.¹⁷ This theory may remind us why the communist party would consider free consumption as a threat to the socialist social structure for it might changed symbols of working. Then the concept of “consumption culture” as an ideology is raised by Leslie Sklair. His book claims that culture always service as an ideology for the capitalist system, while all the international cultural practice belongs to the practice of ideology. When consumerism has equipped with many cultural meanings, the consumerism can be considered as both a culture and an ideology.¹⁸

Obviously, Chinese society in early 1980s did not match the typical characteristics of a consumer society, not to mention the ideological significance,¹⁹ when the amount of social production was still in a low level. But my research tries to discover the seed or the trend to develop a rapid-growing consumerism in Chinese society from the early stage of economic reform because there were some characters like the “social symbolic meanings” growing from the early stage of consumption activities. Comparing with the United States and west European countries, China had really weak capitalist traditions and did not go through the same process of capitalist development as western countries did. However, starting from the 1990s, China became one of the most extremely consumerist societies in the world.²⁰ The speed of development calls attention from scholars. Karl Gerth analyzes the complex reasons why consumerism could grow up in China in such a short time. The two books by Gerth, *China*

¹⁷ Jean Baudrillard, *The Consumer Society: Myths and Structures*. (New York: Sage, 1998), 12-58.

¹⁸ Leslie. Sklair, *Sociology of the Global System*, Harvester (Open Library: Harvester publishing, 1991), 41-42.

¹⁹ The concept of transformation from productive society to consumption society is explained by Baudrillard(1998). The productive society, due to the lack of consumptions, aim to expand productivity to fulfill social demands. The consumer society, due to the products surplus, aims to stimulate consumption. China in the early stage of market economy did not satisfy this situation.

²⁰ [Xin Chen]陈昕, and[Ping Huang]黄平, “消费主义文化在中国的产生”[The Emergence of Consumerism in China], The Institute of Sociology, Chinese Academy of Social Science, 2000.
<http://blog.boxun.com/sixiang/000711/3.html> (accessed in Mar. 15th, 2018)

Made: Consumer Culture and the Creation of the Nation and *As China Goes, So Goes the World*, use historical evidence to trace the early consumption activities in China the first decade of the 20th century, when consumption was linked with nationalism and political movements. Later, from Mao Zedong's pure socialist route to Deng Xiaoping's utilitarian reforms, the fate of consumerism in China experienced a big fall and rise in the second half on 20th century. He argues that the first particularity of consumerism in China is its government-dominant character.²¹

Gerth's valuable contribution to this topic is he firstly figures out the rise of consumer culture actually grew together with the national identity in China. He used formal and informal government orders to show how Chinese government could guide or even determine consumptions. The beginning of this process was in 1910s, when the National Products Movement shaped Chinese consumption from its primary stage. In the 1920s, China just began the capitalist modernization process, both politically and economically. But the long term diplomatic failure in the past, together with the colonial powers invasion, made it impossible to keep its economic independence. When the nation elites spontaneously combined the national crisis with economic crisis, they found that one efficient way to develop domestic economy and rise national identity was call on nationalistic consumption. By giving all kinds of goods a label of "national" or "foreign", a simple consumption behavior was full of cultural and political meanings, representing individual affection to the nation. Then for the Chinese people, the conceptual national identity got its material carrier to show the practice of

²¹ Karl Gerth, *China Made: Consumer Culture and the Creation of the Nation*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 4.

nationalism and patriotism.²²

Since the CCP seized power in 1949, consumption activities in the following three decades dropped to its lowest ebb, for it was suppressed by the powerful socialist regime. When socialist China developed industry and increased social productivity, the government carefully kept distance from the capitalist mode, which meant much less freedom to make decisions when consume and the CCP regarded production as the most important part of social development.²³ During this period, consumption was obviously repressed as a practice, because of the country's limited supply of commodities, while from the "spiritual" aspect, desire for more consumption was criticized by the socialist ascetic ideology for its violation of hard work and plain living.

However, the current historiography often ignores the development of consumerism in the planned economy. I would speculate the suppression period may indirectly influenced the explosive growth of consumerism in the late 20th century, because limited supply of commodities or small-scaled market did not erase the symbolic functions of consumption; in some degree they were just hidden, then waited for another explosion. Aside from the officially planned markets, there were many active black markets in the local level. Before the cultural revolution, they offered many "luxury goods", such as famous brand cigarettes or alcohol, for rich consumers who wanted to show their higher social status. Although I cannot argue that black markets had already achieved the function what Baudrillard claims: objects (goods) act truly as symbolic signs to distinguish people,²⁴ because the undeveloped social production in

²² Ibid, p35.

²³ Karl Gerth, *As China Goes, So Goes the World*, (New York: Hill and Wang, 2010), 9.

²⁴ Baudrillard, *The Consumer Society: Myths and Structures*, 49

China had not yet fulfilled people's basic material needs, I would suggest the need of showing superiority to others by consuming better goods never died out in China. The socialist ideology and authority could only limit the range of consumerism but never wiped out its function as intermediary symbol between people.

When China started the economic reform in 1978, consumption entered its golden age. But historiography on Chinese consumption culture skipped the process in early economic reforms and went straight to the 1990s. LiAnna Yu notices when social production reached a sufficient level to fulfill people's life needs, consumerism, as Bauman and Baudrillard writes, developed to be an abstract arena, where new rich people wildly show their achievements in the economic boom and the new poor have to run after the infinite "social obligation" of consumption.²⁵ But the missing part is that the 1980s Chinese government thought too much consumption as a serious danger. How did the spontaneous growth interact in the nascent market? Yu's book *Consumption in China* gives a detailed analysis of Consumerism as a well-accepted ideology in the society. By the heritage of planned economy, sometimes Chinese government can call up more consumption to promote economic development by some administrative order. It also combines with the nationalistic meaning when the government create a sense of feeling that "individual consumption related to the national economic power or global status".²⁶

My research pays attention to the important missing part in the transformation of consumption, from a "evil capitalist lifestyle" to the "honorable activity to support the country". From 1978 to 1983, the social awareness and government's attitude towards consumption

²⁵ Zygmunt Bauman, *Work, Consumerism and The New Poor*. (New York: McGraw-Hill Education, 2004). and Baudrillard, *The Consumer Society: Myths and Structures*.

²⁶ LiAnne Yu, *Consumption in China: How China's New Consumer Ideology is Shaping the Nation*, (Cambridge(UK): Polity, 2014), 119.

experienced a big turn, which could be explained from the economic sociology theory.

1.3 The Collection and the Usage of Sources

My primary sources mainly come from three categories: The first one is political orders, decisions, resolutions made by the CCP and speeches or comments from individual leaders on the subjects of economic reforms and political reforms, which can present their attitudes towards many new trends in society and the consumption activities. This kind of source includes formal and informal ones. Formal orders are the published party's conference document, official political orders spread to different level of party organizations or to the public. They were mostly collected from newspapers (public facing orders), including the central party's newspapers: *The People's Daily*, *The Guangming Daily*, *The Liberation Daily*, the party's magazine *Qiushi* and different levels of local party newspapers.

The newspaper articles were the major sources to study the interactions between the authority and the public, because in the 1980s there was no standard system to keep the public informed of the government affairs, while the newspapers were all controlled by the party's propaganda department. Many of the newspaper articles on the topics related to the economic reform were proposed by the CCP's propaganda officers or even by the central leaders and written by the professional party writers who paid extreme cautions in choosing proper words to present the political meanings.

The second part is the published memoirs and selected works from the CCP central leaders,

include both innovationists, Deng Xiaoping,²⁷ Zhao Ziyang²⁸, Hu Yaobang²⁹ and the conservatives, Chen Yun³⁰, Deng Liqun³¹ and Hu Qiaomu³². These memoirs reflect their understanding of the new market system and their attitudes towards the reforming society. Due to the current information disclosure system in China, for researchers outside the party's historical research (propaganda) department, it is very hard to access to the original version of unpublished party documents in the archives.

Before moving to the historical details, it should be claimed that most of the selected works, biographies and memoirs of the party leaders were published primary source that edited and chosen by the CCP official publishing department, which means that they are usually selected to preserve a positive image of the party leader. Some exceptions like *Hu Yaobang's Chronology* and *Prisoner of the State: The Secret Journal of Premier Zhao Ziyang* are published in Hong Kong and have less editing works on them. They are not as “too official” as the works from the conservative party elders. Hu Yaobang's primary source, together with Zhao Ziyang's memoirs introduce the reform-related thoughts and attempts by two important innovational leaders in the party. I notice that although all sources mentioned above have many inconsistent contents to each other, an image of “routing conflicts” between two party factions can still be drawn by make comparisons among them.³³

²⁷ [Xiaoping Deng]邓小平, *邓小平文选(第三卷 1982-1992)*[Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping Vol.3],(Beijing: People's Press, 1993).

²⁸ [Ziyang Zhao]赵紫阳, *改革历程:赵紫阳回忆录*[Prisoner of the State: The Secret Journal of Premier Zhao Ziyang], (Hong Kong: New Central Press, 2009) and [Fengming Zong]宗凤鸣,ed. *赵紫阳软禁中的谈话*[Zhao Ziyang: Captive Conversations], (Hong Kong: Open Magazine Press, 2007).

²⁹ [Yaobang Hu]胡耀邦, *胡耀邦文选* [Selected Works of Hu Yaobang], (Beijing: People's Press 2015).

³⁰ [Yun Chen]陈云, *陈云文选*[Selected Works of Chen Yun], (Beijing: People's Press 1995).

³¹ [Liqun Deng]邓力群, *邓力群自述: 十二个春秋* [Autobiography of Deng Liqun: Twelve Years 1975-1987]. (Hong Kong: Dafeng Press, 2006).

³² Hu Qiaomu' Biography Editing Group ed. *胡乔木传* [The Biography of Hu Qiaomu], (Beijing: Contemporary China Publishing House, 2015).

³³ [Lequn Wen]温乐群, “胡耀邦思想年谱(1975-1989)读后”[Book review of *The Chronology of Hu Yaobang's*

The third part is the material and artistic productions or commodities in 1980s, includes the films, dress code and music which presented the blooming trend of searching for material enjoyment and personality liberation. They are the main body of “spiritual pollution” to be studied in the following chapters. The political orders I used are also related to these productions and commodities. The study of changes in dress code is an attempt to use material sources (photos and advertisement of clothes) to give a visual proof of changes in physical dressing style and the ideal signals behind the dress code. One following example is about the first model show in China, brought by the French designer Pierre Cardin. It was reported for long time in Chinese newspaper in 1980s and raised more deeper discussion on the standard of “good life” and “immoral capitalist pollution”. Such social topics were brought by the development of clothing consumption and for some party conservatives, they became the possible threat to the socialist ideological stability.

On the use of movies and pop music, this thesis will use them as a part of cultural commodities, which acted as cultural products to represent the introspection of old system and the encouragement to exploring new life. Some examples in the following body chapter can show the overlap in the searching of “beauty” and “liberation”: Just like the movie “*Red Dresses are in fashion*” first time used dress code as the theme of the movie, expressed the story of a “model worker” from countryside who dare to wear “sexy” red dress to the park and to “compete” with other girls.³⁴ This movie also raised wide discussion in the society, when young girls felt joyful in their search of beauty, the revolutionary old started to complain on

Thought], in *Twenty-first Century* (Online version), (78) Sep.2008. Download from <http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/ics/21c/media/online/0807026.pdf>. (accessed in May. 12th. 2018)

³⁴ Xingjia Qi 齐兴家, directed, *Red Dresses are in Fashion*, produced by Changchun Film Studio, 1984.

this bourgeoisie pursuits. And all the conflicts and divergence on such changes in daily life, are vividly recorded by the movies.

In the Chapter 2, I mainly use the material and artistic productions sources to explore the new phenomena in people's daily economic activity and social life from 1978 to 1983, while the newspaper articles written by the party's propaganda officers would reflect their reactions to these new phenomena. The Chapter 3 relies more of the political documents and the primary source from the CCP leaders' work, because this chapter focuses on the political campaign in 1983 from its origin to its peak. In the discussion on spiritual pollutions, the newspaper articles are used frequently because many of the theoretical debates were posted on the newspaper at that time. The Chapter 4 studies the interactions between the development of consumption and the reform measures from 1984 to 1986, when the sources related to the party's decision and the realistic changes in commodity economy are equally important in my research.

Chapter 2 - The “Polluted” Society and Its Threat

2.1 Transformation in Consumptions: Freedom in Economic Activities

This Chapter will trace the major changes related to the economic reforms and market consumptions that China has witnessed, during the period from 1978, when the economic reform began, to the eve of the “Anti-Spiritual Pollution Campaign” (abb. ASPC) in 1983. In the first five years since the application of market economy, many Chinese people for the first time experienced the freedom to purchase based on their hobby or individual preferences, instead of receiving life necessities granted by the country’s plan.³⁵ After Mao’s death, people first got the chance to discuss about the party’s policies and the artists got to speak out voices different from the party’s. Another equally important part in the Chinese social transformation and liberation is the freedom to consume.

The Chinese society has been changed in all dimensions after the big decision of political transformation made on the Third Plenary Session of the 11th Central Committee of the CCP. The political ideology has been transformed, which relocated the “general line” of the party from class struggle to economic development. Apart from this, the changes in people’s daily life and to every single individual would never be less important than the changes brought by the establishment of the People’s Republic of China in 1949, because all the revolutionary aims, like the “the liberation of all human” or “the elimination of capitalism”, in the Mao Era had

³⁵ [Xiaobo Wu] 吴晓波, *激荡三十年: 中国企业:1978-1008* [The thirty year’s agitation: Chinese Enterprises], (Beijing: Citic Press, 2007), 2.

been replaced by new aims to achieve modernization.

The new lifestyle, consumer demands, and the desire for material enjoyment were criticized in the later political movements as spiritual pollutions. As a matter of fact, their corresponding origins can be found in Chinese society before the Cultural Revolution. The political and ideological transformation, such as liberalization in theoretical discussions since 1978, has brought many novel challenges to the stability of the regime, so they became the major targets to be criticized by the CCP conservatives during the whole 1980s.³⁶ However, the “pollution” in lifestyle was not a completely new concept of Chinese economic reform. In fact, the concept has a long history since the CCP established the government and carried out the enlightened policies to develop national industry and commerce in as early as the 1950s.³⁷ Unfortunately, the end of Socialist Economic Reform in 1956 symbolized the termination of all kinds of private-owned businesses, as a result of which the economic freedom was banned from people’s daily life in the following period of the Cultural Revolution. From this perspective, the history of “bourgeois-polluted lifestyle” in the early 1980s is to some extent connected to the past economic transformation in China. If the “spiritual pollution” is considered as the rebirth of a wilder pursuit of free choice in lifestyles, the ASPC would be correspondingly a narrower and relatively limited rebirth of the Cultural Revolution. They both started from the criticism on theoretical and political trends but gradually expanded to all aspects in people’s daily life.

In this Chapter, by comparing the changes in economic life from the late 1970s to the early

³⁶ Richard Baum, *Reform and Reaction in Post-Mao China: The Road to Tiananmen*. (London: Routledge, 1991), 25.

³⁷ Karl Gerth, “Compromising with Consumerism in Socialist China: Transnational Flows and Internal Tensions in ‘Socialist Advertising’”, in *Past and Present*, (8) 2013, 203-232.

1980s with the Chinese economic system before this period, how the long-suppressed freedom of consumption was possible to form a strong power within a short time has been analyzed. Afterwards, together with the ideological liberation, the stability of the fundamental socialist system has been influenced and a potential crisis to the CCP's political legitimacy has been raised. Although young people in the 1980s who enjoyed wearing jeans and sunglasses from underground free market and listening to pop and jazz music with radio tapes from Taiwan and Hong Kong, might not understand how serious their behaviors were considered by the CCP as unwelcome foreign values and trends. The fact is that they did become a non-ignorable force in promoting the social transformation in the post-Mao China.³⁸ The social changes is elaborated from different angles of consumption popular culture: including clothing, music, films and other cultural products. The examples include both material products and cultural-spiritual products to be consumed in the market, because in the reforming period, the consumption of material product was the signal of free choice in economic activities, while cultural products could intuitively present people's ideological transformation in the post-revolutionary age. However, from the party conservatives' opinion, they were all regarded as bourgeois polluted products brought by the early stage of economic reforms.

2.2 Expressing Individual Characteristics: Consumption in the Search of Beauty

One guiding concept of the ASPC was to oppose “bourgeoisie humanitarianism”, which, as defined by the party, included the pursuit of hedonism and personal value rather than

³⁸ Richard Baum, *Burying Mao: Chinese Politics in the Age of Deng Xiaoping*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 5.

collectivism.³⁹ However, when Deng Xiaoping in the Third Plenary Session of the 11th CCP Committee claimed that the major conflict of socialist China had transferred from the “class conflict” to the “conflict between undeveloped social productivity and the growing demand of people’s material need”,⁴⁰ he already changed the working purpose for everyone and began to reform the labors’ relationship with the market.

Under the pressure of endless class struggle during the Mao Era, the supreme goal for working was not to earn salary to fulfill life needs but to create materials to support and continue the revolution.⁴¹ All kinds of hard work not aiming at devoting oneself to the cause of revolution should be considered guilty and ashamed. In this collective ascetic atmosphere, individuals should not show any personal specialty such as wearing fancy clothes or characteristic appearances. Therefore, the changes in clothing culture in the late 1970s was a remarkable signal to liberate personal characters. To some extent, when a normal worker could use his or her labor salary to consume favorite clothes in different colors and styles, it is considered the first step to break the heavy asceticism, which could mark the beginning of establishing consumer culture in the newborn market economy.

In the decade of Cultural Revolution, the only standards of clothes consumption were the wear-resistance and fitness for revolutionary work. Clothing, which should have been an important class sign, showed no differences in jobs or seasons. There was not any distinction

³⁹ Xiaoping Deng, “党在组织战线和思想战线的迫切任务”[The Party’s Urgent Mission in the Battlefields of Organization and Thoughts] Speech on the Second Plenary Session of the Twelfth Central Committee Oct. 11th. 1983, Beijing, in *Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping*, Vol.3 47-48.

⁴⁰ Xiaoping Deng, “坚持四项基本原则”[Insist the Four Cardinal Principle], in party Literature Research Center of CPC Central Committee ed. *三中全会以来重要文献选编* [Selected Important Documents since the Third Plenary Session], (Beijing: People’s Press, 1982), 4-6.

⁴¹ Jishen Yang, *天翻地覆：文化大革命简史*[The Whole World Turned Upside Down: History of the Chinese Cultural Revolution], (Hong Kong: Tiandi Press, 2016) , 459.

even between genders. Apart from the black, gray and blue working suits, the only fashionable luxury was green military uniforms, which represented undoubtable revolutionary initiative. Wearing new clothes was only acceptable on the days of Chinese New Year, or it would be criticized bourgeois as extravagant behavior, let alone wearing distinctive clothes. Revolutionary youth, to show the only major trend in clothing, hardship and simplicity, would even patch on their new clothes to make them look like poor peasants before wearing it.⁴² This kind of absurd fashion, in the revolutionary age, carried many political correctness to show their coherence with the party's leadership and the class honor.

Because of the lower technical requirements and labor-intensive character, the first light industry that benefitted from new economic policies in the late 1970s was the clothing and textile industry. To response to the call from the party's general line, after the reform in social distribution system,⁴³ producing more and better goods to the market means bringing actual financial benefits to the factories and workers. Many state-owned textile factories in the southeastern provinces like Guangdong and Zhejiang enjoyed more freedom in producing and selling their products. Therefore, the factories were put into a primary but competitive open market, where they need to fulfill the growing demands for fashion and beauty to create profits. Their early clothing advisement was reborn from the "capitalist mode" in the 1950s to attract consumers.⁴⁴ Young girls got enchanted by the heroine in the film "*Romance on Lushan Mountain*" (1980), who changed clothes many times with different fashionable designs to

⁴² [Dalu Jin] 金大陆, *正常与非正常: 上海文革时期的社会生活*[Normal and Abnormal: Social Life in Shanghai in the Cultural Revolution], (Shanghai: Shanghai Dictionary Press, 2011),383.

⁴³ The new distribution system included the "double track" producing system. It allowed state-owned factories to sell some extra products to the market after they finished the planned production for the state. See Andrew G. Walder, *Communist Neo-traditionalism: Work and Authority in Chinese Industry*, 215.

⁴⁴ Gerth, "Compromising with Consumerism in Socialist China", 228.

release her desire of beauty.⁴⁵ Since then, Chinese youth found that they can also have the opportunity to dress like film stars. In 1984, another film named “*Red Dress are in Fashion*” used clothing as a major theme of film for the first time, and shared the story of a “model worker” from the countryside who dare to wear “sexy” red dress in the park and to “compete” with other girls.⁴⁶ This film has also raised wide discussion in the society. When young girls showed their enjoyment and pursuit in such beauty, the revolutionary old started to complain about the bourgeoisie behaviors.

Why did the clothing style matter to the party’s ruling? As Djurdja Bartlett argues in his book *Fashion East*, fashion under socialism was always full of political meaning. In the Soviet Union and the eastern European socialist countries during the 1950s, the dress code meant a lot to people’s attitude towards their life within the system and often showed their interaction with the collective social structure. That is to say, the socialist government had to be very cautious about the freedom to allow people’s pursuit for fashion and beauty, for it might become a challenge to the serious social authority.⁴⁷ The case was even more serious for the CCP because China in the Mao Era advocated a much stricter socialist asceticism. In contrast, in the majority of socialist countries, female beautiful appearances like the high-heels, long hair, dress and jewelry were still a part of “legal appearance”.⁴⁸ Even in the most closed socialist country, the North Korea, it is a valid option to wear make-ups and dresses with high-heels.⁴⁹ However, China in the Cultural Revolution allowed no space for any of the above-mentioned elements.

⁴⁵ [Zumo Huang]黄祖模, directed, *Romance on Lushan Mountain*, Shanghai Film Studio, 1980.

⁴⁶ [Xingjia Qi]齐兴家, directed, *Red Dresses are in fashion*, Produced by Changchun Film Studio, 1984.

⁴⁷ Djurdja Bartlett, *FashionEast: The Spectre that Haunted Socialism*, (MIT Press, 2010), 249-255.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Hyeonseo Lee, and David John, *The Girl with Seven Names: A North Korean Defector’s Story*, (New York: William Collins, 2015)

All of them were deemed as evil capitalist elements in the CCP's revolutionary society.⁵⁰

One of the most worrying features of the new clothing culture for the conservative elders was that it contained too many signs from the “capitalist world”. Colorful clothing from Hong Kong and Taiwan were imported and got fanatically welcomed by the young. There is no doubt how rapidly these Hong Kong-Taiwan style clothing was imitated by local enterprises to attract more customers. The bell-bottom pants were the considerable signal of “capitalist dressing culture”, which caused much controversy. The style of pants come from the sailors', which was tight from the hip to knees and got wider to the feet. They were very popular in America in the late 1960s to 1970s because such Hippies style could represent some sense of decadence and showed people's body curve very well.⁵¹ The bell-bottom pants were imported to China as soon as the foreign trade started and a very local name “labaku” (trumpet pants) was given. Young Chinese from the cities to the villages got crazy about the pants that fit their beautiful and youthful bodies and they are willing to spend half of their monthly salary to buy one pair.

Old people criticized the trumpet pants as a signal of “decadence”. Young students who wore them were tagged as “blindly following the western bourgeoisie lifestyle” by the party's Cultural Department.⁵² In some cities, the “civilization offices” of the government even organized some picket groups to catch people wearing trumpet pants or men with long hair on the streets. The pickets rudely took off their pants or cut the long hair which is considered “not

⁵⁰ [Zhigao Xu]徐志高, ed. *Draft of Chinese Cultrual Revolution history: Collection of Historical Sources in the Cultural Revolution Vol.2*, (Global Chinese Press, 2016) 407. Online link: [https://books.google.hu/books?id=hbwwDAAQBAJ&dq=%E6%96%87%E9%9D%A9%E5%8F%B2%E7%A8%BF:%E6%96%87%E9%9D%A9%E5%8F%B2%E6%96%99%E5%BD%99%E7%B7%A8+\(2\):+%E7%84%A1%E7%94%A2%E9%9A%8E%E7%B4%9A%E6%96%87%E5%8C%96%E5%A4%A7%E9%9D%A9%E5%91%BD+%E5%BE%90%E5%BF%97%E9%AB%98&hl=zh-CN&source=gbs_navlinks_s](https://books.google.hu/books?id=hbwwDAAQBAJ&dq=%E6%96%87%E9%9D%A9%E5%8F%B2%E7%A8%BF:%E6%96%87%E9%9D%A9%E5%8F%B2%E6%96%99%E5%BD%99%E7%B7%A8+(2):+%E7%84%A1%E7%94%A2%E9%9A%8E%E7%B4%9A%E6%96%87%E5%8C%96%E5%A4%A7%E9%9D%A9%E5%91%BD+%E5%BE%90%E5%BF%97%E9%AB%98&hl=zh-CN&source=gbs_navlinks_s) (accessed in May. 11th, 2018)

⁵¹ [Bin Wu]武斌, and [Chunyan Han]韩春燕, *中国流行文化三十年*[The 30 years' Popular Culture of China], (Beijing: Jiuzhou Press, 2009), 175.

⁵² Ma and Ling, *Bout: The Records of Three ideological emancipation in Contemporary China*, 117-119.

suitable for a man”.⁵³ Some enthusiasts mailed to the newspaper and explained their worry about the “declining social morality”. The *Beijing Daily* newspaper in 1980 posted one letter from a reader with the title “Stop watching the youth getting depraved”. In this letter, the author expressed his worry about young generations’ sinking into decayed capitalist lifestyle and called for the justice people and the government to stop them from wearing fancy dresses and strange accessories.⁵⁴ This reader also connected the dress code with the importance of “ideological understanding” and “moral standard”, which were words of high frequency in the party’s propaganda materials. From this perspective, it can be seen how the society was accustomed to politicizing any activities in daily life and giving them more meaning related to the future of the nation.

Apart from the growth of textile product import, the new fashion culture would never emerge in China without the foreigners’ participation. The story of Pierre Cardin’s first visit to China can be regarded as the signal to establish the western clothing design as a popular consumption culture. Cardin was a famous Italian fashion designer in the 1950s. He did not just carry French popular dressing style of clothing to this fashion desert, but also brought the first fashion show to China. One description from the reporter who followed Cardin’s journey would talked about the huge contrast between the sexy French models in strapless dresses and dull audience in all grey and blue in China: “When a blonde beauty stepped in catwalk, stopped in front of the audience, suddenly opened her dress and showed her exquisite underwear, people

⁵³ [Guimei He], 贺桂梅, *新启蒙知识档案: 80年代中国文化研究* [Document of the “New Enlightenment” : Study on the Chinese Culture in the 1980s], (Beijing: Peking University Press, 2010), 77.

⁵⁴ Xiao Ping, 效平, “不能眼看这些青年堕落下去” [Stop Watching the Youth Getting Depraved], in *The Beijing Daily*, Apr.26th, 1980.

under the stair fell back forward tidily, just like hit by a surge.”⁵⁵ Sooner, Cardin and Shanghai Garment Corporation established the first Chinese model team in 1981 despite of heavy public pressure. The young models, who were selected from the female workers in the textile workshop, gave touring fashion shows in different parts of the country, thoroughly provided one way for the Chinese youth to show their personal characteristics and to decide their own preferences of lifestyle by simply consuming new clothing.

The party’s worry and cautiousness became reasonable as the new dress code was getting popular. In the meantime, some of the clothing would only got popular when it contained some typical spiritual symbols. For example, the trumpet pants were no longer popular in the late 1980s. It was not because of any official prohibition but was because that people were used to wearing them and gave no more rebellious label on it. So the most popular age to purchase these pants was exactly the time when such dress code were acting as a material product rather than some new ideal signal in the social transformation.

2.3 Enjoying and Consuming New Arts: Pop Music and New Films

Aside from the changes of appearance with personal characters, different kinds of art enjoyments had spread from the coastal provinces to the whole country in the early 1980s. Together with fashionable clothing and western aesthetics, China’s early trade with Hong Kong and Taiwan led to the import of all kinds of popular culture, including pop music, western commercial films, and so on. These cultural commodities linked the two kinds of

⁵⁵ [Anding Li]李安定, “The First Journey of Pierre Cardin in China”, in 文摘报 [Digest News] Sep.16, 2008 URL: <http://30.people.com.cn/GB/122679/8048166.html> (accessed in Apr. 14th, 2018)

transformations (material and ideological) together, which was a potential instability to the party's old ruling habits. That was one key social reason why many artistic creations were criticized by the conservative party members in the ASPC.

In the Cultural Revolution, the Communist party believed that the function of music was only to encourage people's revolutionary activities.⁵⁶ All popular music among the youth, imported from Hong Kong and Taiwan, were Bourgeois decadent music or erotic music to weaken the will to fight. The emergence of pop music as commodity firstly appeared only in the coastal underground market, but later spread to all big cities. Young Chinese used pop music to present their pursuit of freedom and affections. Some music even contained obscure criticism on the social inequality.

The pop music from Taiwan and Hong Kong was not straightforward plagiarism of western commercialized music culture. The songs were written in the same language but in totally different styles. The most famous pop star in the 1970s and early 1980s was Deng Lijun from Taiwan. She was a talented singer with supreme position in the history of Chinese pop culture. Deng's songs were full of true emotions for love, family and the beautiful life. It is unexpected that her songs were banned by the government even before the economic reform. There is an interesting story about this prohibition: In the long-term non-violent antagonism between Mainland China and Taiwan, Deng's song was a very impressive weapon in the radio propaganda from Taiwan. The coastal regions such as Fujian Province often received pop music tapes by balloons from Taiwan, among which Deng's tape was the most welcomed one. Deng

⁵⁶ [Qing Jiang]江青, “林彪同志委托江青同志召开的部队文艺工作座谈会纪要” [Summary of Comrade Lin Biao authorized Comrade Jiang Qing to host the conference of cultural and art work in military], Jun. 2-20 1966, Shanghai.

was given the identity of “a singer from the enemy-occupied area”. Her soft voice, according to some party officials, was just like the enemy’s spies in the revolutionary films.⁵⁷ The new tape recording technologies from Hong Kong accelerated the flow of Deng’s music. The clever profiteers successfully carried thousands of tapes from southeast coastal provinces to Beijing, then they would suddenly become rich.⁵⁸

Some critical comments from the newspapers in 1979 may reflect their bias towards the pop music: “Generally speaking, the pop music presents the unhealthy trend in ‘that’ society...”, “Many comrades are worrying about the weak disgusting music full of affectations... some teenagers have no ambitions nor the confidence to our nation...only seeking for vulgar spiritual enjoyment...”⁵⁹. Another newspaper published a historical fiction “Confusion’s reprimand on the lewd songs in State of Zheng”. It re-interpreted the Confucius’s classic saying in 2000 years ago to warn the country: The State of Zheng was annihilated because people enjoyed the decadent music.⁶⁰ Thus, similar as the new dress code, pop music in the reforming period successfully evolved into a “crucial element” which may determine the future of the country. In the conservative’s eyes, more and more personal preferences and commercial activities were posing potential threat to the country’s political stability.

The history of Chinese films is another efficient tool to study the social transformation and political movements in China in the 20th century. Since 1949, the nationalized film industry became a significant part of socialist propaganda and social mobility in the Mao Era. Just like

⁵⁷ Karl Gerth, *As China Goes, So Goes the World*, 47.

⁵⁸ [Jianying Zha] 查建英, “Interview with Cui Jian”, in *80 年代访谈录* [The interview with the 1980s], (Beijing: Joint Press, 2006), 229. Cui Jian is the “father of Chinese rock music”, who has deeply influenced by the pop music from Hong Kong and Taiwan. In this interview, he expressed his experience of smuggling illegal tapes to Beijing.

⁵⁹ Letters from the readers, in 人民音乐 [The People’s Music], Aug. 1980.

⁶⁰ Ma and Ling, *Bout: The Records of Three ideological emancipation in Contemporary China*, 122.

the Soviet films, Chinese socialist revolutionary films were mainly hero stories with socialist realist art style.⁶¹ The themes were limited in highlighting positive characters and presenting revolutionary victories.

After the end of the Cultural Revolution, Hong Kong films with western commercial features and Chinese cultural basis were imported to China as the result of both cultural and economic opening-ups to satisfy the people's needs for entertainment. The Hollywood style individualistic heroism and romanticism could also grow on Chinese cultural factors. It shocked the audience who were born knowing only the socialist heroes. At the same time, Chinese local film industry reduced strong political motives then performed to be a kind of expression of emotions and reflection of the past.⁶² The most influential films in the 1980s was the scar films, which were produced from the scar literature. The major theme was to expose the tragic experiences of the Cultural Revolution and the sufferings of the people in the mass political movements.

In the past ten years when art has been imprisoned, fictions and films were monotonous in content and dried up in amount. The birth of scar literature was at the point of a blowout after a long-term inhibition of art and hunger of new culture. Then it turned into a nationwide enthusiasm of literature and films. Among all the new fictions, the scar literature had the closest content to the special past years, so its propagation effect was much greater than the cultural transmission of literature in any normal society. The remarkable work, *shang hen*(the Scar) written by Lu Xinhua, was published on the *Wenhui Bao* Newspaper in 1978. It is a short novel

⁶¹ The character of Soviet films refers to Reeves, Nicholas. "Film Propaganda in the Soviet Union, 1917-1929," in *The Power of Film Propaganda: Myth or Reality?* (London: Cassell Press, 1999)

⁶² Chris Berry, "Seeking Truth from Fiction: Feature Films as Historiography in Deng's China" in *Asian Cinema* (7), 1995, 87-99.

describing a lady's tragic memory of her suffering as a "betrayers" in the ten-year Cultural Revolution.⁶³ The centralized system of media and publishing resulted in the concentration of public discussion on this work, because *Wenhui* was one of the few important party's newspaper. Suddenly, Chinese readers, aged from 15 to 60, found out that they were sharing the similar feelings on the same topic. So, more and more writers joined in the creation of "scars". Soon it became the significant force to emancipate people's mind from the imprisonment by the Cultural Revolution.⁶⁴

The first scar film was produced in early 1980s, when the introspect litterateurs and directors met each other. The miserable characters on the paper walked onto the screen, attracting much social attention from not only the intellectuals and educated groups but also the workers, peasants and the illiterate. From a vivid and visible performance, the broad masses could express a shared emotion and recollect a common historical memory of the past. In the early film market, most of the scar films received a lot of praise and rewards. The famous ones e.g. *bashan yeyu* (Evening Rain), *tianyunshan chuanqi* (Legend of Tianyun Mountain)⁶⁵ and *mu ma ren* (The Herdsman) all won the Chinese film awards with their realistic description of tragedy and in-depth illustration of humanity. When the scar films had become the major theme of the socialist past, such as the anti-rightist movement, the mass revolutionary movements, and the campaign in which the educated youth went to the mountains and countryside, they tried to select more typical narrative angles and depict the mental life of female characters. For

⁶³ [Xinhua Liu]刘心武, *伤痕[the Scar]*, in *文汇报 We hui bao Newspaper*, Aug. 11th, 1978

⁶⁴ Chris Berry, "Seeking Truth from Fiction: Feature Films as Historiography in Deng's China" *Asian Cinema* Vol. 7, No. 1, (Spring, 1995), 89-91.

⁶⁵ [Jin Xie]谢晋, directed *Tianyunshan chuanqi* (The Legend of the Tianyun Mountain), produced by Shanghai Film Factory, 1980. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sG4bej4axDw&t=2629s>, (accessed in Apr. 15th, 2018)

the Chinese audience, films after 1978 were not as political as before, instead, some explorations for the liberation of arts has been made, not just about freedom to create arts, but freedom to consume art products. People could choose to pay for their favored films, comedies or romantic stories either in the pursuit of entertainment, the expectation for a realistic love story or even the reflection on history criticizing the old socialist system. New films as cultural commodities in the first half of 1980s has had a wide audience, so gradually these films transferred from the official tools to the public tools, creating a common sphere for thinking on some specific social and political affairs.

In the post-Mao Era, when the Chinese art and cultural products were still in mist and attempted to seek for freedom. The scar fictions and films raised the comprehensive reflection of history, culture, society and the socialist system. Without the theoretical criticism on the socialist society in Mao Era, this actually could not be done. The scar film truly reproduced the image of the tragedies in the past by drawing the real emotion of ordinary people. The success of the scar film in the 1980s was not only because of its artistic achievement in realistic narration, but also based on the large amount of group memories of the Cultural Revolution. Together with the mass demand of negating the Mao's era from both the party and the public, scar films played an important role in ideological emancipation. It is the most influential part in Chinese film industry. When the CCP noticed that they were losing control of their important educational tool, they began to worry about the potential crisis, because they really had enough experience on how the films can shape people's ideology, the revolutionary model dramas in the Cultural Revolution had a great success in formulating the masses' adoration to revolutionary heroes.

2.4 Consumption in the Market and the Threat from Liberation

From the macro level of the early economic reform in China, the most influential difference was the return of mass consumptions in private market. It did not only mark the end of a long-term shortage of commodities and the freedom of choice in economic activities. The more crucial thing was that it changed people's consumption habits and began to form a consumption culture with Chinese style.

Before the economic reform, when costumers went to the state-owned stores, they had to rely on the sales clerks to get what they need. As a female costumer remembered, "There was only one state-owned store selling my favorite candy. I could not choose my favorite lemon flavor candy, because the sales clerk always randomly grasped candies from the big jar with all kinds of flavors, where only a few lemon candies were among them. It made me really disappointed."⁶⁶ But starting from the late 1970s, the privately-owned stores allowed customers to choose what they want, because it related to the owner's personal interest. For the same reason, the private stores usually provide commodities with better quality than that in the state-owned stores, but with a higher price. Spontaneously, the development of private markets released the consumptions from the total control by the party.

The social changes brought by the economic reforms from 1978 to 1982 had partly liberated the Chinese people to "choose the way of living" from the revolutionary ascetics suppression in the Mao Era, especially for the young people, some of whom became the major

⁶⁶ Gerth, *As China Goes, So Goes the World*, 62.

participants of the protests or political movements in the late 1980s. The foreign trade with “capitalist China” (Hong Kong and Taiwan), on the one hand has brought new ways of consumption and lifestyle; on the other hand, the liberal ideology and western political theories carried by the capitalist products were expanded all around China. The same people could dress in various styles; the same language can be used to sing various songs; etc. It gradually raised a question for the confused youth in the historical turning point: “How those Chinese people could, with similar ethnicity, language and cultural foundation with the mainland, developed in such different ways?”⁶⁷ The five-years’ gestation and development of consumer culture gradually linked the social economic changes to some deeper discussions on the ideological and institutional transformations.

In the meantime, when the society were enjoying the benefits brought by rising commodity economy, the socialist revolutionary political foundation was weakened, because the market reform had liberated people’s daily life from the country’s all-round control in economy. From my understanding, the freedom to consume preferred goods from the market opened a gate to experience the freedom to “the way of living”. The lifestyle did not stand for material enjoyment only, but in the later years expanded to some “dangerous” thoughts causing changes of the social structure and the political system. Therefore, the CCP conservatives took this crisis seriously and finally started the ASPC in 1983, which officially marked the beginning of unsettled inner-party struggles on an open platform until the end of the 1980s.

⁶⁷ Ziyang Zhao, (赵紫阳), *Prisoner of the State: The Secret Journal of Premier Zhao Ziyang*, (Hong Kong: New Central Press, 2009) p295.

Chapter 3 - Political Influence on Economic Reforms: The Anti-Spiritual Pollution Campaign in 1983

3.1 Reform Measures and the Unexpected Consequences:

“It is often said the rural reform was a gift from the party. It is a misunderstanding. Actually, the “production contracted to each household” system was more likely driven by the peasantry. The party just admitted and accepted this reality.”⁶⁸

The previous chapter introduces some new trends in the daily life and economic activities of Chinese people in the first five years of the economic reform. As a matter of fact, they were just one part of the long-term comprehensive social transformation which was rather visible in the society. This visible part of social transformation is important for historians who are interested in the early reform history of China, because the historical evidence like the new commodity, literature and artistic products has been spread to the society in a wide range and memorized by the mass public. Meanwhile it can be a precious window to make a thorough inquiry to some institutional changes and ideological controversies behind the practice of the economic reform.

This chapter will look inside this window to explore multiple reasons behind the inner-party political divergence that finally caused the Anti-Spiritual Pollution Campaign in 1983. It traces the whole process of this campaign from 1980 until its silence in late 1983. From the

⁶⁸ [Wangling Gao] 高王凌, *中国农民反行为研究(1950-1980)* [Study on The Counter-act of Chinese Peasantry] ,(Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2013), xv.

examples in both political and economic affairs, it is argued that the repeated inner-party political struggles between the two factions and the inconsistent attitudes towards the rising consumptions in the following decade was because that the CCP was not ready to handle the far-ranging impacts brought by the reforms. In other words, many of the social changes and potential political crisis in the early stage of the reforms were never expected by the CCP Central Committee and the local members. Many divergences occurred right after the occurrence of new social changes, since the different factions took some opposite “emergency measures” without any existing consensual solutions in the CCP’s pre-arranged plan.

A quite remarkable character of China’s economic reform was that many of the most effective measures were made after the “reform practice”, which greatly promoted productivity and improved people’s life. Many “illegal” economic activities in the Mao’s era, such as private market and individual farming, were justified in the following reforms and generalized in the whole country as soon as the party leaders noticed their actual benefits to the country.

For example, for the period from 1978 to 1982, the conservatives or innovationists in the CCP Central Committee would not repudiate that the five years’ reform was quite successful in developing the social productivity, especially the agricultural production, which was exactly the original propose to launch the economic reform.⁶⁹ The grain yield had a 25% growth from 1975 to 1985,⁷⁰ which directly benefited from the new rural land management system called “Household Production Responsibility System”. This system allowed individuals (in the form of families) to be responsible for their grain growing on the allocated lands, instead of just

⁶⁹ “中国共产党第十一届中央委员会第三次全体会议公报,[The Communique of the Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee]”, Dec.22th 1978, Beijing.

⁷⁰ Michael Hunt, *The World Transformed: 1945 to The Present*. (Oxford University Press, 2016), 355.

working for the people's commune on the public lands. Comparing with the previous People's Commune system, the responsibility system largely improved the peasants' enthusiasm for production because they could really enjoy the growth in grain production by selling them to private customers or the middlemen, after handing over the planned quantity of grains to the state. As a matter of fact, this system came from a "secret blood contract" signed by 18 peasants in Xiaogang Village in 1978. To improve their poor living, the 18 brave peasants signed a contract to distribute the commune-owned lands to individuals. It was a very risky attempt that might receive serious punishment, because it violated the public ownership of rural lands. However, the new system lasted for more than 25 years as a foundational economic rule in China.⁷¹

This case was a typical unpredicted and unexpected case for the CCP in the reform period. There was no scheduled plan to deal with this situation. Fortunately, under Deng's new guiding thoughts on "free our mind"⁷², together with the visible growth in grain production, the brave peasants did not get punished by their local government. Rather, the "Xiaogang Village mode" immediately became a model to be imitated by other regions, and the "household responsibility system" was admitted by Deng Xiaoping and written into the official rural reforming measures.⁷³ This new system was the groundbreaking step in the whole economic reform because it began to touch and shake the foundation of Chinese socialist economic system in the past 30 years, i.e. the public ownership. This case offers us a quite representative example

⁷¹ Gao, *Study on Counter-acts of Chinese Peasantry*, pp.214-227.

⁷² see "The Communiqué of the Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee".

⁷³ 邓小平年谱 [Chronology of Deng Xiaoping(1975-1997)], Literature Research Office of the CCP Central Committee, (Beijing: Central party Literature Press,2004),181.

in the early reform period. When the party sometimes did not have a clear practical way to achieve their macro object, some spontaneous attempts to break the old system would offer them pragmatic solutions. At the same time, it reflects a kind of energetic atmosphere in local regions, where Chinese people were keep attempting to get rid of the fixed old social system. At the same time, different levels of local government, publishing and media institutions were giving unprecedented freedom for the intellectuals and normal citizens to speak out their thoughts and comments on the reform.

However, not every challenger would be as lucky as the 18 peasants in Xiaogang Village, nor would all attempts breaking the old system be accepted by the party. CCP has its tradition of highly centralized authoritarian power, which means the central party leaders, no matter they were conservatives or innovationist, would not always tolerate doubt in their authority.⁷⁴ The origin of the ASPC was a strong epitome to response to those excessive and offensive activities. Comparing with the rural economic policy, the party was more sensitive about the discussions on the party's history in Mao Era or the Marxist theoretical system. The following paragraphs will explain the details in the origin of this political campaign.

3.2 Political Reform and the Counter Force in 1980

For the conservative faction of the CCP, represented by Chen Yun, Deng Liqun and Hu Qiaomu, the “emergency reactions” were very sensitive when the unexpected consequence of economic reform had affected the political stability of China. As a result, they launched several counterattacks against the innovationists in the discussion of political reforms, which became

⁷⁴ Yang, *Political Struggle in the Era of Reforming China*, 13.

one essential reason to the political movement in 1983.

In 1980, when reform in rural economy has witnessed abundant achievements, a possible political reform was included in the party's plan as its next reform steps. In August 18th, Deng Xiaoping gave a speech named "Reform of CCP and State's Leading System" on the meeting of the CCP Political Bureau. The speech symbolized many positive signals to political reform, such as "promoting people's democracy... erasing the bureaucratism of the party leaders", "to democratize the political affairs... to democratize the economic affairs and social life".⁷⁵ He also claimed his opinion against the idea of "supporting the proletariat and eliminating the bourgeoisie" by saying "It is wrong to criticize our current reforms which are truly good for socialist development and social productivity as criticizing capitalism".⁷⁶

Not surprisingly, this speech got extremely welcomed by the liberal intellectuals and young innovationists, for it was a first strong statement to pushing the political reform since 1978. Many radical intellectuals published articles on the newspaper to suggest possible ways to eliminate corruption and promote democracy.⁷⁷ The famous ideological propaganda platform of the party, *Guangming Daily*, posted articles in October, which attracted lots of readers to suggest the route of further political democratization.

These enthusiastic discussions on political reform and wide desire for liberalization and

⁷⁵ Xiaoping Deng, "党和国家领导制度的改革" [Reform of the CCP and the State's Leading System], in 邓小平文选第二卷 [Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping Vol.2], (Beijing: People's Press, 1994), 327-338.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Related newspaper articles includes [Jiaqi Yan] 严家其, "改革政治制度, 需要研究政体问题 [It Is Necessary to Study the Form of Government to Reform the Political System]" and [Haocheng Yu] 于浩成, "治制度改革的目标是实现民主化 [The Aim of Political Reform is to Achieve Democracy]". They were presented on the Conference of Theoretical Cycle in Beijing, held by the *Guangming Daily*, 1980.

democratization in some degree exceeded the conservatives' expectations. Chen Yun and his conservative partner, Hu Qiaomu, worried about the strong trend in political reform, so they planned to slow down the process of reform.⁷⁸ At the moment, a piece of international news offered them a perfect excuse to persuade Deng Xiaoping to stop the political reform.

This news was about the Independent Self-governing Labor Union "Solidarity" (Niezależny Samorządny Związek Zawodowy "Solidarność") in Poland in July 1980.⁷⁹ The social environment for the Labor Union movement in Poland was quite similar as that in China. It was starting from a weak economic situation and the desire to improve living standard. When the Polish Communist party (Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza, PZPR) could not satisfy the reform needs of the people, the Labor Movement turned into a mass political resistance and finally resulted in the end of the supreme authority of PZPR.⁸⁰ When the news of Polish turbulent political scene introduced to the CCP central leaders, the innovationist Deng Xiaoping and Hu Yaobang did not take too much attention. but the conservative faction, represented by Hu Qiaomu believed that "it is very likely to have the same political crisis in China."⁸¹ He wrote a letter to Hu Yaobang and claimed his worry:

"A small group of dissenters united with unsatisfied workers and civilians may become a strong political power... The foreign thoughts, economic and cultural influence may be a big problem for us... The Labor Unions can be divided into official union and private union. If we cannot deal with this within short time, other mass organizations may cause the same problem (as in Poland)."⁸²

Hu Yaobang did not response to his worry. For the party unity, he could directly refuse it,

⁷⁸ *The Biography of Hu Qiaomu*, p727.

⁷⁹ Jan Jozef Lipski, *Kor: A History of the Workers' Defense Committee in Poland, 1976-1981*, (University of California Press, 1985)

⁸⁰ Ibid

⁸¹ *The Biography of Hu Qiaomu*, p730.

⁸² Qiaomu Hu, 胡乔木书信集[Collection of Hu Qiaomu's Letters], (Beijing: People's Press, 2002), 287-289.

although he did not agree with the anxiety from Hu Qiaomu.⁸³ Hu Qiaomu wanted to expand the influence of this news to slow down the political reform, so he spread this letter to all central party organizations and different levels of local government and civil organizations and ask them to discuss and to “think about the solution”.⁸⁴ Soon the leader of the conservative faction, Chen Yun also stood out to support Hu Qiaomu by claiming that “ We must be aware if we have the chance to face the ‘Polish event’? If we manage the economic issues and propaganda works in a wrong way, it is very likely to happen”.⁸⁵

More and more articles and comments from the CCP propaganda departments joint the discussion on the Polish news, most of which agreed with the worry. The persistent pressure from the conservative faction successfully changed the reforming direction from pushing liberalization to avoiding political instability. Later, the central propaganda ministry stopped broadcasting Deng Xiaoping’s article of “reform of CCP and state's leading system”. Rather, the ministry requested “all newspapers, broadcasts, and televisions to unconditionally follow the guidance from party central committee in all political issues”⁸⁶ In the Central Working Conference in December 1980, there was no more discussions on the issues of the political reform. Chen Yun insisted that “We must take steady steps in reform, because it is full of complex problems... We should begin with doing experiments, which means ‘Crossing the river by feeling the stones’”.⁸⁷

⁸³ [Ping Sheng] 盛平, ed. 胡耀邦思想年谱[*The Chronology of Hu Yaobang's Thought*], (Hong Kong: Tidetime Publishing, 2007), p635.

⁸⁴ *The Biography of Hu Qiaomu*, 732.

⁸⁵ *The Chronology of Chen Yun*, vol.2 262.

⁸⁶ “关于当前报刊新闻广播宣传方针的决定[Decision on current news and broadcasting propaganda policy]”, posted by the CCP central committee, Jan. 29th, 1981.

⁸⁷ Chen, “经济状况的经验和教训”[Economic Situation with Experience and Lessons], speech on the CCP Central Working Conference, Dec.25th, 1980, in *Selected Works of Chen Yun*, 248-250

Deng Xiaoping also betrayed his early reforming plans by stating “to insist the Four Cardinal Principles”⁸⁸ and “We must criticize, educate and even struggle with any attempt on weakening, escaping or opposing the party’s leadership.”⁸⁹ As for the reform concerning the party and the nation’s leading system, he suggested “to start reform in some experimental unit”.⁹⁰ But when and where to start the experiment was never mentioned and practiced ever.

Based on the analysis from the layer of facts, it is considered that the real disastrous effect of this counter-reform movement in 1980 was not to the political reform but the economic reform, because the abortive propose of political reform only remained on paper works but the economic reform and the new born market system had led to actual damage. The Polish Issue began with the inequality in social distribution and insufficient in social productivity. Similarly, the conservatives’ worry on China’s instability was also caused by “unexpected economic phenomena”, which included the private-owned enterprises in rural area, the employing labors and private domestic trades. In 1981, the pedlars on streets of Beijing who sold radio tapes of Deng Lijun’s song or some petty dealers crossed the province boundary to resell agricultural products were all serious criminals. According to the party’s document, these private businesses can be called as “speculation”. The state council claimed “speculation” as a “very serious economic crime” and smuggling, corruption and stealing state property were to be punished.⁹¹ For the conservative supporters of planned economy, such economic activities

⁸⁸ The Four Cardinal Principles(四项基本原则) include the socialist road; the people's democratic dictatorship; Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought; the leadership of the Communist party of China. They were proposed by Deng Xiaoping in 1979, which stood for the conservative side ideology in the reform.

⁸⁹ Deng, Speech on the Central Working Conference, Dec. 25th, 1980. <http://cpc.people.com.cn/GB/69112/69113/69684/69695/4949718.html>, (accessed in May. 13th, 2018).

⁹⁰ Ibid

⁹¹ “关于打击经济领域中严重犯罪活动的决定” [Decision on fighting serious crimes in economic field], published by CCP Central Committee and The State Council, Apr.13th, 1982.

were strictly prohibited in the Mao Era, so the resurgences of market consumption touched their sensitive mind on the question of “socialism or capitalism?”⁹² This “one of two” question went through the whole reforming period together with Chinese marketization progress until the mid-1990s.

From my understanding on Hu Qiaomu and Deng Liqun’s counter movement in the reform, the essential reason to slow down the reform was not the market activity itself, like how the market would hurt the country or the people, but more like an ideal “label” on the nature of market which always stick to “capitalism”. Under this circumstance, what made the conservative faction anxious was the possibility that the rising market economy would subvert the socialist economic foundation and even shake the legitimacy of communist system. In the past 30 years, the CCP’s ruling foundation was based on the class struggle theory, which always divided socialism and capitalism into two absolutely hostile camps. For the CCP ruling group, it was kind of dangerous to admit an unexpected market economy without a self-consistent theoretical system, otherwise the party could not explain such a big switch in economic policies that violate the principles of socialist system. Although many western historians and Chinese liberal intellectuals deplored that Chinese demarcation process was blocked by the diehard conservatives, standing aside with the conservatives, their counter movement against the 1980’s political reform plan was reasonable in the condition of lacking theoretical support to justify the reform with systematic rationality and necessity. Later reforms in building market economy after the 1990s became more successful since the socialist market economy theory was officially established after the decade of long controversy.

⁹² Ma and Ling, *Confrontations: Record of the Three Ideological Emancipation in China*, 160-163

Chen Yun and Deng Liqun their political power in 1980 to fight against the coming political reform, but the actual consequence of this counter movement dropped into the economic field, simply because the new economic policies and market activities were ongoing with obvious violation the classical socialist theory. The most influential conclusion for the 1980 Central Working Conference, after such long critique of possible political crisis, was a united decision “to insist planned economy”.⁹³ In the end of 1980, the counter force on political reform actually reflected in slowing down the reforming process in economic affairs.

3.3 Fighting against the Pollution in Theoretical Field in 1983

The radical division of reforming plans stalemated in 1982, when both factions were holding their viewpoints without breaking the seemingly peaceful condition until a sudden storm emerged. On March. 14th, 1983, the 100th anniversary of Marx’s death, the CCP Central Committee held an academic conference, which ironically turned into an opportunity to launch the full-scale attack on the spiritual pollutions. A speech given by Zhou Yang(周扬)⁹⁴ with the theme of Marxist “humanitarianism” and “alienation” became the most controversial issue. This chapter will not go deeper in the discussion on Marxist alienation and humanitarianism theory, but it is still necessary to introduce the main idea of Zhou Yang’s speech, due to its significant role as the blasting fuse for the coming political movement.

Alienation (*Entfremdung*) is a Marxist concept which is mainly discussed in his *Economic*

⁹³ This decision was made by Chen Yun, see *Chronology of Chen Yun (1905-1995)*, 263-264, and supported by Deng Xiaoping, see *Chronology of Deng Xiaoping(1975-1997)*, 698.

⁹⁴ Zhou Yang is a famous Chinese Marxist theorist who had taken the place of the vice-minister of the central propaganda department. He was a leftist literary critic in his early career. After the cultural revolution, his thought changed a lot and raised some liberal ideas such as humanitarianism.

& *Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*. It describes a social consequence found in the modern bourgeois society. As the capitalist industrialization developed, it transformed the labor relation with their work. As a chain of the capitalist production process, the labors lost their control of the work, then their life. They never had the chance to make decisions by themselves but only live in the form which the bourgeois set for them.⁹⁵ Generally speaking, it is a disastrous effect which only exist in capitalist society. What made Zhou's speech debatable was he argued that "There are also alienation phenomena in Chinese socialist system."⁹⁶ For the conservative party leaders and the old-school communist theorists, this argument was a strong offence to the superiority of socialism. In their minds, the socialist system in China had successfully overcame the deficiency of labor exploitation and the idea of "socialist alienation" was "disloyal to the socialist system"⁹⁷

One famous sufferer in this "alienation issue" was Wang Ruoshui, who worked as the vice chief editor of the *People's Daily* at the moment. Wang also had the similar understanding on the alienation theory and contributed much in Zhou's speech on Marxist theory.⁹⁸ His memoirs on this political campaign symbolized that the beginning of mass political criticism was triggered by the "alienation" problem. When Hu Qiaomu and Deng Liqun reported Zhou Yang's speech about the "humanitarianism" and "alienation" to Deng Xiaoping, Deng asked them, "What is alienation?" They answered, "It is anti-socialism." Then Deng Xiaoping

⁹⁵ The basic meaning of alienation cited from *Encyclopedia of Marxism*: <https://www.marxists.org/glossary/terms/a/l.htm>. accessed in May. 2nd, 2018. For further information, the concept refers to Richard Schacht, *Alienation*, (London: Psychology Press, 2015).

⁹⁶ [Huaiming Hao] 郝怀明, *如烟如火话周扬* [Talk About Zhou Yang: Like Fireworks], (Beijing: China Federation of Literature Press, 2008), 399.

⁹⁷ [Ruoshui Wang] 王若水, "清除精神污染前后" [Before and After the Anti-Spiritual Pollution Campaign], <http://www.wangruoshui.net/CHINESE/QINGWUQH.HTM>, (accessed in May. 12th, 2018).

⁹⁸ Ibid.

claimed that “Do not make spiritual pollution in theoretical and art fields”.⁹⁹ It was the first time the term “spiritual pollution” appeared in the party leader’s comments, which marked that the conservatives successfully won support from Deng Xiaoping in the coming political movement.

In October 10th, 1983, the Second Plenary Session of the Twelfth Central Committee was held in Beijing, in which Deng Xiaoping gave a speech on “the party’s urgent mission in terms of organization structures and thoughts”. Drafted by Hu Qiaomu and Deng Liqun, the report clearly presented their attitude towards the spiritual pollutions. In this speech, Deng Xiaoping pointed out that “There are serious problems in the circle of economic theory and literature, especially some spiritual pollutions... the substance of spiritual pollutions is to spread decadent bourgeoisie ideology to corrupt our nation... The (capitalist) humanitarianism theory and the idea of alienation are the two outstanding problems.”¹⁰⁰ Actually, this speech only emphasized the dangerous situation but did not mention any practical measures to “eliminate the spiritual pollutions” in the conference. But Deng Liqun perfectly leveraged this speech in pushing his anti-spiritual-pollution movement to the local level.

At the moment, Deng Liqun had taken the position of the Minister of CCP Central Propaganda Department. He made use of this convenience to spread the main idea of the Second Plenary Session of the Twelfth Central Committee and Deng’s speech to the local party organizations in short time, together with his instructions on “solving the problem from the bottom”.¹⁰¹ The local government and party organizations immediately launched the anti-

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Xiaoping Deng, “The Party’s Urgent Mission in the Battlefields of Organization and Thoughts”.

¹⁰¹ *Autobiography of Deng Liqun: Twelve Years (1975-1987)*, 449.

spiritual pollution movement in theoretical and artificial administration. Soon it expanded to many other local social activities and economic policies.

To eliminate the pollutions in central theoretical departments, Deng Liqun asked Zhou Yang to write a self-criticism report.¹⁰² Then Deng Liqun criticized Wang Ruoshui and Hu Jiwei for their different opinions against the socialist ideology, removed them from the chief editor positions of the *People's Daily*. In the arts and publishing industry, scar fictions and scar films, like *The Legend of Tianyun Mountain* and *The Sun and The Man* were banned by the central propaganda department and criticized by the official newspapers.¹⁰³ Later, under Deng Liqun and Hu Qiaomu's support, the economic reform, including the rural "Household Responsibility System" and the four special economic zones,¹⁰⁴ has become the target to criticize by the party conservatives. They even slandered that the four special economic zones "are the new format of colonial concessions".¹⁰⁵ Although these criticism on the party's economic achievements only stayed on "verbal dissatisfaction", their following attack on economic activities on the local level did made big troubles to the Chinese society.

3.4 Fighting against Spiritual Pollutions in Economy

Accompanied by the continuing expansion of ASPC, many reforming ideas in the

¹⁰² Hao, *Talk About Zhou Yang: Like Fireworks*, 401.

¹⁰³ *The Sun and the Man*, directed by Peng Ning, produced by Changchun Film Studio in 1980, was adapted from Bai Hua's script 苦恋[*The Bitter Love*]. There is one famous question asked in this film "You love this country so much, but does this country love you?", which got strong criticism from the *Liberation Army Daily* since 1981 and lasted until the end of 1983, see "坚持和维护四项基本原则[to Insist and to Preserve The Four Cardinal Principles]", in *Liberation Army Daily*, Apr.17th 1981.

¹⁰⁴ The four Special Economic Zones are Shenzhen, Zhuhai, Xiamen and Shantou. In 1979 the CCP central committee and state council set these four cities to make experiments on foreign trade and attract foreign investments.

¹⁰⁵ [Linyun Zhao], 赵凌云 ed. *中国共产党经济工作史[History of the CCP's economic work]*, (Beijing: China Financial & Economical Publishing House, 2011), 470.

economic affairs have been involved into this political movement. The newborn market, as well as the novel economic theory and policy were included into the spiritual pollution. Comparing with the previous critique in Marxist theatrical and literary fields, critique on economic theory would result in more practical influence on the society, because if the critique on market reform come true, “it was possible to overthrow the good momentum in the first five years of reform.”¹⁰⁶

In previous chapters, many new phenomena in people’s consumption behaviors have been introduced, especially the enjoyment of fashionable dress code, popular culture and arts. Those examples indicate that the historical background has created the wide discussion on money, because the relationship between money and consumption activities had changed since 1980. After the socialist economic reform (1952-1954), China established the “planned supply system” of all life needs, which means all major products could only be consumed with the coupons distributed by the government. Money was useless in the state-owned market without the coupons. But things changed in the economic form.¹⁰⁷ When the development of private light industry and textile factories reached its top speed since 1978, the clothing coupons were no longer necessities in the clothing market. Then the central government officially canceled the clothing coupon in 1983, which means money became the only tool to buy new fashionable clothes. Therefore, the value of money became more important for every Chinese in economic life, but it seemed to violate the socialist tradition of plain living.

The early stage of critique on market consumption theory can be seen in the memoir of Zhang Weiying. Zhang is a Chinese economist who was studying for his master’s degree in

¹⁰⁶ Ziyang Zhao, *Prisoner of the State: The Secret Journal of Premier Zhao Ziyang*, pp.122-124

¹⁰⁷ Zhao, *History of the CCP’s economic work*, p305.

economy when the ASPC happened.¹⁰⁸ In August 9th, 1983, Zhang posted an article named “To Justify the Value of Money” on *China Youth Daily*. In this article, he claimed that “In the production process of commodity, money is your social medal. Earning money means you have contributed to the society, because you finished the tasks divided by the society... Earning money is just like earning military medals on the battlefields.”¹⁰⁹ His article also pointed out “China is now in the transformation period of thoughts and social structure, from natural economy to commodity economy. It is impossible for someone to get rich while resisting the ‘money-oriented’ thoughts”.¹¹⁰ The editor of the newspaper also noted that “Zhang claims his opinion on the issue ‘looking forwards to money’. We welcome more discussions on this topic”. Later, as many other debatable topics in the reforming period did, the *China Youth Daily* became an enthusiastic stage for the debates among different views on “earning money” and “consumptions”. The leader of official theoretical discussion platforms, *Guangming Daily*, also posted lots of discussion articles on its economic pages.¹¹¹ As a matter of fact, Zhang’s view on money stood for the new trend in people’s mind since 1978: when the economic reform in social distribution gave Chinese people the chance to manage their income and consumption (still in limited range), the value of money naturally attracted more attention. As a result, many workers and well-educated youth wrote mails to the newspaper to support Zhang’s opinion and stated their wishes to justify money and consumption as normal issues in the society, instead of elements from bourgeois lifestyle.

¹⁰⁸ Zhang Weiying’s information on Peking University website, <http://scholar.pku.edu.cn/wyzhang/home>, (accessed in May. 12th. 2018)

¹⁰⁹ [Weiying Zhang]张维迎, “为钱正名—有感于〈中国青年报〉的一则报道[To Justify the Value of Money]”, in *China Youth Daily*, Aug. 9th. 1983.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ *Guangming Daily*, Sep.14th and Sep. 17th. 1983.

However, Deng has made a clear statement on the Second Plenary Session of the Twelfth Central Committee in October 12th that the “money-oriented society” should be criticized.¹¹² Immediately, the critique on Zhang’s article became the core target in the movement, which transferred an academic discussion into a serious political mistake as “spiritual pollution” and “bourgeois liberalization”.¹¹³ It was a quite familiar scene for many Chinese people who had just experienced mass political campaigns in the Cultural Revolution, during which period any mistakes in economy, literature and even daily life could be defined as political mistakes and bring criticism and punishment.¹¹⁴ Fortunately, the mass critique on Zhang’s article did not cause very serious results for him. Although the young economist wrote a self-criticism article and submitted it to the school, his supervisor, who was also the president of the Chinese Northwest University, believed that this article should not be regarded as spiritual pollution, but only as discussion of different academic opinions.¹¹⁵ By the end of the year 1983, the university endured many pressure from local party organizations and weakened the harsh criticism on “reactionary” economic theories coming from conservative intellectuals. However, the controversy on the value of money never ended until the 1990s. Before the Chinese government officially affirm the commodity economy, “money-oriented” work and lifestyle were usually considered improper for the socialist countries.

In the daily economic life, economic departments of local governments regraded commodity economy as one of the “typical pollutions” to be criticized in the society.¹¹⁶ Once

¹¹² Xiaoping Deng, “The party’s Urgent Mission in the Battlefields of Organization and Thoughts”.

¹¹³ [Shuguang Zhang]张曙光, *中国经济学风云史*[The History of Chinese Economic Studies], (Beijing: Global Publishing, 2006), 413-415.

¹¹⁴ Frank Dikötter, *The Cultural Revolution: A People's History 1962—1976*, (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2016), pp.225-235.

¹¹⁵ Shuguang Zhang, *The History of Chinese Economic Studies*, 414.

¹¹⁶ Yang, *Political Struggle in the Era of Reform in China*, 252-254.

again, the police and economic administrators began to fight against economic crimes like “speculation” or “long distance trading”. But it was difficult to put this renovation of economic activities into practice, because they were produced by some imbalanced reforming policies in different provinces. As the previous chapters noted, many reforming policies were firstly made from the local level then admitted by the party organizations. In the unstable reforming situation where guiding thoughts from the party’s central economic policies might change very soon, different local governments often set up different policies to manage the production and the consumption activities in the market.

As one of the most important trading ports in the Opening-up Reform, Guangdong Province was the pioneer in the market reform, where economic policies were very flexible, allowing people to trade agricultural or industrial products freely. In addition, many agricultural products in nearby provinces which were still under the “unified national acquisition system” could be traded in the free markets in Guangdong. Those neighboring provinces such as Hunan Province and Guangxi Province were the main grain-producing areas, where the price of rice and pork, no matter in the state acquisition market or in the semi-legal free markets, was much lower than that in Guangdong Province. This gap in food price between two close provinces led to the result that a huge group of interprovincial food traders and farmers in Hunan refused to sell their grain to the government but trooped to free markets in Guangdong.

To fight against such criminal behaviors, the government of provinces near Guangdong had to send the police and the militiaman to set checkpoints and barriers to stop and catch the “speculators.”¹¹⁷ However, these peasants were as tricky as Chinese peasants always are. They

¹¹⁷ [Yi Lei]雷颐, “‘投机倒把’的来龙去脉[The origin of the ‘Speculation’]”, in *经济观察报*[*The Economic Observer*], Dec.3rd, 2016.

transported goods just like the Red Army guerrillas escaping from the National Army's suppression in the 1920s. Although the local government worked hard to stop this "polluted behavior" in economy, the result did not meet their expectation in slowing down the marketization process.

3.5 Chaotic Social Impacts of the ASPC

Aside from clear orders given by the CCP Central Committee to criticize and punish some representative liberal thoughts and wrong economic behaviors, many primary party organizations creatively expanded the range of criticism, because there was no official range given by the Central party to limit the scope of the movement. It was also out of the party conservatives' expectation that under the political pressure, a kind of communist asceticism came back, which was to some extent similar to the situation in the Cultural Revolution, to depress people's desire to pursue beauty, enjoy life or show individual characteristics.

Xu Baike is a famous journalist from the *China Youth Daily* who has experienced the crazy expansion of ASPC. His memoir records some absurd and ridicules stories during the climax stage of the movement: *The Biography of Karl Marx*, published by the People's Press, had once been confiscated as "dirty book", because on its inside page, there was a picture of Marx's wife who is wearing an off-the-shoulder dress; The *Outlook Weekly*, published by the Xinhua News Agency, got criticized by some local bureaus of culture, because there was a "dirty photo" on the cover, which was a female gymnastic world champion doing gymnastic performance in tights.¹¹⁸ Photo with naked body was the worst pollution to be burnt. Even a

¹¹⁸ [Baike Xu]徐百柯, "一篇文章叫停一场运动"[An Article Stopped A Political Movement]", in *China Youth Daily*, Nov.5th, 2008.

soldier was punished for carrying a photo of his wife with him, because “falling in love will corrode people’s volition in constructing our country.”¹¹⁹ Some new lifestyles came into being in the last five years, like wearing bell-bottom pants, having make-ups or playing pop music were banned from the mainstream society. The safeguards of state-owned factories and the government agencies would not allow people with “strange appearance” to enter the gate.¹²⁰ Actually, the range of spiritual pollution could contain anything that made the party officers unsatisfied. For the primary party organizations, comparing with the new reform plan which needed a bit of innovation and courage, it was kind of easier to follow the party’s guiding flag and continue the political movement, at least the experience of the Cultural Revolution has not completely faded away in their memory.

From the graduate student’s article on commodity economy to the peasants’ semi-legal markets, from the declining grain acquisition system to the prohibited fashion consumptions, the influence of ASPC has touched most corners of China’s economic reform. Unlike the counter movement against the reform proposal in political affairs, the criticism on economic affairs affected the majority of Chinese people who participated in daily economic life. Political orders from the central party and local governments restrained the growing trend of social consumptions, but they could not completely eliminate the achievements in the early economic reforms. On the other hand, from the disordered measures and the chaotic social consequences of the ASPC, it can be seen that the initiator of this movement, which is the conservative faction in the party, did not prepare meticulously for the following mass movements in reality. Again,

¹¹⁹ This sentence is originally from a handbook to criticized pop songs with love affairs in lyrics, People’s Music editorial office ed. *如何鉴别黄色歌曲* [How to Define Dirty Songs], (Beijing: People’s Music Press, 1982), 3.

¹²⁰ Xu, “An Article Stopped A Political Movement”

this movement is still considered as an “emergency reaction” dealing with the unexpected reform consequences. Neither did they successfully transfer the ASPC into a long-term national policy like the Cultural Revolution, because the economic foundation had changed and the CCP’s absolute control on economic affairs no longer existed. After the political movement in 1983, the CCP conservatives had to face the unstoppable market economy and rethink their politics in the economic reforms. The following chapters will study the turns in the party’s attitudes towards spiritual pollutions in economic affairs.

Chapter 4 - The Developing Commodity Economy (1984-1986)

This chapter focuses on market reforms with new trends in consumption behaviors in the three years after the ASPC (1984-1986). It aims to study the long-term influence of this short but drastic movement in the next stage of Chinese economic reform. In the three years, relying on the shift in CCP's economic guiding policy and the growth in social productivity, the environment of consumption in China had improved a lot and gradually equipped with some basic conditions to formulate consumerism in the society with Chinese characteristics.

The previous chapter investigates the origin of the Anti-Spiritual Pollution Campaign in 1983. This political movement started from theoretical divergence in the party's proposal on political reform, and then expanded to economic affairs all around the country. A particularly noteworthy character of the CCP conservatives' attitude towards this movement before the ASPC was that they considered the political mistakes and the economic mistakes on a quite equal level to oppose to, which created countless targets to criticize on the local level, then resulted in an unlimited expansion of the mass movement.

In the end of 1983, under the worry of "another Cultural Revolution", the CCP central leaders agreed to weaken the range of ASPC and tried to divide the economic reform from the political reform, which as far as I concerned was the most influential consequence of this campaign. In the following three years, the Chinese government on one hand partly justified the value of commodity economy and gave the market more freedom. But on the other hand, its attitude towards the western political theory was still sensitive and remained a strict control.

From the positive aspect, I think the separation between economic reform and the political reform was quite a successful attempt in the CCP's reform policies, because it did offer more flexibility for the local government to manage people's desire of improving the living standard after 1984. However, the long-term systematic social transformation required synchronous developments in both fields of politics and economy.

4.1 The Dissenting Voice and the End of the ASPC

When the ASPC was officially launched in October 1983, the inner-party conflicts between Hu Yaobang and the conservative leaders, Hu Qiaomu and Deng Liqun came out into the open. At the moment, Hu Yaobang was in a dilemma: On one hand, he had to preserve solidarity among the party leaders by not expressing different voice against the party's decision, so his public speeches on this issue were kind of obscure and sometimes inconsistent. On the other hand, he believed the ASPC had expanded much farther than its safe range, which might be very dangerous to the social stability. As the general secretary of the party, he tried to use his power to weaken the influence of ASPC and even protect some liberal intellectuals from harsher punishment.¹²¹ The biggest offender in the Marxist theoretical discussion, Zhou Yang, was criticized by the conservatives for years after he made the "alienation" speech. Hu Yaobang sympathized with his suffering and tried to rehabilitate his theoretical contribution in the ideological emancipation by saying that "Zhou Yang's discussion on the Marxist theory could only be examined by practice... could only be judged by the masses".¹²² However, in the

¹²¹ Shuguang Zhang, *The History of Chinese Economic Studies*, 412.

¹²² [Xiang Gu], 顾骧 "兰叶春葳蕤:评周扬近作"[Review of Zhou Yang's Recent Work], in *The People's Daily*, Jan.29th, 1985.

ASPC, Deng Xiaoping mostly stood on the side with the conservative faction, which made Hu Yangbang helpless in the party central leading group, so Hu Yangbang had to look for another public opinion position to express his different attitude from the conservatives.

In Nov. 10th, 1983, Hu Yaobang called up the leaders of the *People's Daily* and the Xinhua News Agency to a private meeting. In this meeting, he politely expressed his opinion. He firstly clarified that Deng Xiaoping's speech on the Second Plenary Session of the Twelfth Central Committee had given a clear range to eliminate spiritual pollutions, "...It only aims to the pollutions in theoretical and intellectual circles." Also, he pointed that "there are some wrong methods in eliminating the pollutions in some local governments and party organizations... It is a problem in practice because they did not understand Xiaoping's speech well."¹²³ Then he proposed eight rules "to correct the wrong methods in practice", which covered most of the new objects criticized in the running mass movement.

On the new dressing trend, he suggested "the government shall not butt into people's choice of dress code, since our country just began to have some varied dressing styles..." For the music, he "...encourages revolutionary songs, but do not prohibit light music unless they are indecent... The prohibition must be authorized by the central cultural department." As for the films, operas, dances or acrobatic shows, he claimed that "they are all free to show unless some of them are officially banned by the central administrative order".¹²⁴

Hu's talk was the first time for a central party leader to unequivocally stated the proposition to slow down the ASPC, which immediately caused repercussions in the one-sided propaganda environment. In Nov. 11th, the *China Youth Daily* published a commentary named "Eliminate

¹²³ *The Chronology of Hu Yaobang's Thought*, vol.2, 1130.

¹²⁴ *Ibid*, 1131.

the Pollution, Beautify the Life”. The author argued that “Young women like perm, young people like fashionable clothes... (they) are not relevant to the spiritual pollutions at all... It is legitimate and positive to look for a beautiful life... We should not pay attention to the width of the pants, the length of the heels or the style of dressing and haircuts and the and regarded them as spiritual pollutions...”¹²⁵ More sharply, the article pointed out the potential dangers in this mass movement, “If we do not analyze (what is real pollution), we cannot distinguish right from wrong... even the ‘leftist’ past may come back...”.

This article was the first signal containing some negative attitude towards the ASPC, and it was published on one of the party’s central propaganda newspapers, which offered a series of dissenting voice in the following debates. On Dec.31st, the *China Youth Daily* posted an interview titled “What is Bizarre Dress?” with Prof. Bai Chongli, a famous designer from Central Academy of Art and Design. This article reclaimed to wear beautiful clothing is “a normal lifestyle.”¹²⁶

From Hu Yaobang’s different voice against the conservative faction, it is quite obvious that he was more open-minded to the changes in Chinese society brought by the economic reform. Meanwhile, he did not just consider this freedom as a social liberation process but also realized its economic benefit to promote the industrial production. In his talk with the propaganda officers, he said “To allow and even to encourage more dress code is to encourage people’s consumption, which is a necessary measure to promote our industrial production... We need

¹²⁵ [Zhuqing Xu]徐祝庆, “污染须清除 生活要美化” [Eliminate the Pollution, Beautify the Life], In *China Youth Daily*, Nov.11th, 1983.

¹²⁶ “什么是“奇装异服”——访中央工艺美术学院副教授白崇礼”[What is Bizarre Dress? Interview with Prof. Bai Chongli from the Central Academy of Art and Design], in *China Youth Daily*, Dec.31st. 1983.

to understand the relationship between them, that consumption can boost social production.”¹²⁷

Comparing with all the CCP central leaders’ articles and public speeches on the economic issues before 1983, Hu Yaobang’s understanding of the relationship between consumption and production was the most advanced one, which basically touched Baudrillard’s theory on consumption society. When Baudrillard defines consumption activity in an overproduction economy, he stressed an essential social function of consumption is promoting production.¹²⁸ In the early 1980s, Hu was the only one in the CCP central leading groups who thought deeply in the commodity economy because he had realized the systemic disadvantage in the socialist planned economy.

According to Hu’s political partner in the CCP Central Committee, the Prime Minister Zhao Ziyang’s memoir, Hu believed the highly-centralized economic plans from the top would definitely limit the initiative of the mass while it was eliminating the creativity of the local governments and enterprises, so it would be better if the CCP allows the mass, the enterprises and the local government to free their hands in the economic development.¹²⁹ Hu’s concept of market economy differed from the majority of the other leaders in CCCPC. The leader of the conservative faction, Chen Yun always believed in economic plans. Chen was a follower of the Soviet economic mode, because the “Five Years Plans” in USSR successfully transferred an underdeveloped country to a world economic hegemon that could compete with the U.S. His plan for the next stage of the economic reform was to build a “Planned Economy Supplemented by Market Regulation.”¹³⁰, which did not mean establishing a market system but only using

¹²⁷ *The Chronology of Hu Yaobang’s Thought*, vol.2, p1131.

¹²⁸ Baudrillard, *The Consumer Society: Myths and Structures*, 12-58.

¹²⁹ Zhao, *Prisoner of the State: The Secret Journal of Premier Zhao Ziyang*, 118.

¹³⁰ Yun Chen, “加强和改进经济工作” [To Strengthen and Improve the Economic Works], Jan.25th, 1982. in

the price leverage to stabilize the economy. That caused the long-term divergence in the reform orientations between Hu Yaobang and Chen Yun before and after the ASPC.

However, by the end of 1983, many semi-legal markets in the coastal provinces had already become the center of all economic activities, which strongly weakened the power of administrative orders in local economy.¹³¹ For the CCP conservative leaders, it was almost impossible to erase the statues of the market by the ASPC because Hu Yaobang's effort in the propaganda space successfully reconfirmed that the range of ASPC could only limit in the theoretical circles. Hu's insistence stopped the politicization of the economic activities, so the conservative faction of CCP did not mention the term "spiritual pollution" too often after 1983, especially in the economic policies. It marked that the ASPC was no longer a major political assignment for the CCP Central Committee.

4.2 Development of Consumptions with Chinese Characteristics 1984-86

When the CCP conservative faction accepted the fact that the marketization was an undeniable process at that moment, they made concessions in the economic policies, which offered a loose environment for the development of consumptions in the following years. Starting from 1984, the consumption activities in China stepped into another round of high-speed development. I agreed that the great trend indeed benefited from the shift in economic policies from above, but more importantly, China just began a dramatic transformational period, when all aspects of consumption were changing, including the participants (consumers and

Selected Works of Chen Yun, vol.3, 314-315.

¹³¹ Zhao, *History of the CCP's economic work*, p311.

retailers), the object (commodities) the place (markets), the way to consume(habits) and even the meaning of consumption.

The first and most foundational change was the formation of the two sides in all consumption activities, the consumers and retailers. As the examples of candy shop and the dress codes written in the previous chapter showed, Chinese people in the planned economy period had very few choices to consume what they need and what they like. It was basically because the planned distribution system had decided the types and total amount of commodities for everyone in the shortage of supplies. In another word, aside from a small group of privileged class, like the party and military cadres, there was almost no consumer who had free will in the social distribution chain.

After 1979, the income for both rural and urban residents had a huge growth,¹³² while the growth in food and light industrial productions became the foundation to create the new consumer group by supplying them sufficient commodities with various types. When the supply of daily necessities could fulfill people's basic life needs, the Chinese people regained the rights to choose what they like from the market. At the same time, the private retail business also developed and challenged the position of "supply and marketing cooperatives" operated by the state, because the private retailer cared about their own business more than any salesperson in the state-owned stores, and they offered more choices for the consumers with a flexible price. All these favorable conditions contributed to the people's participation in consumption activities.

¹³² From 1978 to 1991, the per capita disposable income of the urban residents increased from 343 CNY to 1700 CNY, the net income of the rural residents increased from 133 CNY to 708 CNY. Data comes from the National Statistics Bureau of China. http://www.stats.gov.cn/zjtj/ztfx/jnggkf30n/200810/t20081031_65691.html (accessed in May, 25th, 2008)

The ways of consumption were also shaped by the flexibility in market price. In the old state-owned shops, all prices were set by the government, the salesmen had no obligation to manage the price. But when the private markets went back, the consumers started to bargain in the market. They always tried to be responsible for their right of free choice as well as their salaries, so they checked the standard price from the state-owned shops and went to the private shops and bargained for a lower price. However, the free market might have many profiteers, so they must be very cautious to check the quality of the goods and to figure out the differences between real products and the advertisements.

Aside from the basic life needs, the “luxurious goods” for a household, upgraded from the old “three-major-items” (watch, bicycle and sewing machine) to the new “three-major-items” (television, refrigerator and washing machine).¹³³ These are the representative massive commodities for Chinese families in the 1980s to show their living standard, which, according to Baudrillard, have more social symbolic meanings in the consumption society.¹³⁴

For this kind of “luxury consumption”, a significant factor that influenced people’s decision was the brands. The development of foreign trade brought in many famous foreign products. These foreign brands were considered as a signal of the higher living standard, especially for the electric appliances. If someone had a Toshiba television or a Panasonic refrigerator, he might draw numerous envy glance from the others.¹³⁵ Comparing with the famous foreign brands, China only had a few old brands, which were mostly the classical state-

¹³³ [Haiyan Chen]陈海燕, “北京居民消费结构不断升级”[The Consumption Structure of Residents in Beijing Upgraded for Times], in the *People's Daily Overseas Edition*, Aug.31th, 2009.

¹³⁴ Baudrillard, *The Consumer Society: Myths and Structures*, 48-53.

owned brands who lacked the modern marketing management in the booming age of consumptions. It was not surprising that the local brands were defeated by the foreign competitors because the Chinese electronic industry in the 1980s did fell behind the developed countries. Meanwhile, what made this situation more terrible was that many marketing measures, such as the advertisement had been banned from the mass media in the planned economy, because “advertisement is a business mode of the bourgeoisie”¹³⁶. The local companies needed to learn how to advertise their products in the competitive market and how to attract the consumers.

Just like Pierre Cardin’s first visit to China had brought the western fashion style to this country, David Ogilvy, the “Father of Advertising”, introduced the modern advertising model to China in the early 1980s as well. In his first visit to China, Ogilvy was shocked by the “advertisements” there: The printed advertising posters were just like product descriptions. They were full of detailed technical information but no visible images to call upon the consumers’ desire to buy. The very few TV advertisements were mostly some industrial products, such as engines and lathes. It was really hard to see any daily goods in the TV advertisements.¹³⁷ Nevertheless, the Chinese companies in the free market had excellent skills in understanding the new business trends to attract consumers. When the advisements were no longer criticized as spiritual pollutions, they quickly spread to all mass media in the country. In the young market, advertisements successfully promoted the sale of products in competitions. On the other hand, they also reinforced the social symbolic function of the commodities,

¹³⁶ [Shunhua Sun]孙顺华, *中国广告史*[The History of Advertisements in China], (Jinan: Shandong University Press, 2007), 187.

¹³⁷ Gerth, *As China Goes, So Goes the World*, 70.

because they often gave the products a social meaning to represent some typical lifestyles.¹³⁸

The advertisements made Chinese consumers not only to think about the price and quality of the products but also some symbolic functions behind them that can present their social status, which became even more important in the development of consumerism in the following years.

One distinctive feature of mass consumption activities in China was the nationalist characteristic. It was not a new character just happened after the economic reform, but a social tradition dated back the early 20th century. Gerth's book explains the origin of the "nationalistic consumption" in 1920s. When China just began to develop capitalism and established a primary market consumption system, the domestic products could not compete with the foreign brands in the market. To help Chinese local industry, the government and the social elites encouraged Chinese people to support the national brands, which gave the mass consumption activities more political meanings. When consumers were making their choices among all kinds of goods, they needed to think about the nationalist signals behind.¹³⁹

In correspond to "consuming more domestic goods", "the boycott of goods from one typical country" became a very direct and easy way for the Chinese people to present the hostility to the country since the May Fourth Movement in 1919. Although the consumption activities in China had a long-term suppression after 1949, the CCP party still admitted the "Domestic Product Movement" and the "Boycott of Japanese Goods" as positive patriotic events in the history textbooks.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁸ Yu, *Consumption in China: How China's New Consumer Ideology is Shaping the Nation*, 24.

¹³⁹ Karl Gerth, *China Made: Consumer Culture and the Creation of the Nation*, 12-16.

¹⁴⁰ The History Department of the Peoples' Educational Press ed. *全日制普通高中教科书: 中国近代现代史*, [The Mandatory Textbook for High School: The Modern History of China], (Beijing: People's Educational Press,

In 1985, when the foreign goods had occupied a big part of Chinese market, the nationalist sentiment appeared once again among the Chinese consumers, which caused a series of protest movements in China. 1985 was the 40th Anniversary of the Victory in the Anti-Japanese War, the government organized some commemorative activities. Meanwhile, the trade between China and Japan was in its golden age. After the six's growth in trade since the *China-Japan Peace and Friendship Treaty* (1978), the value of trade with Japan increased to 16.4 billion USD. But China had a huge trade deficit of 5.2 billion USD.¹⁴¹ Because of the backwardness in science and technology, the lack of information and some corruption problems among the business officers, some Japanese companies dumped many outmoded production equipment and sham products to China.¹⁴² This negative news was widely circulated in the society and badly hurt people's favorable impression on the Japanese products. And some radical Chinese people believed that Japan was pushing another round of economic aggression, just like they did in the past. They suggested the consumers to boycott Japanese goods "for the interest of our nation"¹⁴³

What made the nationalist sentiment more enthusiastic was a political issue happened in Aug. 15th, 1985. The Japanese Prime Minister Nakasone visited the Yasukuni War Shrine to worship the war criminals in the WWII. It was always a serious offence to the Chinese nationalists in the Sino-Japanese relationship, especially right after the scandal in trade. On Sep. 18th, the anniversary of Japan's Invasion of China in 1931, many young students from

2003), 100-104.

¹⁴¹ The data comes from *China Commercial Yearbook 1984*, published by China's Ministry of Commerce, 1984. <http://data.cnki.net/trade/Yearbook/Single/N2005121037?z=Z004> (accessed in May.29th, 2018)

¹⁴² Yang, *Political Struggle in China's Reform Era*, 270.

¹⁴³ Ibid, 272.

Peking University tried to organize a protest on the Tiananmen Square to express their anger and their hope to change the Sino-Japanese economic relationship. Although their protest plan was restrained by the school, they gained support from students and citizens in many other cities. On Oct. 1st, thousands of students organized a protest demonstration in Xi'an, where the angry student burnt advertisement posters of the Japanese photographic equipment to show their determination in boycotting the Japanese goods.¹⁴⁴ From this case, the meanings of consumption for the Chinese people in the 1980s was more than just participation in the economic activities to get their basic life needs or fulfill their personal preference. On a spiritual level, the consumption activity became a channel to present consumer's political opinion. To explain this representative character of consumption in China, it is still necessary to look back to the CCP's political strategy in balancing the people's desire in economic reforms and political reforms.

4.3 The Gains from “Planned Commercial Economy” and the Loss in Political Reforms

In 1984, the end of the ASPC in economic affairs allowed the CCP's economists to concentrate their mind on making economic reform plans in a larger scale, especially the laws and regulations in the urban economy. The party leaders needed to give their clear attitude towards many new phenomena existing in the urban economy. Just like the fact that rural land contracting system was legitimized after the actual effect had proved its advantage in promoting the food production, the free markets in the cities and towns had already showed their contribution in promoting consumption and accelerating social reproduction. The problem

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

was that there was no clear documents or laws to confirm the legal status of commodity economy in China until 1984, because concepts like “commodity” or “market” were often disliked by the conservative faction as threats to the economic foundation of socialism.¹⁴⁵ However, things changed after 1983, when failure in the ASPC suggested that the party leaders need to control and manage the rising commodity market rather than forbid it.¹⁴⁶ So the legitimization of commodity economy became an urgent mission for the party in 1984.

Actually, it was not the first time when CCP realized a guiding document could properly unite the economic policies in different local regions, because the groundbreaking document made in the Third Plenary Session of the 11th Central Committee (1978) worked perfectly to guide the early economic reforms. Before the ASPC, the CCCPC in 1982 had already planned to draft a new document to adjust and to re-confirm their missions in reforming the urban economy, but the serious disagreement between the party factions on the statue of the market paused the drafting process.¹⁴⁷ The following political movement in 1983 totally disturbed their attempt to legitimize the commodity economy.

When Hu Yaobang successfully prevented the expansion of ASPC in economic field, he took the leading position in a drafting group to draw up the new guiding document for the further reforms. The vice director of the CCP’s Central Commission for Structural Reforms, Gao Shangquan was also in this group. His memoir recorded Hu Yaobang’s courage to break through the old preconceived idea of commodity economy. Yaobang at his first meeting with

¹⁴⁵ Yun Chen, “经济建设的几个重要方针[Important Guidelines in the economic construction]“, Dec. 22th, 1981, in *Selected Works of Chen Yun*, 305-308.

¹⁴⁶ Xiaoping Deng, “我们的宏伟目标和根本政策”[Our Ambitious Goals and Fundamental Policies], in *Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping*, vol.3, 77-80.

¹⁴⁷ Ziyang Zhao, *Prisoner of the State: The Secret Journal of Premier Zhao Ziyang*, 118-122.

the drafting group asked the members to make a “guiding principle from the highest position... to clarify the necessity of the reform... to suggest the direction for reforms of state-owned enterprises”.¹⁴⁸ Aside from the practical measures, Yaobang also strengthened his opinion by discussing some foundational natures of socialist economy. He claimed that “What is socialism? Socialism is made to eliminate the poverty to create a better life for the people... What is economic plan? The plan is just a propose, a prediction to the future, which cannot always match the real situation... (the economy plan) is not the law that everyone has to obey.”¹⁴⁹ After several rounds of revision, the liberal economists finally raised a gallant proposal to define socialist economy as “a commodity economy with plans”.¹⁵⁰

This new definition was a creative invention to reconcile the divergence between the conservative faction and the innovationist faction, for it combined the two key economic factors together. For both factions, “market” and “plan” were basically contradictory to each other. But with this definition, they could exist together at the same time. Although the different factions still argued about which one should be the major driving force for economy, it legitimized the policies in pushing the further commercialization reforms within the range of socialist system.

The Third Plenary Session of the CCP’s Twelfth Central Committee in Oct. 1983 was presided by Hu Yaobang. Once again, he highlighted the significance to continue the economic reform which was trapped by some conservative counter movements.¹⁵¹ For the specific

¹⁴⁸ [Shangquan Gao]高尚全, “胡耀邦主持起草《中共中央关于经济体制改革的决定》”[Hu Yaobang Led the Drafting of ‘The CCP Central Committee’s Decision about the Economic Structure Reform’], in 炎黄春秋 [Annals of the Yellow Emperor] (12) 2015, 18-20.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ “中共中央关于经济体制改革的决定[The CCP Central Committee’s Decision about the Economic Structure Reform]”, passed by the Third Plenary Session of the Twelfth Central Committee in Beijing, Oct. 20th, 1984.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

reform measures in the coming years, he mentioned the aim: “to build a planned system which can make use of the law of value”, which “must rely on a stable price system in the future”¹⁵².

Some optimistic historians in late 1980s think that this session was a major turning point for commodity economy in China. They praised the achievement made by the innovationist leaders in this session, because the new guiding document “*The CCP Central Committee’s Decision about the Economic Structure Reform*”, approved the party’s task to build a “Planned Commercial Economy” in China, which would obviously liberate the individuals’ creativity when they participated in production, distribution and consumption activities. Meanwhile it successfully solved the inner-party divergence in economic affairs to maintain the harmony among the central leaders.¹⁵³ I agree that this *Decision* was a valuable breakthrough to the political deadlock, but it produced some negative effects to the social consumptions in a short term and caused long-term damage to the further political liberalization reforms.

In the economic field, reforms in the following three years did achieved many exciting results in the macroeconomic environment, such as the reform of state-owned enterprises, which reinforced the enthusiasm for production. As the previous paragraphs listed, all aspects related to consumption were changed in this chaotic transitional period, when the ineradicable central economic plans caused a lot of problems in the market as well.

The most representative example was the “Double-Track Price” system launched in May

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ These optimistic views were summarized from John King Fairbank, *The Great Chinese Revolution: 1800–1985*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1987), Harry Harding, *China’s Second Revolution: Reform after Mao*, (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 1987) and Kenneth Lieberthal, and Michel Oksenberg, *Policy Making in China: Leaders, Structures, and Processes*, (Princeton University Press, 1988). These books were published before the drastic suppression on democratic movements in 1989, so they shared some common views in the bright future of China’s comprehensive social transformation.

1984, which in the second half of the 1980s became an intermediary that transferred people's dissatisfaction in consumption activities to a wider desire for further institutional reform. The Double Track system was a mixture of the market and plan. It divided the enterprises' production into two parts: In the first place, products in the state economic plans have to be sold at a fixed price decided by the state. And the products beyond the state plans could be sold to the market in a flexible price. The flexible price was often higher than the state purchasing price, so there were many businessmen and officers from the state-owned enterprises who had chance to make use of the gap in price buying the planned products at lower price then sell in the free market.¹⁵⁴ Their behavior disrupted the normal order of consumptions in the free market and raised a strong dissatisfaction among the people. Then the dissatisfaction with the "official profiteers" gradually created a desire to reform the double-track system and to reorganize the corrupt bureaucracy, which was considered by many historians as one of the economic reasons that caused the 1989 Tiananmen Protest.¹⁵⁵ The achievements made in the Session in 1984 did not properly solve the problems occurred in the transformation process from the plan to the market, rather it created some new turbulent factors.

From the view of long-term political consequence, the CCP conservatives did not make any concession in the ideological control after 1984. Deng Xiaoping once claimed his attitude in a speech in 1986, "I never give up my view on the Anti-Spiritual Pollution Movement... We need at least 20 more years to eliminate the bourgeois liberalization."¹⁵⁶ The political

¹⁵⁴ Lingyun Zhao, *History of the CCP's economic work*, 424.

¹⁵⁵ This argument was presented in Jonathan D. Spence, *The Search of Modern China*, (New York: Norton, 1991) ,91-92. and Donna Rouviere Anderso, and Forrest Anderson. *Silenced Scream: A Visual History of the 1989 Tiananmen Protests*. (Rouviere Media, 2009) ,1.

¹⁵⁶ Xiaoping Deng, "旗帜鲜明地反对资产阶级自由化"[To Show Our Flag to Oppose the Bourgeois Liberalization], a talk with other party leaders on the student movements, in *The Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping*, vol.3, 181-182.

suppression on the western capitalist ideology and political theories slowed down the good trend of macro social transformation. When the economic reform and the political reform reached the period of stagnation in the end of 1986, the slow and conservative institutional reform could not meet the requirement from the blooming market, which caused more social upheaval in the end of the 1980s.

In the 1984's new reform guidance , it seems that the CCP conservative faction allowed more freedom in economic reforms, but the reality was the innovationist faction made a total concession in political fields to trade for the legitimization of the commodity economy: To overcome ideological divergence between “socialism” and “capitalism” when Hu Yaobang was drafting the *Decision*, he proved that the free markets and the commodities were also important parts of socialist economy, which no longer only stick together with the capitalist political liberation; To reduce the pressure from the conservative leaders, Zhao Ziyang concentrated on the detailed policies and measures to develop economy, trying to avoid the political controversy.¹⁵⁷ As far as I understand, both of the two famous reformers applied pragmatic ways to gradually promote the market reforms on a practical level, but they involuntary gave up an important theoretical basis to push the political reform, which means the necessity to build a suitable institution that matches the need of the market economy. After 1984, Hu Yaobang's liberal political reform propositions to match the deeper economic reforms became more or less unconvincing in the theoretical debates in the party, when there was no inevitable theoretical connection between the necessity of marketization and the necessity of political liberalization.

¹⁵⁷ Ziyang Zhao, *Prisoner of the State: The Secret Journal of Premier Zhao Ziyang*, 114-117.

In Oct. 1986, the CCP started another round of political movement, the Opposing Bourgeois Liberalization Campaign which aimed to criticize the liberal trend in the theoretical circle. Actually, many of the political demands raised by the liberal intellectuals were summarized from the realistic economic problems in the chaotic “planned commodity economy” from 1984 to 1986, such as the chaotic “double track price system”.¹⁵⁸ Deng Xiaoping denied their requests on the structural political reforms with a strong hand. He regraded this movement as his most important mission in the later political reforms and repeated its significance in public.¹⁵⁹ In the 121 articles in *The Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping* Vol.3(1982-1992), there are 52 articles mentioning the term “opposing bourgeois liberalization”.¹⁶⁰

What differed from the last major political campaign was that the Opposing Bourgeois Liberalization Campaign was more focused. Comparing with the ASPC, it did not expand that wide to almost every aspect in the reforming society to affect people’s daily economic and social life, because it would create too many targets to criticize. Rather, since the commodity economy was running in a stable track, the CCP conservatives concentrated their criticism on the political and ideological affairs, which made this movement more strict and long-lasting.

¹⁵⁸ The demands for further institutional reforms included the request to develop primary-level democracy, to supervise the party officers and to limit the economic power owned by the government. One representative liberal intellectual got criticized in this movement is Fang Lizhi. For his opinions on reforms, see Lizhi Fang, “知识分子的社会职责” [The Social Responsibility for Intellectuals], speech in Peking University, Nov.4th, 1984. and “谈政治体制改革” [Talks on Political Structural Reforms], speech in Sep. 16th, 1986, in *方励之文选* [The Selected Works of Fang Lizhi], (Digital publication by the Editing Group of Fang Lizhi’s works, 2014), <http://fang-lizhi.hxwk.org/2014/04/06/%E3%80%8A%E6%96%B9%E5%8A%B1%E4%B9%8B%E9%80%89%E9%9B%86%E3%80%8B/> (accessed in May. 25th, 2018)

¹⁵⁹ [Qiang Li]李强, “邓小平与反对资产阶级自由化[Deng Xiaoping and the Opposing Bourgeois Liberalization Campaign], in *马克思主义研究* [Studies on Marxism], (3) 2009.

<http://mall.cnki.net/magazine/Article/STUD200903023.htm> (accessed in Jun.1st, 2018)

¹⁶⁰ Xiaoping Deng, *The Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping* Vol.3

This campaign explicitly stated that “western capitalist democracy and liberty” were the major enemies to fight against.¹⁶¹ Besides, Deng Xiaoping became the dominator to launch this campaign.¹⁶² He was more like a “supporter” or a “participant” instead of the initiator in the ASPC in 1983. Deng Xiaoping’s tough attitude made the gap in political power between the conservatives and the innovationists too wide to mediate the fractional struggle in the party, so the liberal intellectuals and radical leaders of the student movements got serious punished by the government.¹⁶³

This time, Hu Yaobang could not protect those liberal intellectuals from criticism. He also suffered a lot in the political movement and had to resign from the position as the general secretary in Jan. 1987, because his attempt in pushing the political liberalization got criticized by the CCP conservative leaders in the Central Committee as a “terrible political mistake with bourgeois liberalization”.¹⁶⁴

The fall of Hu Yaobang was a very complex issue in the inner-party fractional struggles which resulted from multiple political and individual reasons. It is difficult to explain his failure in the struggle, but from his practices in promoting market reform and promoting political liberalization, I would consider his concession on the *Discussion* about the political nature of commodity economy in 1984 as one crucial factor that finally resulted in his loss in the party’s struggle between two lines, because it took away his chance to propose more reforms in the political system that could match the need of further market economic reforms in a better way.

¹⁶¹ Xiaoping Deng, “To Show Our Flag to Oppose the Bourgeois Liberalization”.

¹⁶² [Yongfa Chen]陈永发, *中国共产革命七十年*[The Seventy Years Communist Revolution in China], (Taipei: Linking Publishing Company, 1998), 919-921.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Vogel, *Deng Xiaoping and the Transformation of China*, 472-491.

At the moment of 1984, it was a wise choice to skip the ideological debates on commodity economy by including both “market” and “plan” in the party’s guiding document, so that they could push the specific measures to develop the market system. When the unexpected institutional crises happened again in 1986, the demand for developing commodity economy was too weak to justify the necessity of further political reforms, because commodity had already been “a part of the socialist system”¹⁶⁵. Thus, Hu Yaobang’s effort in 1984 in some degree ended up his long-term aspirations to the political liberation.

To summarize the relationship between the achievements in developing the mass consumptions and the failures in continuing the institutional reforms, the separation of “pure” economic reforms from the systematic political reforms was a short-term advantage for the Chinese society, for it temporarily resolved the ideological division in economic policies. However, in the long-term process to develop a mass consumption society, the insufficient institutional reform was still the massive political barrier in the society.

¹⁶⁵ Xiaoping Deng, “计划经济和市场经济都是发展生产力的好办法[Both The Plan and The Market are Ways to Develop Productivity]”

Conclusion

The study on the history of China's social transformation after 1978 is full of pleasure for different historians who had their specific research interests, because this transformation changed almost all aspects of history, which covers the thoughts, the politics, the economy and the culture... No matter scholars are interested in the macro level, like the structure of the Chinese society and the systematic institutional reform, or the micro level, like one specific person and a representative behavior in this period, they can make impressive researches from the rich historical materials. Meanwhile, every single research project in this field makes its unique contribution to the comprehensive historical network of this period, because there is no single historical fact that can represent the particularity of this grand transformation, neither can a single theory explain the complexity of social transformation in China. My research on one specific economic factor, the consumption, also tries to offer a new perspective to combine the economic reforms and the political movements in reviewing their interactions in the early stage of China's social transformation after the Mao Era.

By introducing the socioeconomic theory on consumerism, I analyze the changes in consumption activities as one part of the trend to formulate an influential ideology in the later period. Thanks for the scholars' works on the consumerism which offers me many different angles to study the consumption activities rather than only regarding it as a component in the social reproduction chain. The examples of new emerged commodities after 1978 demonstrate how freedom in economy had influenced the life of Chinese people during the first five years of the reform era. The freedom in economic activities soon influenced the trend of political liberalization because it created vitality in the people's connection with the society and with

the outside world.

At the same time, the diversification of commodities in early 1980s carried more and more cultural products, like the fictions, films and songs, to the public, which became some enlightening tools to rise people's deeper thinking about the freedom in political affairs. The representative examples of new products in the free markets, like the bell-bottom pants, not just reflected the achievement in China's economic reform in developing foreign trade, but more important, it proved that there was a certain existence of the social symbolic function behind the consumption activities. This symbolic function is the key factor to explain how consumption matters to the political movements in the 1980s China. When there was limited freedom to present individual's opinion, the Chinese people could show their personal characteristic by consuming goods with rebellious signals on it.

To involve the case study of Anti-Spiritual Pollution Campaign into the project of consumption is another bold attempt in my thesis to create a new perspective on this issue. Although most of the historians in their books on the 1980s' Chinese history had mentioned this campaign as a quite important political turning point, there are few works illustrating its origin from the development of pop culture and mass consumptions. My chapter reveals that one of the hidden origins of the political movement came from the rising consumptions on with liberal characters. Also, it gives examples on how political movement damaged the liberty in market consumptions in reality, which in most historiography was ignored. In the introduction, I write "There was no "pure" economic decisions made by the party leaders", because they always thought about the possible political influence coming together with the economic policies. Then the case of ASPC and the following political movements demonstrated that there

was no “pure” political consequences from these political movements, because the practice in fighting against the political liberalization did caused unavoidable turbulence to economic activities. Meanwhile, the argument on the party leaders’ “emergency reactions” to the unexpected social consequences tries to offer a different way to explain the inner-party fractional struggles during the 1980s: When

There are several names in this thesis having been mentioned for many times: Deng Xiaoping, Hu Yaobang, Deng Lihou... Without any doubt, these leaders in the CCP Central Committee had taken the most important positions in making the reforming plans and dominating the turning points in the whole social transformation process. In this thesis, many of their comments and speeches were directly cited, because they can offer intuitional evidence to distinguish their different attitudes towards the same issue. I do not consider the decision made by the party leaders as the only crucial factor that determined the result of the economic reform, neither do I ignore the weight carried by their words. There is a very large space to develop further research on how the party leaders’ personal decision influenced the history of China’s economic reform, if more primary documents from the party are declassified to the public.

My focus on several different aspects of consumption activities after the ASPC coherences to the theories of consumerism. Actually, this thesis does not propose to prove the consumerism in contemporary China, which has become a popular topic in economic and sociological researches, is certainly developed from the dynamic consumptions in the 1980s. Still, it requires more evidence to continue the study in the 1990s, to which this thesis can be used as a historical background to develop more detailed analyses of consumption activities and

consumption culture in the 1990s.

In the last chapter, my research touches one of the core historical mysteries in China's social transformation, which is "Why China went into such a special track, where the economic development did not accompany by the political democratization?" It is a long-debating question for not only historians but more sociologists and political scientist. Neither could I give a certain answer to it by this primary research on the relationship between the developing economy and the stagnant political reforms. But just from Hu Yaobang's pragmatic view on the commodity economy and its influence on the economic reform from 1984 to 1986, this thesis offers a logical connection between two major political campaigns in the first half of 1980s, which can be included into a wider network on the myth of China's social transformation.

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