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"Fight for Fertilizer!" Excrement, Public Health, and Mobilization in New China

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Andrew Morris is a doctoral student in modern Chinese history at University of California, San Diego. In October, 1994 he presented a paper entitled "The Republic of Taiwan and the Failure of Qing Centralization," at the Western Conference of the Association of Asian Studies, Claremont, California. By the time this issue of the Journal is published, he will have presented another paper, "Mastery Without Enmity: Tiyu (Athletics) in Early Republican China," at the West Coast Graduate Conference in Modern Chinese History, Berkeley, California, in April 1995. Morris says, "What I hoped to do in this paper was to show, in as graphic a manner as possible, the concern of the Communist state for the most personal of details in driving the Chinese nation towards the singular goal of modernity in the Great Leap Forward. Public health and agricultural production campaigns both were based, very literally, in the excrement of the people of China. Comprehensive programs of mobilization and modernization could leave no stone unturned, and I have tried to examine the ways in which state organs attempted to transform basic habits of daily life into acts of explicitly political and national significance."

On October 31, 1959, a 44-year-old night soil carrier named Shi Chuanxiang stood before an audience of more than 6500 model workers from all over China at the Beijing National Conference of Heroes. Featured on the same program as other revolutionary idols like Xu Xuehui, a young Kunming woman whose hands had been chopped off by Guomindang bandits, and Li Fuxiang, a standout boiling room operator from Shanghai, Shi spoke to the enthralled crowd about his experiences as a *fenbian qingjie gongren* ("excrement-sanitation worker") in Beijing before and after Liberation.¹ This speech

marked Shi's coming out into the Communist high society of celebrated model workers, and the beginning of an amazing yet tragic public life as one of the great Chinese labor heroes.

The arrival on the scene of such an unlikely debutante as Shi signified the self-apparent completeness of the revolution; only in a truly liberated society could a collector and carrier of human waste be given the honor of making an address in the hallowed Great Hall of the People. The address also marked something altogether different: the emergence of the subject of excrement as an unlikely medium for ideas of mobilization and modernization during the Great Leap Forward of 1958–60.

How does one explain the inordinate amount of attention paid to excrement and its handling in the Leap-era Chinese press? Simply put, the discipline necessary to continue the successes of the Chinese Revolution required that all Chinese people follow new rational, scientific, and revolutionary codes of behavior, even down to the most personal details. Coherence was to be achieved by eliminating any deviations in personal practices that existed throughout China and projecting new trivial, but standard, details now to be observed.

Several different excrement-related discourses, put together during the Great Leap Forward, appeared as manifestations of these new codes of rational, revolutionary, and mobilization-friendly behavior. The Leap affected city and country alike, as excrement played an important part in the big public health and productivity campaigns. Then, excrement was featured in representations of the awful "old society," the opposite of the good society the Party had made in just a decade, and it is in this context that star night soil carrier Shi Chuanxiang's emergence is key.

Efforts in the field of public health are a significant part of what constitutes a "modern" state. We can start to see how the idea of "public health" operates if we realize that it is not just a case of modern governments being a lot nicer than pre-modern ones. When the maintenance of its subjects' well-being

is added to the modern state's growing list of responsibilities, there results a completely new dimension to state power.² Personal hygiene is no longer so personal; divergence from the norm results in surveillance and intervention on the lighter side, and quarantine and isolation for more serious transgressions. Entrusting to the state the task of providing a healthy space cedes to it yet another measure of control over public space and its uses. Recognition of these processes is not to deny the very real improvements in health and quality of life that may result from the modern state's annexation of a public health agenda; the Communists were able to bring astounding health benefits to a significant percentage of the Chinese population. As this aspect of the CCP public health program is well-documented, I prefer here to discuss its political implications during the Leap.

The concept of "public health" was introduced to China during the New Policies period (1900–1911). Qing reformers imported German and Japanese public health policies, which were carried out by local police departments.³ Ideas of public health and hygiene were floated as justification for official policy by 1929, when the Guomindang stated that "hygiene is the strong, secure base of [Sun Yat-sen's principle of] the people's livelihood (*minsheng*)."⁴

Chiang Kaishek's New Life Movement, beginning in 1934, was the first Chinese effort to use public health as a mobilization tool. Chiang hoped that the Chinese people could catch up with the stronger nations of the world by returning to the four ancient virtues of ritual, righteousness, honesty, and shame. These could be concretely achieved by following 96 specific rules, including: regularly brushing one's teeth, no smoking, no whoring, and no sneezing, spitting, or urinating just anywhere.⁵ This system of cleanliness and order was explained by Chiang to be "the secret of success of the two ancient kingdoms Qi and Chu, and also the primary cause of the strength of modern nations."⁶

While Sun Yat-sen had complained about the images presented to the West by the Chinese people's "spitting, farting,

and stained teeth," he never spoke of the correction of these individual faults as the secret to strengthening China.⁷ The New Life Movement, concentrated in the coastal provinces, took Sun's basic concern and grafted onto it nationalistic implications; it was recognized that the "failure to keep clean and healthy will naturally cause others to despise us."⁸ New Life was thus the first attempt to politicize personal hygiene habits and point them in the direction of national growth and progress. However, the connections between the four ancient virtues and the specific 96 rules were never elucidated. The militarist ideal envisioned by Chiang was not enough to convince urban Chinese to give up their "backward" or "unhealthy" ways and adopt the disciplined *bushido* spirit that he so admired.

Communists at the same time were trying to enlist the elusive force of public health in its own struggle. The Party began implementing public health measures in its base areas several years before ascending to national leadership.⁹ In 1944, Communist forces in the Shaanxi-Gansu-Ningxia border region identified Liuyuhou Village's Wang Enfu as head of a model hygienic household that was like a "flower garden." Because of his commendable hygiene habits, "in summertime you couldn't even smell the stink of sheep and donkey shit." The smell of urine was eliminated by cleaning the chamber pots every three days, "no matter who urinated in them, adult or child."¹⁰ In 1949, another party cadre bemoaned what he saw as "the unhealthy and bad habit of shitting and pissing everywhere like crazy guerrillas (*luan dayouji*)."¹¹ These early efforts, while showing a firm grasp of the use of colorful and familiar details, do not go far beyond merely giving opinions or advice on proper health habits. In the early 1950s, however, we can see a more coherent plan that the new urban-based technocrat class used for public health propaganda.

One dimension of this plan was to emphasize the painstaking efforts that the Party had put into improving the public health. This had begun even by 1950, with the early focus put on the old scourge of schistosomiasis. Known as *xuexichong bing* ("blood-sucking worm disease"), the ailment also

went by the sobriquets "big-belly disease" (*da duzi bing*), "Buddha disease" (*luohan bing*), and "the intestine-blasting disease" (*guchang bing*).¹² In South China, schistosomiasis was easily spread, since *matong* toilets were usually rinsed out in the same bodies of water used for bathing and washing clothes, utensils and vegetables.

Dissemination of information about the disease was a key part of the public health project, as government agencies hoped to dole out technical information in return for loyalty and cooperation from the people. They established that one's own excrement was more than just one's own; it now had the potential to affect the health of family members, neighbors, and even complete strangers miles downstream. Uncared-for excrement could ultimately cripple the Chinese labor force. Excrement was now public property, a thing on/in which could be inscribed the individual's responsibilities to the "public" and to the nation, and vitally important to the public health.¹³ China's new "broadly conceived, efficiently executed public health programme" included a "three tank system" for human waste treatment, where feces could be used in the fields after the offending blood flukes had been killed off. New sewage pipes were installed to replace filthy open ditches. Railway loudspeaker systems, in addition to music and entertainment, provided tips on health topics like diarrhea.¹⁴

Some of the information came in the form of straightforward advice: do not wash your chamber pots in the rivers, wash your hands before eating and after-relieving yourself.¹⁵ Other information was presented using more technical language. As it was explained, "Human waste (*shiniao*) is the best place for germs to live." A 1950 book entitled *Hygiene Common Sense for the Countryside* described specific and proper steps required to build public toilets.¹⁶ The dangers of schistosomiasis carriers' feces were stressed; to prevent the spread of the disease, it was imperative that toilets not be allowed to seep into groundwater or to be near water sources, have good air circulation, and be cleaned and covered. Private open-air (*lutian*) toilets were to be outlawed.¹⁷ Writers were sympathetic

to people's reluctance to abandon old habits. It was admitted that dumping the contents of toilets into rivers was "the most economical method." However, "it pollutes the water and causes great danger, and therefore is strictly prohibited."¹⁸ One can imagine what peasants might have thought about this impractical advice. However, the old ways of doing things were officially no longer sufficient; only by following the Party's very specific criteria could the people have access to improved public health.

Hygiene work teams travelled from village to village teaching basic health knowledge via group discussions, movies and slide shows.¹⁹ Even mainstream publications carried technical information; *Chinese youth* included a chart of the life cycle of the schistosomiasis-causing blood fluke. The authors patiently explained to the reader how these worms, once inside the human body, laid eggs so small that they could only be seen with a microscope! The worms could survive in the body for twenty years, and in feces for about three weeks. When storing the excrement and urine to kill off the worms, a ratio of seven parts urine to one part feces was recommended, as was the addition of a 0.5 percent solution of ferrous sulfate and a 0.3 percent mixture of slaked lime. It is hard to know how likely the authors thought it was that their advice would be heeded, especially when other suggestions included the equally unrealistic request that fishermen not defecate or urinate in the water, but that they try to come ashore to use a public toilet.²⁰

Public health also had to be linked to patriotism. Until the Great Leap Forward propaganda shifted into high gear around 1958, this connection was rarely made. The public health propaganda was almost totally in the hands of urban-based technocrats who could supply only dry, technical and detached accounts of party commitment and helpful health tips. But the Great Leap Forward soon brought the Party's rejection of the direction in which it had been working for years. The urban-based socialism that had been carefully copied from the Soviet model was gradually abandoned in favor of Mao's vision of a socialism from below. This is reflected very

clearly in the public health and hygiene publicity work, as the stiff encouragement and advice of the pre-Leap period was replaced by a much more energetic, urgent, and celebratory mode. After all, the great transformations to be made in the Great Leap required first a great revolution in the people's thinking and attitudes, and it was this turnaround that the Leap-era campaigns were aiming for:

Mao Zedong composed a poem (half of which is included below) in June 1958 after hearing the news that schistosomiasis had been eliminated in Jiangxi's Yujiang county:

So many green streams and hills, but to what avail?
This tiny pest left even the great physician Hua Tuo
powerless!
A thousand villages choked with weeds, men wasting
away,
Ghosts chanted mournfully in ten thousand desolate
houses.
Motionless, by earth I travel eighty thousand *li* a day,
Surveying the skies, I see a thousand distant galaxies.
Should the Cowherd star ask tidings of the God of
Plague,
Tell him that he has been washed away by the tide,
with sorrow and joy.²¹

The poem was published on the front page of the October 3 edition of *Renmin ribao*, and the new prominence of schistosomiasis marked a new phase in how the disease, and public health propaganda in general, would now be dealt with. It was no longer enough for mid-level bureaucrats to publish statements that merely informed or advised. Nor was it enough to attack health problems on a local level, without broader coordination and publicity efforts. Mao's personal seal of approval and his nationalization of the campaign to fight the disease are perfect examples of the new dramatic and breathtaking language that was being used to set up the new details of excrement and public health responsibilities.

The Party adapted the idea expressed by Mao in 1955 that fighting schistosomiasis "was closely related to the nation's destiny and prosperity, [and] to the development of production and rural construction."²² The battle against schistosomiasis was made part of the Patriotic Hygiene Movement (*Aiguo weisheng yundong*).²³ At the end of 1958, *Renmin ribao* reported the heroic efforts of more than 1,300,000 people who had ventured into "uninhabited remote mountains and wild canyons" and "scaled steep cliffs and precipices" in their efforts to destroy the blood fluke host snails. The number of schistosomiasis carriers reported cured in 1958 was twice as many as the number cured over the past *eight* years put together.²⁴ In an article entitled "Cleanly and Tidily Greet the Tenth Anniversary of the Nation," it was announced that health agencies planned to completely eliminate the snail population over an area of one billion square meters (1000 square kilometers), and cure 500,000 to 1,000,000 schistosomiasis carriers that fall and winter.²⁵ Fighting schistosomiasis was no longer something presented by laboratory coat-bedecked scientists using strange Westernized phrases, or by boring bureaucrats asking nosy questions and giving impractical advice. It was dynamic, heroic, adventurous, patriotic. These modes of discussion would be the keys to convincing Chinese citizens to recognize the concept of a public health, and therefore integrate this nationalistic goal into their most personal behaviors.

The following "folk songs" published in *Dazhong Yixue* (Popular Medicine) give an idea of the new sanitized, hygienic vision propagated to the people.

The rapeseed flowers open into yellow,
Villages and communes all carrying out preventive
blood tests;
Three days of therapy and you feel perfect,
To completely cure evil diseases, depend entirely on
the Party!

In the past, when trying to see a doctor,

You would even have worn out iron shoes trying to
find someone that would see you;
But today, every village has a hospital,
Care at state expense right here for all.²⁶

The new vision included immunizations, new medical techniques, street sweeping, and, of course, clean toilets. The Maoist concept of public health served as the connection between Western sanitized habits and a strong China. The recognition of a Chinese public health, supplemented by Mao's description of the anti-schistosomiasis campaign, would be impossible to refuse: it would cure people and make them well enough to work for the glory of New China. The Great Leap could only be achieved by healthy strong Chinese whose bodies were free of weird worms or germs that could slow them down.

A series of articles was published to teach people to learn from Jishan County in Shanxi Province, a place that had used hygienic and scientific knowledge to "green, beautify, and perfume" (*luhua, meihua, xianghua*) itself.²⁷ The new toilets, running water, and excrement management took away the bugs and the "stink," and allowed hygiene to be "the vanguard of a cultural revolution."²⁸ It was clear now that good hygiene habits were not ends in themselves; they were now fully revolutionary concepts of themselves that would bring about the Great Leap.

What emerges from this new hygienic vision of a filthless China is a mentality clearly at odds with the idea of the Great Leap as a pure triumph of the peasant over the urban revolution. As Mao even admitted, hygiene work required the "unifying of new and old, Chinese and Western."²⁹ The new ideas of hygiene and public health were clearly foreign in nature.³⁰ However, the language in which messages for the people were encoded could not have been more "Chinese": Great Leap, anti-imperialist, revolutionary, earth-shaking. These dramatic concepts, connected to hygiene and clean habits by the idea of what a truly healthy Chinese work force could someday achieve, made up the discourse by which state health

agencies hoped to create coherent norms of public health for use in finally carrying out the Leap.

Great Leap manure campaigns, promoted using the idea of productivity and bountiful harvests that would be necessary to carry out the Leap, differed a bit from the public health drives. There, a hygienic and scientific discourse told how excrement was dirty, germ-laden, and had to be eliminated in order to bring about a squeaky-clean new China. Here, however, when collecting manure, there was no time to worry about germs or dirt; the people had to dig in and get every last drop of this valuable fertilizer. The Maoist idea that dirtiness is anti-capitalist and good dominated the excremental discourse as it related to production; the following song, published in January 1959, encapsulated all the major components of the campaign propaganda.

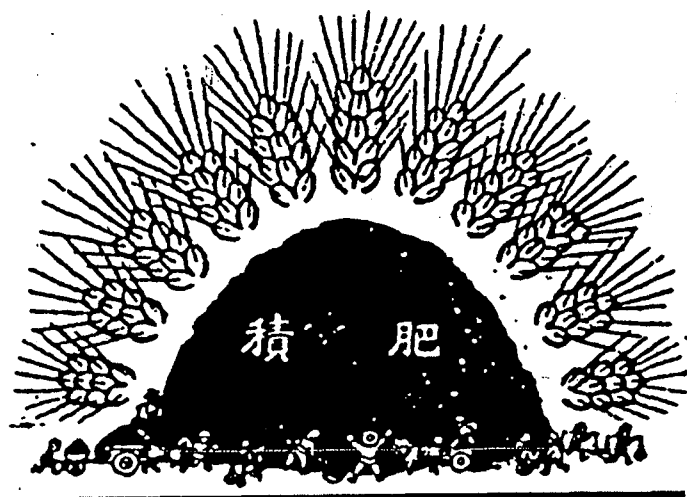
The cadres come one after another lugging their
baskets of manure,
Rising early, busy collecting fertilizer long past dark;
Dust billowing as they move along like so many
battle steeds,
After autumn you can come see our golden gra-
nary.³¹

The campaign was based on help from the Party, hard and heroic labor, and grain that would be more plentiful than ever before. It would not be just the peasants who had to get dirty hauling manure around. Many other articles told of all the help farmers got from other sectors of society “red” enough to realize that only bourgeoisie avoided shit if it could help China. In Beijing on January 29, 1959, great numbers of “fired-up” (*reqing si huo*) soldiers “went into battle” to help commune members collect manure and fertilizer.³² In four days of work, PLA units collected over 40,000 *jin* (20,000 kilograms) of manure, including over 11,000 *jin* (5,500 kilograms) gathered

up by the anti-aircraft artillery unit in only two days. Another manure-collecting activity was held in Beijing on the 30th. Xicheng district sanitation workers were accompanied and “very encouraged” in their regular duties by “shock troops” from different factories, government agencies, schools, and shops. The following day, Beijing Normal University students organized groups to go out to the suburbs and help the peasants gather and dredge manure. In Cengxing County, Guangdong Province,

singers and artists set out for the fields every day with their flutes, drums, gongs and other musical instruments. They spend part of their time helping to collect manure, then tour the fields to perform for the other peasants. They sing a hymn in commendation of the best brigades.³³

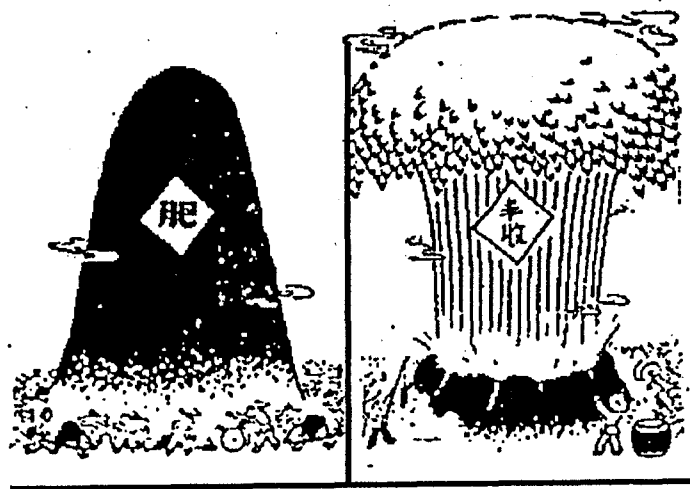
As with public health work, heroic efforts and dramatic language were too an integral part of the propaganda. *Middle school student* published a story about the “Young people’s fertilizer yard,” where young volunteers stayed up long into the night figuring out ways to make their labor more efficient.³⁴ Hunan began an astounding movement called the “Seas of Shit, Mountains of Fertilizer” (*fenhai feishan*) Campaign. The papers instructed everybody to “get moving” and to “collect household fertilizer in a big way.” This the Hunanese did indeed, supposedly collecting more than 10 billion *dan* (500 billion kilograms) of the stuff in just two and one half months.³⁵ Residents were instructed to collect fertilizer “painstakingly, creatively, and comprehensively,” and to join the “red-hot” manure movement that was “shooting flames into the sky.”³⁶ “Fight for fertilizer!” streamed down the left side of the February 1, 1959 edition of *Renmin ribao*, while the horizontal headline read, “North and south jubilantly fly the flag of fertilizer collection.” Updates were given on seven different battle fronts. In Yunnan, “one million people of every race fought bravely” to collect manure and build toilets. In Hubei



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图 1

Figure 1. *Renmin ribao*, February 2, 1959. The sun creates grain from heaped up fertilizer.



今年积肥明年增产

图 2

Figure 2. *Renmin ribao*, December 5, 1959. Piled-up manure erupts into a bountiful harvest.

"ten thousand people entered battle like flying horses to collect manure and march forward side by side." In Inner Mongolia, "great tool reforms were carried out to speed up fertilizer collection and excrement delivery."³⁷ Glorious images were associated with the manure collection; drawings feature smiling peasants marching shoulder to shoulder, armed with their manure collection tools, leading their steeds into the fields.³⁸ Manure was not something that people could just deal with casually or nonchalantly; heroic effort was necessary to put it to the Party's good use.

What would be the result of this wise use of manure by the Party? Bountiful harvests of grain would make all the people's painstaking and brave efforts worthwhile, and would finance the industrial leap that the Maoists hoped to make. In 1959, several cartoons were published in *Renmin ribao* illustrating just this idea. "A little bit hotter, a little bit brighter" [Figure 1] showed people lugging wheelbarrows and horse carts of manure to add to a huge pile, with rays of grain radiating outward from this life-giving fertilizer-sun.³⁹ "Accumulate fertilizer this year, increase production next year" [Figure 2] again showed peasants laboring around another great steaming pile, which later, to the accompaniment of drums and gongs, erupts into a mushroom cloud of grain labelled "Bountiful harvest" (*feng shou*).⁴⁰

This intense manure drive would "take command of and ensure the Great Leap in agriculture."⁴¹ Headlines screamed, "Everybody get working, everybody collect fertilizer, battle for an even bigger and more bountiful harvest!"⁴² Liaoning province organized a program to send the "numerous varieties" of manure from its ten major cities down to the countryside for use as fertilizer, thus "turning waste into treasure." The 25 billion *jin* (12.5 billion kg) of manure that the cities hoped to produce every year was calculated to be enough to spread over 1,300,000 *mu* (214,000 acres) of land, which would produce 760,000 tons of grain, which in turn would be able to feed 2,500,000 people for a whole year.⁴³ Several writers performed this kind of numerical hocus-pocus, using the power of statistics to illustrate just how valuable the substance really was. It was so precious that the Party

hoped that people would “pledge not to lose a single drop of manure!”⁴⁴

It was hoped that all of the 600 million Chinese people, male and female, old and young, could learn from the traditional peasant spirit in their manure collection work. This spirit was illustrated best by the peasant who, when fertilizing his land, always sang, “Soil, oh soil, the two of us are partners, you eat what I shit, and I eat what you shit.”⁴⁵ Adoption of the official manure practices was clearly the key to unlocking a wonderful new world, where the laws of thermodynamics meant nothing, and manure could be completely converted to food in an endless cycle of socialist plenty.

The Beijing National Conference of Heroes was convened on October 26, 1959. Six thousand five hundred and seventy-six model workers and labor heroes from all provinces and regions of China came to Beijing to celebrate the Great Leap and to gather more revolutionary knowledge to share back home.⁴⁶

Shi Chuanxiang, the Beijing night soil carrier, was now a deputy member of the Beijing City Council and member of the Beijing City Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference,⁴⁷ and was selected to be one of the 293 heroes in Chairman Liu Shaoqi's special group (*zhuxi tuan*).⁴⁸ On October 29 and 30, a soon-to-be-famous picture was run prominently in several newspapers of a beaming Shi shaking hands with the Chairman.⁴⁹ Clad in a new suit, Shi took the Great Hall podium on October 31 and painted a grim picture of what life was like in the “old society.”⁵⁰ Starting at age 14 after coming to Beijing from Shandong province, Shi worked for 20 years under the whip of the oppressive, exploitative *fenbas* (“shit lords” who managed the mob-operated excrement collection business before Liberation). At that time, night soil carriers were “despised by all” and had to answer to the monikers “Mr. Shitman” (*shi ge lang*) or “Stinky shit egg.” They were all bachelors; Shi slept in a shed with a donkey, huddled together with 10–15 of his

co-workers. He could never eat rice, but had to eat coarse grain, and once he wore the same pair of pants for eight years.

It was two decades of torture, “working like a cow or a horse,” and being constantly beaten and cursed by *fenbas*, soldiers and policemen. Once, after Shi refused to tip his cap to some Japanese “devils” in Beijing, they beat him with the butt of a rifle. A few years later, a speeding American jeep crashed into his night soil cart, destroying the cart and almost killing Shi. Shi remembered his friend Zhang who, after falling and hurting himself, was simply buried alive by the *fenba* and left to die. He concluded that “in those days our lives were at stake at any moment.” Shi's address was greeted by “stormy applause,” and several heroes in the crowd were moved to tears by this all-too-familiar depiction of the old society.⁵¹

Following the public health and manure campaigns, Shi's scathing condemnation of the Guomindang-era old society from a “shitman's”-eye view was another strategy undertaken in the Leap. The Party reminded the people why it was worthwhile to work so hard for the Leap. This was done by way of flashbacks to the bitter pre-Liberation past, or the shitty old days.

This practice was not invented in the Leap. As early as 1944, Party organs in the border regions were attacking the “filthy past” (*angzang de guoqu*). Before the Party sanitized Yangjiawan village in northern Yan'an, it was a pretty disgusting place. “There was shit all over the place, and the filthy stink assaulted the nose.”⁵² By the time of the Leap, things were so much better:

Swallow the medicine in your mouth,
And the sweetness is in your heart.
Think back to the old society,
We poor people were treated worse than dogs.
In this age the ways have all changed,
And if you get sick there's no need to worry.
But don't forget the source of the water you drink —
Walk with the Party forever and ever.⁵³

The Party had to make it clear that it had finally given the Chinese people a good and clean society, and that the people owed it their gratitude. The Party even recognized that it was not enough to merely give advice as it did in the early years. When Party workers arrived in Big Willows village, "the villagers were firmly in the grip of [unhygienic] habits and ideas that had persisted for centuries." The Party began a hygiene campaign, but it "was not sustained. People slipped back into their old habits."⁵⁴ Now, they reminded the people that they were just not intelligent enough to cast off the death grip of the old society by themselves; it took the wise and scientifically advanced Party to do this for them.

The old society was an ugly place, a place full of disease and exploitation, a place where "refined gentlemen" could curse common people as being "worse than shit."⁵⁵ Gao Yubao's novel told of his duties working for Chou the Old Skinflint landlord in the 1930s: besides being ordered to clean and empty the family's chamber pots, he had to go into the "stinking pigsty, which was over two feet high, to mix the dung by treading in it!"⁵⁶

Foshan city in Guangdong province, once "notorious" for its filthy streets and ditches, won recognition in 1960 as the "hygienic red flag city." The chemical "666" (the Chinese DDT) was sprayed all around to kill pests, and people developed fine hygiene habits. What was once called "Chickenshit Alley" (*jishi xiang*) was now a spotless and homey neighborhood. An "unbearably filthy and stinky" stagnant pool was transformed into the scenic public recreation spot, "Beautiful Lake" (*Xiuli Hu*).⁵⁷

We can return to Shi Chuanxiang's narrative to see more improvements that were made by the Communist state. Shi testified to the Heroes Conference crowd that workers like himself were now the masters of the country. As Chairman Liu told him on the occasion of their historic handshake, "You serve the people by collecting night soil, I serve the people by being state chairman ... both are indispensable parts of our revolutionary task." No longer "shitmen," sanitation workers and their labor were respected by the people; adults now called Shi "comrade" and children called him "uncle." Residents no longer plugged

their noses when he arrived, and now "warmly" offered him glasses of water to drink. Thanks to the help of the Party, productivity increased: each night soiler on Shi's squad was now able to collect more than 80 barrels of manure a day, up from the previous 50. He boasted of the benefits that were now available to workers:

Instead of living in a donkey shed, we are now living in apartment houses. Instead of the dread of being buried alive, we now enjoy free medical care. Lorries have taken the place of handbarrows ... In addition to a television set in our unit, I have a wireless of my own. I have also bought a fur overcoat which cost me more than 100 *yuan*.⁵⁸

Shi Chuanxiang was not the only sanitation worker who gained newfound respect in the 1950s (though he might have been the only one wearing a fur coat). Wang Ruheng was an enthusiastic Shanghai public toilet attendant featured in a 1958 article. For seven years, since the age of 16, Wang had been in charge of a 20-square-foot public bathroom in the Tilan district. Always scrubbing the floor to keep away the stench, Wang said the greatest joy for him was for a visitor not to notice any foul odors, and leave happily. There seemed to be no limits to Wang's generosity. He was always willing to help support old men who had trouble squatting by themselves, or to fish his clients' wallets out of the waste for them. The author described how it was hard work like this, and the Party's help, that won Wang the respect of the people.⁵⁹

Shi Chuanxiang's narrative of the old society, the common description of the past in terms of excrement and filth, and the descriptions of the new status that excrement workers achieved in society combined to make up a sort of "excremental timeline" of modernization. After almost a decade of Communist rule, China had both rid itself of excrement and begun to glorify those, like Shi, who had to deal with it on a daily basis. This set of messages was originally designed to reinforce the radical new

campaigns of the Great Leap period. But was the powerful backhand of the Party totally absent from this praise?

How did these turns in language that I have covered actually affect real groups of Chinese people? For the typical citizen of a modern state, new public health programs can bear pitfalls as well as benefits. Acceptance of the idea that the state is now responsible for the health of the people, by definition, brings one more point of intrusion and judgment into what was once a personal or community-oriented space. In China, the hygienic was now "glorious" and the unhygienic "shameful." Certain habits, such as not brushing one's teeth or squatting in the middle of the street to urinate or defecate, were now things about which one should officially be ashamed. Failing to live up to state expectations gave others official license to discriminate against the practitioners of these backward and pernicious habits.

The urgency of the Leap made it impossible to complain when strange poisons like "666" were dropped all over the village by crop dusters, sprayed around the house by pest-eliminating crews, or blasted into the streams that villagers washed in, in order to kill the blood-fluke host snails.⁶⁰ Nor could one effectively protest against sanitation representatives who snooped around apartments in the city and slapped stickers on doors indicating whether the place was a "Clean Household."

In some areas, the fight against schistosomiasis entailed establishment of units to test the stools of every resident in the vicinity twice a year. Officials kept track of those whose feces still contained the schistosomiasis eggs and larvae. These disease carriers and their feces were monitored closely, and most likely made unhygienic examples of. One stool examiner betrayed the resistance of some people to taking part in this operation when he described how the "main difficulty is to persuade people to send in specimens ... some try to fool us by sending us dog or ox dung."⁶¹ Health agencies had their own visions of the ideal socialist society, and stool inspection was a means to creating a schistosomiasis-free population. However, resistance of some individuals to this fecal discipline that was designed to help them

is a testament to the problems that can arise from this kind of program.

A specific group that can be examined is the night soil collectors. David Strand has described 1920s-era Beijing night soil workers' famous solidarity and collective identity based on their "unique social role."⁶² As the Party nominally worked to integrate these former pariahs into the revolutionary social order, it is possible to see how the state actually ended up *contributing* to a very separate night soiler identity.

New China was in many ways constructed as a shitless place. Excrement was collected daily, swept off the streets, flushed through invisible sewage systems to faraway places, covered with chemicals, buried in storage tanks, and generally removed from the public eye. While the nation was cleansing itself, a few people still had to touch it everyday just to make a living. Party attempts to glorify these workers in the name of egalitarianism somehow still concentrated on just how filthy their work was. Shi's work was so heroic precisely because it was something that no one else wanted to do: it was "dirty and stinky," and "because of the prejudices left over from the old society, most people were not willing to work with feces."⁶³ Shi justified the importance of his job in odd ways: "If everybody had culture and could go fly airplanes or be technical experts, then who would do all the excrement work?" Even the workers themselves were unconvinced of the glory of excrement work; Shi was excited and grateful when Liu Shaoqi told him "to study hard and prepare for a new job in the future."⁶⁴

Shanghai night soil collector-turned-competitive bicyclist Chen Qiaozhu told of her experiences before she "came out of the toilet to claim victory." Passersby would see her and "pooh-pooh her, plug their noses, and spit," to which Chen would fiercely reply, "Look! If we stopped doing this work for just three days, Shanghai would turn into Stinkytown!"⁶⁵ The propaganda was supposed to show how revolutionary these workers were for working in such filthy jobs. However, Shi's complaint in 1965 that youngsters were not entering the profession⁶⁶ makes a lot of

sense in light of what the public was constantly told about this line of work.

A Chinese pun goes, "If you convert a shit barrel to a water barrel, the stink still remains."⁶⁷ This was how night soil collectors came to be portrayed: despite all that the Chinese revolution had done for the people, many of them were still just stupid and simple souls who, without Party help, would have been content to keep touching human waste. After seven years scrubbing his public toilet, Shanghai-hero Wang Ruheng had expressed his excitement at being able to move up into a new job: night soil collecting.⁶⁸ The communist myths of egalitarianism and freedom, and the public health campaigns' fixation on the filthiness of feces combined to tell the people that anyone who still chose to work with the stuff was just plain dull and simple. The cruel "shit lords" were gone, and the night soilers definitely benefitted from a new occupational and health security. However, it is impossible to ignore the ugly ways in which Party propaganda so effectively reinforced the stereotypes that the Revolution was supposed to combat.

Three contending ideas about excrement presented in the Great Leap Forward-era press formed what was far from a coherent, seamless whole. Public health, production and modernization propagandists all put forth their versions of the ideal society that the Leap was shooting for. The public health and production campaigns reinforced each other in their portrayal of the correct handling of excrement as absolutely crucial in working for the Leap. However, these two formulations relied on diametrically opposed ideas of excrement: as dangerous and germ-laden in the public health messages, and as treasure in the production campaigns. Finally, the glorification of excrement workers in the campaigns to show off Communist modernity exacerbated these contradictions even further. As people learned to distance themselves from excrement and its dangers, these workers were praised for their intimate relationships with the stuff; their willingness to immerse themselves in feces every day was exactly what made them revolutionary.

Despite the expected contradictions and inconsistencies within these discourses, the utter thoroughness of the modernization project seems to leap from my data. Excrement, something that we think of as so personal yet so marginal to our daily existence, served as a tablet on which so much could be written and rewritten as Chinese people were led in rationalizing and modernizing in every aspect of their lives. Practices of daily life, down to people's own most elemental bodily functions, were to receive attention in the form of scientific advice and rational opinion, if not direct surveillance. While the assertion that the Party worried excessively about human excrement would not be useful in constructing models of Great Leap-era modernizing, the absolute completeness of the Party public health and production projects is important to comprehend.

Politicization, mechanization, education, militarization — these are some of the most visible, but certainly not the only, stages on which dramas of modernization are produced. For each of these large arenas, there are necessarily many smaller training grounds on which modernizing scripts are rehearsed and sometimes perfected. Awareness of the state role cannot be achieved totally by observation of these larger projects and activities, but by definition must include knowledge of how the state influences life practices on the most basic levels for its subjects, without whom, after all, there could be no state.

Notes:

1. "Sixth Day of National Conference of Heroes," *Survey of the China Mainland Press* No. 2131 (November 5, 1959), pp. 5-6.
2. Michel Foucault, "The Politics of Health in the Eighteenth Century," in Paul Rabinow, ed., *The Foucault Reader* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), p. 274-78.
3. Carol Benedict, "Policing the Sick: Plague and the Origins of State Medicine in China," paper prepared for the Association of Asian Studies meeting, March 26, 1993, Los Angeles, pp. 1-3.

4. *Weisheng yundong xuanchuan gangyao* [Outline of publicity for the hygiene campaign] (Nanjing: Zhongguo Guomindang zhongyang zhixing weiyuanhui xuanchuanbu, 1929), p. 5.
5. Samuel C. Chu, "The New Life Movement, 1934-1937," in John E. Lane, ed., *Researches in the Social Sciences on China* (New York: East Asian Institute of Columbia University, 1957), pp. 3-5.
6. James C. Thomson Jr., *While China Faced West: American Reformers in Nationalist China, 1928-1937* (Cambridge University Press, 1969), pp. 157-158.
7. David Strand, "Images of Society and the Rhetoric of Development in the *Sanmin zhuyi*," unpublished paper, p. 14.
8. "New Life Movement and the Developments on China's Political Stage," *The China Weekly Review* 68 (March 24, 1934), pp. 126-127.
9. See Yan'an zong weishengbu, ed., *Zhongguo jiefangqu weisheng ziliao, diyi ji* [Hygiene information from China's liberated areas, Volume 1] (Yan'an: Yan'an zong weishengbu, 1946), p. 1.
10. Shaan-Gan-Ning bianqu zhengfu bangongting, ed., *Yiyao weisheng de mofan* [Models in medicine and hygiene] (Shaan-Gan-Ning bianqu zhengfu bangongting, 1944), p. 106.
11. Guo Zhiqing, *Liang ge yue de tudi gongzuo baogao* [Report on two months of land reform work], handwritten report, November 26, 1949.
12. Li Junqing and Xu Wei, "Ba xuexichong bing cong zuguo de tudishang genjue" [Eradicate schistosomiasis from the face of the motherland], *Zhongguo qingnian* 4 (February 1, 1956), p. 35.
13. See "Xuexichong bing" [Schistosomiasis], *Zhongguo weisheng huakan*, 1950.
14. Li Teh-chuan [Li Dechuan], "Health For All the People," *China Reconstructs* 1 (January-February 1952), pp. 14-17.
15. *Zhongguo weisheng huakan* [Chinese hygiene pictorial] (1950).

16. *Nongcun weisheng changshi* [Hygiene common sense for the countryside] (Zhongnan xinhua shudian, 1950), pp. 9-10.
17. Gu Tian, ed., *Weisheng changshi jianghua* [Guide to hygiene common sense] (Wuxi: Sunan renmin chubanshe, 1952), pp. 51-53.
18. Zhu Yunda, *Gonggong weishengxue jiaocheng* [Program for public hygiene study] (Shanghai: Xinan yixue shushe, 1951), p. 94.
19. "Huandeng ziliao" [Slide show information], *Weisheng xuanchuan gongzuo* (June 25, 1951), pp. 23-26.
20. Li and Xu, pp. 34-36.
21. This is the first half of Mao Zedong, "Song wenshen ershou" [Farewell to the God of Plague], *Renmin ribao* (October 3, 1958), p. 1. My translation was aided by Joseph Ch'en's in his *Mao and the Chinese Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), p. 349.
22. Wei Wenbo, "Farewell to the 'God of Plague,'" in Zhong Wenxian, ed., *Mao Zedong: Biography-Assessment-Reminisces* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1986), p. 219.
23. Qian Xinzhong, "Yanzhe dang suo zhishi de weisheng gongzuo daolu shengli qianjin" [Victoriously move forward on the road of the Party's instructed hygiene work], *Dazhong yixue* (October 1959), p. 361.
24. "Quanguo aiguo weisheng yundong zhanlanhui kaimu" [Opening of the Nationwide Patriotic Hygiene Movement Exhibition], *Renmin Ribao* (December 21, 1958), p. 2.
25. "Gangan jingjing yingjie jianguo shi zhounian" [Cleanly and Tidily Greet the Tenth Anniversary of the PRC], *Renmin ribao* (September 25, 1959), p. 3.
26. Fan Jinhan, "Weisheng mingge" [Hygiene folk song], *Dazhong yixue* (May 1959), p. 177; "Weisheng mingge", *Dazhong yixue* (March 1959), p. 101.
27. Fu Lianzhang, "Yi weisheng wei guangrong, yi bu weisheng wei chiru" [See the hygienic as glorious and the unhygienic as shameful], *Renmin ribao* (June 12, 1960), p. 8.

28. Yi Yaowen, "Wenhua da geming, weisheng da xianfeng" [Let hygiene be the vanguard of the cultural revolution], *Renmin ribao* (June 12, 1960), p. 8.

29. Qian Xinzhong.

30. See English and Russian terminology in *Gonggong weishengxue mingci* [Terminology of public hygiene study] (Beijing: Renmin weisheng chubanshe, 1956); and 1958-59 issues of *Yixueshi yu baojian zuzhi* [Medical history and health care organization].

31. Ge De, "Feiliao he zhengzhi" [Fertilizer and politics], *Renmin ribao* (January 31, 1959), p. 8.

32. "Gong nong shang xue bing jifei zaofei mang" [Workers, farmers, merchants, students, and soldiers all busy collecting and making fertilizer], *Renmin ribao* (February 2, 1959), p. 1.

33. "Big 'Manure for the Farms' Campaign," *SCMP* No. 1958 (February 20, 1959), p. 18.

34. Yao Shouxin, Tao Yucheng, and Yu Shaowen, "Shaonian feiliao chang" [Young people's fertilizer yard], *Zhong xuesheng* (March 1959), pp. 54-59.

35. "Hunan kaizhan fenhai feishan yundong" [Hunan carries out the "Seas of Shit, Mountains of Fertilizer" Campaign], *Renmin ribao* (January 23, 1959), p. 4.

36. "Kugan qiaogan quanmian zhankai jifei zaofei zhandou" [Painstakingly, creatively, comprehensively carry out battles to collect and make fertilizer], *Renmin ribao* (January 27, 1959), p. 1.

37. "Jifei shuaiqi nanbei qiju" [North and south jubilantly fly the flag of fertilizer collection], *Renmin ribao* (February 1, 1959), p. 1.

38. See untitled drawing, *Renmin ribao* (December 15, 1960), p. 3.

39. Gu Pu, "Duo yidian re, duo yidian guang" [A little bit hotter, a little bit brighter], *Renmin ribao* (February 2, 1959), p. 1.

40. Xie Dingyu, "Jinnian jifei, mingnian zengchan" [Accumulate fertilizer this year, increase production next year], *Renmin ribao* (December 5, 1959), p. 3.

41. "Kugan qiaogan quanmian zhankai jifei zaofei zhandou."

42. "Renren dongshou, dajia jifei, wei nongye geng da fengshou er zhan!" [Everybody get moving, everybody collect fertilizer, battle for an even bigger and more bountiful harvest!], two-color headline in *Renmin ribao* (January 31, 1959), p. 1.

43. "Liaoning zuzhi chengshi wushui xiexiang fei tian" [Liaoning arranges for city sewage to be sent to countryside to fertilize fields], *Renmin ribao* (January 26, 1959), p. 6.

44. "Jifei gongzuo yao shigan qiaogan" [Fertilizer collection requires sincere and clever work], *Renmin ribao* (January 20, 1959), p. 3.

45. Ge De.

46. "Liuqian duo yingxiong renwu huishi Beijing" [More than 6000 heroes join forces in Beijing], *Gongren ribao* (October 25, 1959), p. 1.

47. Shi Chuanxiang, *Rang wuchan jieji de geming jingshen daidai xiangchuan* [Let the proletarian revolutionary spirit pass on from generation to generation] (Beijing: Gongren chubanshe, 1965), p.14.

48. "Dahui zhuxi tuan he mishu zhang, fu mishu zhang mingdan" [Name list for the chairman's group, secretaries and deputy secretaries for the Conference], *Gongren ribao* (October 26, 1959), p. 1.

49. See *Renmin ribao* (October 29, 1959), p. 2; *Guangming ribao* (October 29, 1959), p. 1; *Beijing ribao* (October 30, 1959), p. 1; *Gongren ribao* (October 30, 1959), p. 4.

50. Account comes from "Sixth Day of National Conference of Heroes"; "Guojia bian le, wo ye bian le" [The country has changed, and so have I], *Guangming ribao* (October 29, 1959), p. 1; "Guojia bian le, ren ye bian le" [The country has changed, and so has this person], *Gongren ribao* (October 30, 1959), p. 4; Shi Chuanxiang, *Rang wuchan jieji*, p. 13.

51. The new society would unfortunately turn against Shi as well. During the Cultural Revolution, his connection with Chairman Liu became a matter of "high treason and heresy." In 1966, Jiang Qing called Shi a "bandit," "shit lord," and "false labor hero," and Chen Boda reported that Shi had "sold out to the capitalists." He was paraded violently through the streets of Beijing more than 500 times, endured endless public criticism sessions, and was jailed for five years. In 1971, Shi was ordered back to his Shandong home, and fell ill as a result of the abuse he had suffered while in jail. In August 1973, Zhou Enlai brought Shi back to be rehabilitated and treated in Beijing, where he eventually died on May 19, 1975. Jing Sheng and Xi Quan, *Xin Zhongguo mingrenlu* [Who's who in New China] (Nanchang: Jiangxi renmin chubanshe, 1987), p. 300; Yang Wuhu, ed., *Ban'an daquan* [Collection of cases] (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1991), p. 427. In the 1970s Shi was celebrated in a comic book biography.

52. Shaan-Gan-Ning bianqu zhengfu bangongting, p. 95.

53. Wang Zhenzhong, "Weisheng mingge — bingren de hua" [Hygiene folk song — A patient's words], *Dazhong yixue* (August 1959), p. 289.

54. "How Big Willows Became Health Conscious," *China Reconstructs* 7 (June 1958), pp. 15–17.

55. Ge De.

56. Kao Yu-pao [Gao Yubao], *My Childhood* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1960), pp. 158–159.

57. Wang Zhiyuan, et al., "Weisheng hongqi shi — Foshan" [The hygienic red flag city — Foshan], *Renmin huabao* (1960, #9), pp. 24–25; "Small South China City Wins National Recognition for Environmental Hygiene," *SCMP* No. 2231 (April 5, 1960), p. 25.

58. From "Guojia bian le, ren ye bian le"; "Sixth Day of National Conference of Heroes"; Shi Chuanxiang, *Rang wuchan jieji*; Gao Mingqi and Huang Yaowen, eds., *Zhongguo zhigong laomo liezhuan* [Biographies of Chinese model workers] (Beijing: Gongren chubanshe, 1985), pp. 189, 191.

59. Cheng Zhigu and Jin Songshu, "Ta de xin shanshuozhe yaoyan de guangmang" [His heart glimmers a dazzling radiance], *Zhongguo qingnian bao* (November 25, 1958), p. 3.

60. *For the Health of the People* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1963); Zhang Yunlei, "Weisheng mofan cun — Taiyangcun" [Hygiene model village — Taiyang village], *Renmin huabao* (1960 #16), p. 22.

61. Joshua S. Horn, *'Away with all pests...': An English Surgeon in People's China* (New York: Paul Hamlyn Publishing Group Limited, 1969), pp. 99, 101.

62. Ethnicity was no small part of this; Beijing nightsoilers, like Shi, were almost all Shandong natives, and Emily Honig has shown that Shanghai nightsoil men hailed from northern Jiangsu. David Strand, *Rickshaw Beijing: City People and Politics in the 1920s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), pp. 155, 238; Emily Honig, *Creating Chinese Identity: Subei People in Shanghai, 1850–1980* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), p. 62.

63. Gao and Huang, p. 190.

64. Shi Chuanxiang, *Rang wuchan jieji*, p. 9; "Sixth Day of National Conference of Heroes," p. 6.

65. Wang Shaoyan, "Tui fenche de guniang cheng le yundong jianjiang" [Excrement cart-pushing young lady becomes master athlete], *Xin tiyu* (1957 #13), p. 19.

66. Shi Chuanxiang, *Rang wuchan jieji*, p. 4.

67. "Fentong gai shuitong — chouqi hai zai." From Li Xingwang and Min Yanwen, eds., *Xiehoushu daquan* [Complete collection of puns] (Gansu: Renmin chubanshe, 1984), p. 568.

68. Cheng and Jin.