

## The Radical Practice of “Hanging Out”: China’s University Student Dissidents

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### ABSTRACT

This interdisciplinary paper advances existing empirical research on the longevity of anti-state university student protests in the People’s Republic of China. This paper contributes ethnographic data from Beijing and Fuzhou university students to yield a Marxian critique of Chinese authoritarianism. This paper asserts that empowering identity development and *subversive scholarship*, or the use of critical scholarship to transmit critical consciousness of political injustice, in Chinese universities creates more durable resistance against Chinese authoritarianism. This paper concludes that methodological and tactical shifts can sustain and refresh American student protest.

### Introduction:

Halfway through the Trump Administration, American campuses serve as crucial sites of collective action and public practices of reckoning, anger, and grief. Building upon the legacy of Vietnam War-era campus protest and radicalism, mass mobilizations like Black Lives Matter, #MeToo, and numerous gun control movements stop short of insurgency and student-led collective action is a instinctual recourse for confronting systemic injustice in the American polity, with increasingly institutionalist outcomes. Recent shifts in sociocultural attitudes resemble reactionary normalization of racial bias, xenophobia, and queer/trans-phobia. With state-sanctioned brutalization of black, brown, and Muslim bodies, and mobs stealing the visibility of collective action with tiki-torches and red hats, students have much to reclaim as the cultural and political resistance against white-nationalism and global capitalism. The counter-reaction must look beyond distinctly American rhetoric and tactics of “resistance” to refresh pedagogies and tactical precedents of resisting authoritarian states. Therefore, what can China’s student activists in an era of Patriotic Education after the 1989 Tiananmen Square Massacre teach us? Put simply: to hold up a mirror.

This study seeks to advance, using ethnographic work on university student activists in Beijing and Fujian Provinces, scholarship on anti-state student protest methodologies in the People’s Republic of China (PRC). I introduce empirical data to the theoretical framework that answers the following research questions: what effect does official curriculum have on capacities for student protest? How do students dissent in China’s universities? In this paper, I evaluate Chinese university students’ paradoxical position as elites-*cum*-dissidents, showing their role in resisting Chinese authoritarian *neoliberalism*.

In 1992, the PRC introduced the Patriotic Education Campaign (PEC, 爱国主义教育) which nationalized curriculum to prevent further mass insurgencies, which I call *outward protest modes*. The PEC employed nationalist curriculum to transmit propagandized Chinese Communist Party (CCP) orthodoxy to produce compliant and productive graduates (Wang 2016). While PEC tempered capacities for *outward protest modes*, China’s student dissidents persisted in dissident *moral economies* (Scott 1990) through what I term *subversive scholarship*, or the use of university space and scholarly modes of disseminating critique. Through *subversive scholarship*, students

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<sup>1</sup> This paper was presented during a poster session of the Fourth Quadrennial Race and Pedagogy National Conference in 2018 Radically Reimagining the Project of Justice. Kyle L. Chong is a doctoral candidate at the Michigan State University and 2018 Robert S. Trimble Distinguished Asia Scholar. The author wishes to thank the following individuals for their contribution to this study: Dr. Stuart Smithers, Dr. Jason Struna, Dr. Karl Fields, Dr. Sean Wong, Dr. Lily Lin, Dr. Yu-Shan Wu, Dr. Shelby Kar-Yan Chan, Dr. David Satterwhite, Amy Lelyveld, Benjamin Bland, Lisa Long, Alexis Robinson the University of Puget Sound Department of Asian Studies/ Pacific Rim Program, the Embassy of the United States of America in Beijing, Consulates General of the United States of America in Shanghai and Hong Kong, Hwa Nan Women’s College of Fuzhou, Allison R. Nasson, Walter Fromm, Ananya Pandey, Sarah Tucker, Emma Paulson, Rachel Schroder, and translators Chan and Wu.

diversify resistance tactics by reframing public practices of dissent and using universities as sites of resistance. I conclude with three cautions for American universities on better empowering diverse practices of radicalism. Increasingly so in Chinese and American universities (Brown 2011), the diploma eclipses a demarcation of achievement, class, or status; becoming an ideological statement of mastery and consent to a political ideal.

Reviewed literature demonstrates that China's *neoliberalization* (Harvey 2005; Goodman 2014) co-opted students (Zhao 1998) to repress dissidence as with hard (Césaire 1955) and soft repression (Deng and O'Brien 2013) in universities. As Chinese universities shift toward a market-form (Heller 2016), literature necessitates (Brown 2011) uniquely Chinese public practices of dissidence that have wider implications for American student radicalism. I conclude that dissonance between students' public and hidden transcripts shows the extent of state influence on political identity development and dissidence reframed through *subversive scholarship*, or using university space and "hanging out" to transmit substantive capacities and consciousness to resist the state.

**Resistance Today: 不明真相 (*bùmíng zhēnxiàng*: *misunderstanding the actual situation*)**

China's scholar-activists display the liminality of their elite-*cum*-dissident status in struggling to find resistance tactics that are both durable and coded as resistance (Chuang 2017; Clover 2016). Chinese students serve as a source of state moral, political, and economic legitimacy, critical to conserving the present state (Bourdieu 1966; Chu 2017). In the PRC, students have historically created politico-economic stability and instability especially in an era of *neoliberalism*, or market-based logic of social good, dominating political-economic life (Harvey 2005: 10-11).

China's economic rise began with Deng Xiaoping fundamentally restructuring China's science and higher education infrastructure (Harvey 2005), to begin to tap into global *neoliberal* development and transnational capital (Silver 2003). Today's the PRC requires citizens to embrace its trajectory early, consenting to *neoliberal capitalist* logic as a force for social good, or at least fearful of violence that represses dissent or uneconomic behaviour to resist the state. China's university students, I attempt to show, see an opportunity (機會, *jīhuì*) for radical public practices of dissidence amidst the crisis (危機, *weijī*) of the Chinese state.

China's university students are China's current and future high-skill laborers, the current generation of whom are the first generation educated under the PEC and China's aggressive economic growth (Zhao 1998; DuBord 1967:52; Osnos 2014). At stake is normalizing a precedent in which dissidence and truth-seeking are no longer *subversive*, but *sedition* justifying repressive *spectacles* (DuBord 1967: 73), the distilled concentrations of violence and police brutality.<sup>2</sup> The multigenerational implications of today's activism transcend degrees and political engagement whilst PEC curriculum obscures China's own precedents of student civic engagement (Goodman 2014; Osnos 2014; Wang 2016) and revolutionary mythology (Yang 2016: 54), creating a campus culture of path-determined fatigue (Han 2014: 15).

American campus activism similarly struggles to reckon with injustice in the Trump-Era. *Melodramatic* injunctions of righteousness (Anker 2014: 50) appeal to the emotion of protest: a desperate yearning for democracy (Grattan 2016: 20-22). In painful confrontations with injustice, American concepts of freedom assume redress of grievance (Césaire 1955: 25-26). However, the near-insurmountable challenges of confronting racism (Giroux 2004: 90, 96, 140) demands rethought public pedagogies of resistance (Grattan 2016: 19) without martyrdom. Without it, Giroux's (2004) neoliberal 'creep' will continue to distort our and our Chinese colleagues' radical

<sup>2</sup> See DuBord's (1967: 36-37) discussion of *spectacle*, defined as shifting away from lived experience into a state of representation of reality. His discussion extends to include the use of protest as a tautology of *spectacles* domination and reclamation.

re-imaginings justice whilst critically and frankly acknowledging our complicity within the academy. The following literature supports this contention.

### **Literature Review:**

I review two themes of literature. First, literature on Chinese *neoliberalism* (Harvey 2005; Schuman 2009; Hung 2012; Yang 2014) shows that conditions made capitalism attractive to China reckoning with the Cultural Revolution (Schuman 2009; Harvey 2005; Goodman 2014) granting elite status to students as harbingers of development. Second, literature (Agamben 1993; Clover 2016; Bland 2017; Zhao 1998) demonstrates Western protest tactics' incompatibility with Chinese dissidents' needs for subtlety, requiring new resistance methodologies.

Literature supports my contention that *neoliberal capitalism* (Harvey 2005) and nationalistic education (Zhao 1998) were seductive prospects for China's leadership (Harvey 2005; Arrighi 2007; Hung 2012; Goodman 2014) to counteract the Century of Humiliation (Scott 1976; Scott 2009; Césaire 1955) and self-exploitation (Davis 2006; Osnos 2014). The *neoliberal* model encourages specialization, granting the state competitive advantage, by dominating skill and knowledge production (Brown 2011; Yang 2016) to sustain economic development and resultant class fractionalization (Goodman 2014; Scott 2009; Chuang 2017; Osnos 2014) with market-liberalization driven development (Robinson 2014; Harvey 2005; Clover 2016; Giroux 2002; Wang 2009; Yang 2016), which tempers the effectiveness of Western modes of student protest requiring new practices and definitions of radicalism (Clover 2016).

### **Chinese Neoliberal Education:**

In 1978, Deng Xiaoping sought to reverse the Cultural Revolution's chaos (Davis 2006; Townsend 1992; Arrighi 2007: 377) by 'repurposing' students in a concerted effort to modernize agriculture, industry, education, science, and defense (Harvey 2005: 141). China's modernization created a market-based economy based on "privatization with Chinese Characteristics," or strict state supervision (Osnos 2014; Robinson, 2014; Harvey 2005; Hui 2009)), to transnationalize China and subsequently its students (Harvey, 2005, 173) at the expense of soft skills like critical empathy (Kulynych 1997) and in exchange for elite status (Harvey, 2005, 203; Goodman, 2014, 149). *Neoliberalism* healed China's Cultural Revolution trauma and created state legitimacy through strong economic performance.

Bourdieu (1966) argues that education acts as a *conservative* force, upheld by *dilettantes*, or idealized academic subjects, limit radicalization, whilst masking real inequality by reproducing existing classes (Bourdieu 1966: 38), and capital. Today's students are taught to advance China (Harvey 2005: 11), not revolution (Yang 2016: 29-30). Chinese schools idealize (Scott 2009; Hui 2009; Yang 2016) elite *dilettantes* (Bourdieu 1966; Zhao 1998) enshrining singular definitions of success. Free-market advocates (Schuman 2009; Osnos 2014) admonish activism, preferring accumulation as the *representative identity* of the educated bourgeoisie (Agamben 1993; Kulynych 1997: 145). Despite tempered critical capacities, students retain a concept of justice, a *moral economy* (Scott 1990) which yields angry and *melodramatic* conditions (Anker 2014) stemming from a violated concept of justice (Scott 1976: 4).

Yang (2016) concurs with framing an education as a language of power by asserting that ideological education is important to the PRC because students historically have enabled and inhibited radicalism (Zhao 1998). Education, as a classed space, demands a performative *public transcript* (Yang 2008: 248 cited in Goodman 2014: 127) to access sociopolitical power (Osnos 2014: 51) orienting curriculum towards skill and economic growth, rather than interdisciplinary legibility (Brown 2011). This section discussed capitalism's interest in higher education, and how *neoliberalizing* universities tempers dissident capacities. I next review literature that (Yang 2016; Bland 2017) shows how protest (Clover 2016; Agamben 1993) responds to state repression.

### Resistance methods and student protests:

Goodman (2014) asserts that conceptualizing class consciousness and resistance negatively, as absences of privilege or deprivation (O'Brien 2013:541-542), prevents seeing class as a positive claim: a surplus of emotion, violence, and danger (Clover 2016: 16-17). Clover (2016) asserts that riots and resistance, ought to be framed as surplus emotion, correcting excesses of accumulation (Clover 2016: 29) and *representative identity* (Agamben 1993). For example, Joshua Wong's 2011 Hong Kong Scholarism movement (Bland 2017: 26) sought to resist PEC 'Sinification' of Hong Kong. The Umbrella Movement exemplified dissidence that the PRC successfully subverted by addressing stated aims. Clover (2016) argues protest and state violence reflect presence rather than absence, a key difference between American and Chinese resistance. American protest, Clover (2016) argues, uses "exposure to exploitation" to organize "class war" and sustained revolt against the state (Clover, 2016: 4-5, 45). Clover distinguishes Chinese dissidence with "distinct characteristics" (Clover 2016: 29) and political logic. Reclaiming space for dissent creates solidarity unbound to markets, removing market considerations from dissent (Clover, 2016, 32, 46).

Contra American resistance that Clover (2016) describes, Chinese dissidence must lack *representable identity* (Agamben 1993) or stated aims (Giroux 2013: 8). Subverting nationalistic education, intentionally created to destabilize dissidence (Zhao 1998: 296), requires sensitivity to Chinese authoritarianism. The problem remains that state crackdowns, appropriated revolutionary myth and traditions direct violence to diffuse dissidence (Wang 2009: 101; Yang 2016: 224-225).

PEC pedagogy, fractionalizes intellectuals, and appropriates revolutionary myth, slimming prospects of sustained revolt. Yet, the "decentralized and fragmented" students and scholars operationalize their elite institutional affiliations and status to resist the state (Yang 2016: 225). Thus, the strike and riot are not coincidental, rather praxes of will and reason (Clover, 2016, 165), devoid of *representable identity* (Agamben 1993: 2), insulating students from violent state apparatuses seeking to exploitation their disciplinary or class identities as determinants of productivity (O'Brien 2013).

Reviewed literature (Harvey 2005; Schuman 2009; Hui 2009) shows that Chinese *neoliberalism* has favored a classed reconstruction of education (Yang 2016) to sustained development (Bourdieu 1966) necessitating a reframing of Chinese student radicalism (Clover 2016). Education with *neoliberal* characteristics reflect market-oriented needs and skill training. As a result, a commodified form (Giroux 2002) of education devalues critical thinking pedagogies and individually discerned identities. Co-opting official curriculum to serve state ideological needs normalizes fatigue (Han 2014) to resisting state capitalism.

### Methods:

This interdisciplinary study employs existing empirical and theoretical research on Chinese higher education and student activism. I conducted in-person structured and un-structured interviews with students from Fujian Hwa Nan Women's College (HNWC) (Fuzhou) 福建華南女子職業學院, Fujian Normal University (FNU) (Fuzhou) 福建師範大學, Capital Normal University (CNU) (Beijing) 首都師範大學, Tsinghua University (Beijing) 清華大學, Peking University (Beida 北大) (Beijing) 北京大學 in October through December 2017. Structured interviews covered students' campus experiences with dissent, their thoughts of China's political direction, and what education means to them. I collected supplemental data *via* written survey responses and panel discussions.

I used virtual correspondence with students and campus leaders by participating in English-Language medium and translated interviews, English corners, and classroom observation to develop an ethnographic account of the Beijing and Fujian settings. Interviews focused on students'

perceptions of curricular applicability after university, and their capacities for civic engagement. Conversations covered students' attitudes toward their political identity development, motivations to be politically active, and their impact on China.

#### **Data:**

In this study, the sample size was 52 current graduate and undergraduate students enrolled in Chinese universities. The male to female ratio was 20:32. My respondents were from Fujian (28), Chongqing (1), Guangdong (2), Shandong (1), Guizhou (1), Zhejiang (1), Beijing (12), Canada (1), Malaysia (1), United States (2), Republic of China (1), Hong Kong (1)<sup>3</sup>

#### **Findings:**

This paper's findings are grounded in respondents' narratives from interviews and written survey responses. I discuss respondents' experiences with China's university entrance exam (*Gaokao*), and conclude that university culture creates toxically (Silver 2003) class cleavages. I address how student elitism reinforces an intellectual ideal, or *dilettante* (Bourdieu 1966), derived from both revolutionary mythology and capitalist productive needs. I show respondents' negative opinions of dissidence demonstrates the need to reframe student radicalism in Chinese universities.

#### **The *Gaokao***

Students spend at least two years of secondary education preparing for the National Higher Education Entrance Exam (普通高等學校招生全國統一考試, *Gaokao*) (Xu 2014; Chu 2017: 88), seen as an educational milestone that effectively determines university placement (Chu 2017). The *Gaokao* is seen to determine students' career path, at least those who cannot circumvent the system by enrolling in foreign schools. The *Gaokao* dominates students' formative non-curricular time with rote tutoring. Rachel, an educational consultant describes:

Parents...refer to the US as a holy grail.... Next to Tsinghua university, a lot of [attendees] are professors or in academia, and I gave this talk about the American college system and what it takes. The theme was 'six years six steps' long term planning. It seems crazy if you think about giving that kind of presentation at a US middle school.... The youngest parents had their kid in kindergarten and they were familiar with the highest "ranking" US boarding schools— they knew the difference between Phillips Exeter, Andover and Milton... (Rachel 2017)

Rachel elucidates the pressure on students to secure university admission *as a means to* desirable employment (Silver 2003: 112). She believes there is a perceived advantage to Western schools and transnationalizing children, circumventing the *Gaokao* and Chinese universities. Reinforcing a causal relationship between university placement and success and an elite socioeconomic ideal, thus classing Chinese universities (Silver 2003: 18-19).

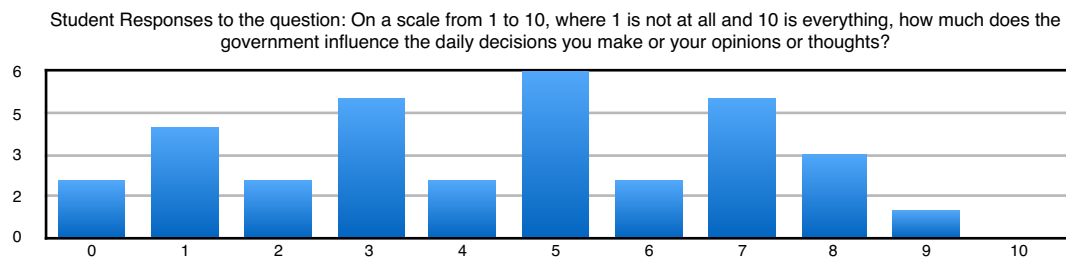
Jane, a graduate of HNWC, mentions that "we try very hard to go through [the *Gaokao*]. If I can go to university, it means I can prove myself." As a measure of one's productive capacity, we see the university model as an elevated training platform and measure of intelligence, because she can demonstrate mastery of state official curriculum. However, the *Gaokao* system runs contrary to what respondents like Chanel perceive to be an inherently equal Chinese society. Yet, my respondents all succeeded. The economic dimension of academic success highlights the politicization of official narrative as a moral norm as a curricular factor in assessment, rather than unimpeded intellectual inquiry. This section shows that the *Gaokao* prepares students for university by dominating students' non-curricular time, setting up a capitalist *dilettante* (Bourdieu 1966), or an

<sup>3</sup> I acknowledge the following caveats that may impact the findings of this study. The vast majority of my interviewed were English medium, which was often respondents' second language in addition to translated exchanges. A small number of foreign nationals are considered part of my sample size. These people are studying or have studied in China for a minimum of two years. I have chosen to define a recent graduate as completing study 2010 or later. This sample is also disproportionately urban compared to the PRC at-large, and disproportionately enrolled in private schooling. Surveys were used mostly in Fuzhou and in-person interviews were mostly used in Beijing.

aspirational ideal with an ideological dimension insofar as academic excellence requires consent to nationalistic coursework.

### Dilettante pedagogy:

Bourdieu (1966: 39) writes that *dillettantism*, or an idealized academic subject, reinforces educational conservatism. This educational power dynamic normalizes a singular idea of correctness within academia and, therefore, a hierarchy of knowledge. Chinese *dillettante*-elitism, data shows, has a distinctly political dimension to it *via* rewarding the PEC's reproduction or compliance and the singularity of the state's ideology. With a clear political motive in the PEC curriculum, state ideology takes on a morality and righteousness (Zhao 1998: 292) to "keep students in line" (Zhao 1998: 293). My respondents, born between 1988 and 1996, are the first generation to be educated from primary to post secondary levels under the PEC curriculum (Zhao 1998: 292). Student respondents were asked the extent to which they thought the government influenced their thinking, responses are illustrated thusly:



The wide variance among responses to perceptions of state engagement suggests a wide range of PEC ideological impacts on university students. The mean value of responses was an inconclusive 4.40625 of 10. However, the reasons for their responses clarifies this data.

Where the government influence is felt within their education nuances the data, showing that that the question was interpreted by some as a value judgement on students' content with the assumed presence of government influence. Serenity of HNWC, for example, states that "no matter which country... the government will pass on the right values to its citizens and achieve it through education" and responded "9" on the survey. Aware of state attempts to reproduce its morality in education by navigating Brown's (2011: 33) "academic market norms" in a Chinese context. Jane, answered "8" saying that a difference in "background" is "why we would not argue with... other people, especially powerful people because you have a different background." "Background" implies 'expertise,' insofar as a constructed *dillettante* is legitimized by benefitting from competitive advantage within the intellectual market, and thus elite status (Wu 2005). Further, PEC curriculum reproduces hierarchical cultural norms, "when we were taught as little kids, no matter whether the parents or the teachers they always telling us which way is the right way, which was is true wrong way," exemplifying Deng and O'Brien's (2013) *relational repression* and interpersonal (人盯人) classroom thought-work. Therefore, PED curriculum teaches political loyalty by reproducing power relations seen in home life (Deng and O'Brien 2013: 538-539).

Jane and Serenity suggest that Chinese universities directly equate loyalty with success. Julia, a student leader at FNU further stated that "when we are making decisions, we should obey the law... and, secondly, we should obey the moral requirements of the government." By invoking moral requirements, Julia affirms Moore's (1966 cited in Scott 1979: 20) high "repressive capacity of dominant elites" to dictate the *moral economy's* boundaries within education's *public transcript*, reinforcing nationalistic ideation as morally righteous. Julia's response, however, enables *subversive scholarship* by superficially engaging in 'righteous' actions like scholarship, whilst entirely rejecting the state's moral claim.

Submitting to state moral logic maintains "peace," Jane continues, while Matthew of FNU asserts, "make[s] our country more safe and easy to manage," showing the downward pressure on

radicalism (Chuang 2017: 208). Clarissa of HNWC, cites state influence in primary education, writing that “primary students have to recite... codes of conduct... even if they do not understand it, [it becomes] habitual.” State cultivation, to Clarissa, casts the “spell” of capital’s “mechanisms of fear” (Adorno 1973 cited in Smithers 2016: 26) solidifying habits at a formative point of a child’s development yielding the appearance of organic moral patriotism. Therefore, *subversive scholarship* must counteract foundational educational norms of the intellectual status quo resisting pedagogical habit. The only outlying response was Anson, a political science student at CNU, who said “I can think freely and I can access many [kinds of] information, so I think I am not influenced at all by the Chinese government, [I have] more [information] than most people” and answered “1.”

Students’ responses suggest that PEC curriculum transmitted inattentiveness to the consequences of state influence, as Zhao (1998) argues. The PRC, by equating peace and morality with nationalistic ideation, reproduces elite *dilettantism* through state education. By employing curricular and ‘soft’ repression techniques to prevent dissidence using *dilettante* pedagogy, and idealised academic subjects, more easily repressing *melodramatic* (Anker 2014) modes of protest. Respondents’ *subversive scholarship*, therefore, attempts to demystify the *dilettante* through rejecting state moral logic. Respondents concur with Bourdieu’s (1966) conservative education and authoritarian fears of student protest (Chase-Dunn 2006). This section showed that respondents perceive levels of state control as a deprivation. Further, consenting to state influence is aspiring to *dilettantism*, which *subversive scholarship* demystifies. Next, I discuss the relationship between Marxism and nationalist education *as a skill* contingent to economic success, and why *subversive scholarship* must reject the state’s moral logic.

#### **Drones and Marxist Education:**

Thus far, my findings corroborate the conditions created by the PEC in which China’s higher education structurally repress *outward protest modes* which preserves the authoritarian system by equating academic success with regime loyalty. Among the profound consequences of the PEC is the misappropriation of revolution and Marxism. China’s revolutionary legacy has been contested as a source of sociopolitical legitimacy by every political movement since the revolution. Revolutionary legacy (Yang 2016) simultaneously permits the state to see itself as a historical continuity, and its opponents a precedent for radical upheaval and mass mobilization, specifically rooted in student protest. Data shows that *subversive scholarship* fits within the framework of Chinese public dissidence through respondent narratives. For Anson, revolution legitimizes CCP political domination. He says:

“After 1949... the revolutionary legacy matters, but it’s not the revolution itself. Legacy, the revolutionary legacy influences how Chinese leaders behave, how people think about what’s happening about what’s happening in the world, but I think it’s totally different from the revolution” (Anson 2017)

Revolution to the PRC, according to Anson, exemplifies Guo’s (2016) re-appropriation of revolutionary mythology and how *outward protest modes* no longer define revolutionary praxis. Revolution, for Anson, is instead evading the state with non-issue-based protest that promotes a *general strike* from the wrecked bastions of class combat between radicals and state apparatuses wherein the counter cannot be another *spectacle*.

Anson and James both state that revolution begins with subtle and individualized transmissions of critical consciousness in a scholarly setting that permits identity development to define oneself against those approved by the state. James resists notions that students are brainwashed, instead asserting that resistance’s discretion prevents Western journalists’ and academics’ from fully understanding the intricacies of hidden information networks (Link and Qing 2013).

Within the PEC, soft-power surveillance includes compulsory nationalist and Marxist education at all levels, of which many respondents remain critical. Anson called this Marxism education “ideolog[ical] brainwashing” and “‘so-called Marxism,’ it’s not real Marxism, it’s [CPC] Marxism. To cater their ideology... their ruling.” Anson argues that PEC curriculum is disingenuous because its conservative agenda promotes neoliberalism with Marxian garnishes insofar as “the socialist education system produced a highly literate nation with a glut of mid-level engineers” (Chuang 2017: 227). As a result, Marxist methodology and students’ perceptions of a volatile framework are domesticated whilst deriving legitimacy from an appropriated revolutionary mythology (Yang 2016).

Respondents were especially in Fujian seemed to also associate socioeconomic success with *dilettantism* as a revolutionary act aligning the PEC with CCP neoliberal Marxism. The Fujian students’ narratives show the connection between their education and employability, suggesting that patriotism (Bland 2017) is understood to be a measurable skill. Cassie of HNWC mentions that higher learning is “not only [to] learn... specialized knowledge, but also most companies only recruit college students,” thus associating education with productivity, and productivity with Chinese identity. Jane regards faculty as unquestioned intellectual guidance showing higher education’s role in ideological development. Faculty therefore operate as person-to-person (人盯人) ‘thought’ workers (O’Brien and Deng 2013) whose relationships with students maintain a linear percolation of knowledge.

Respondents like Jane assert that state domination of knowledge dissemination allows the state to assert knowledge’s *purity* (Agamben 1993:2). Jane mentions that “we were taught as little kids... parents or the teachers... always [tell] us which way is the right way, which was is [the] true wrong way.” She perceives her education as an *apparatus* of state control replicating cultural and family power dynamics in the classroom, creating uniform power networks across students social interactions with subtle tactics, requiring *subversive scholarship* to resist capture in state moral logic.

The Fujian students, unlike the Beijing students, spoke less of authoritarianism, framing state authoritarianism as a form of influence. Unlike the Fujian students’ bluntness, students like James of Beida spoke about nationalism notably defiant of the PEC curriculum:

“...my friends who are Chinese are very disillusioned by the idea of communism; by socialism, it’s not something that is taken seriously. Quite frankly, they’re more excited about drones than the communist revolution. They’re excited about TaoBao..., innovation and entrepreneurship.... Consumerism tickles their fancy more than revolution. ...Some of my friends, ... [are] still very eager to talk about Chinese nationalism and ... defending China, or misperceptions about China.” (James 2017).

James implies that participation in Silver’s (2003) transnational capitalist class is idealized within the classroom, thus the perceived disorder of protest resists known means to social mobility. Further, Anson and James, corroborate the experience of CCP-appropriated Marxist revolutionary mythology tempering anti-capitalist *outward protest* (Yang 2014: 62). They further show the need for discrete tactics because the academy guarantees their visibility by assigning an economic worth to their achievement. As a result, PEC Marxist curriculum instead masks class conflict (Chuang 2017) in other capitalistic identities thus manifesting themselves within the students. The neoliberal status quo is revolutionary, defying China’s history of resistance, and crises of consumerism (Yang 2014: 38). Therefore, PEC Marxist education (Hui 2009: 60) prevents class-based organization, necessitating *subversive scholarship* to counteract state control of identity and knowledge production. Anson states “if China’s government taught real Marxism, China itself should be the target.” This section shows that PEC Marxism education to shape students ideological development, placing faculty in a *thought-work* role by appropriating Marxism and China’s proletarian myth as



paradoxically conservative and nominally revolutionary. In rejecting the moral claim to revolution and Marxism, *subversive scholarship* rejects concepts of freedom relational to the state.

**Freedom is another condition:**

I will next discuss how Chinese intellectual, and thus political, freedom is positioned relative to the individual and must therefore be conceptualized conditionally and relationally rather than inherently, as in liberal logics of education (Rousseau 1750: 5). China's educational system consciously reproduces conditional freedom contingent upon one's loyalty to "uniformity" within the imagined state (Rousseau 1750: 5; Anderson 1983 cited in Smith-Kipp 2015). Chinese intellectual freedom is thus an unstable concept due to the *Gaokao* and PEC *dilettantism* normalizing student dependence on the state, so-called *rational patriotism*. Aspiring to *dilettante* status, requires performing loyalty in academic public transcripts and submitting to the deterministic pathways that favor expressions of elitism in university students. Public performances of loyalty, such as the *Gaokao* and PEC compulsory 'Marxist' education, create a felt sense of freedom as a condition alienated from the person creating a paradoxical relationship between rationality and nationalism. With freedom, as respondents show, more closely equated to a fleeting condition, like pain, rather than a more permanent state of being, like sentience or cogency.

With freedom relational to educational success, students do not identify freedom as inherent which makes public *spectacles* of protest dangerous and vulnerable to crackdowns which curtail freedoms because it can simply be 'shut off'. Liz, a law student at FNU, argued that relational freedom in the classroom pressures students to conform:

"...freedom is based on your condition. Some [have] radical thoughts or anti-society thoughts, [but] whenever a law has been bent or unbent, it is accepted by people. ...You can eat whatever you want but you can't say whatever you want. You should be responsible for your [ideology] or your thoughts because some radical thoughts may produce or instigate terror among people; in this time there are not many people who have the ability to define what is right or what is wrong..." (Liz 2017).

Liz and Anson allude to "average" Chinese with unstable concepts of or claims to freedom. Furthermore, she defines freedom not as a state of being as in liberalism, but rather a condition set by the state conditionally trans actual given an individual's loyalty, yielding *perceived* freedom. Liz asserts that acceptable and unacceptable thinking are clearly delineated by the state, the latter connoting an "anti-society" ideology, exemplifying the "particular norms" implicit in phrases like 'extremism,' or sedition.

Placing freedom in a dependent relationship with educational achievement and political engagement, conscious social reproduction (Giroux 2002) of self-censorship and internalized submissiveness, therefore, prevents resistance escalating into riots. Furthermore, familial pressure from family creates a responsibility to maintain stability encouraging public self-censorship (Scott 1990). As a result, disobedience becomes associated with anti-state extremism, therefore permitting violence against '*extremists*' (Agamben 1993). *Subversive scholarship* must therefore operate within the *hidden transcript* (Scott 1990), and appear to lack urgency to feign banality. Anson, however, believes the academy protects freedom of speech as a *public* and *hidden transcript* because critique is coded in academic language. He states:

"Although ideological control in our higher education system is very high..., I think political science students have a little... freedom to be critical of the government. I think China's government tolerates critical thinking in academic research. If you keep your critical thinking within a very tiny academic sphere, it's okay because [undoubtedly] ordinary people [won't] understand your research so... it's very safe to the regime... For instance, [in] political-economic analysis of authoritarian regimes, we use equilibrium analysis... because ordinary people don't know what the meaning of equilibrium is" (Anson 2017).

Anson acknowledges discrepancies between Chinese and liberal conceptions of freedom. He further distinguishes himself from ordinary, contrary to his otherwise pro-democracy views. Anson regards academic discourse as a liberating practice of expression, but illegible to the public due to disciplinary specialization (Heller 2016: 31-32). The educated elite remains insulated from disseminating their critique, preserving their status as China's moral compass using conventional modes of transmitting knowledge. Anson shows the disconnect between academic and personal discourse, or *public* and *hidden transcripts*, necessitating subtle resistance to avoid violent repression. He states that many netizens only "tolerate when you criticize China on a tiny, micro perspective..., the traffic is too congested, or [air pollution]. But you cannot challenge fundamental political principles." Anson and Liz' comments exemplify Clover's (2016: 21) "surplus emotion," within Chinese *hidden transcript*, a fertile outlet for *subversive scholarship*.

Critiques that appear beyond the acceptable range, yield "surplus danger" (Clover 2016: 21), but conditions of *subversive scholarship* that appear banal have greater durability. The illegibility and inaccessibility of Chinese academic discourse prevents mobilization, requiring students employing *subversive scholarship* tactics to retool academic space. Subversive academic discourse can be coded as policy research, insulating students' claim to elitism and conditional freedom within state-sanctioned discourse. Respondents show that absent surface radicalism is less an abdication of radical possibility, but an exercise of freedom that is overlooked because of its banality. Respondents show that freedom is experienced conditionally based on one's acquiescence to state ideology. As a result, respondents exemplify Scott's (1990) *hidden* and *public transcripts* by self-censorship and shows the need for a un-*melodramatic* mode of protest. Next, I expand on Scott's (1990) *hidden* and *public transcripts* regarding the differences between students' public and private political views show self-censorship therein, lending gravity to *subversive scholarship*.

#### Quiet Dissent:

The previous section discussed freedom relational to political loyalty. Next I show that freedom of speech is similarly relational in China. I demonstrate perceptions of an unspoken 'line' that divides acceptable and seditious political speech. I then nuance respondents' answers to the question "do you feel you can have any opinion on anything in China?" in between the *public* and *hidden transcripts*. I then show *subversive scholarship* coded within the *hidden transcript*, aligning with Scott's (1990) 'offstage' radicalism.

Respondents Terry of FNU and Hannah of HNWC, on the one hand believe speech is freer because of social media like Weibo. However, they acknowledge the consequences of crossing an unspoken line that demarcates the boundaries of acceptable critique. Rachel discusses a 'line' that, for journalists and professionals, means "the line that keeps you at your daily job working as a normal citizen and the line that, crossed, gets you black-bagged, wrapped up and gets you taken to Chinese prison," constituting discussion of the "'Three Ts,' Tibet, Tiananmen, Taiwan," threatening Rachel's fragile concept of "the normal China." Normalcy of self-censorship is crucial to understanding the tactical differences between Chinese and American protests (Clover 2016), at least in the *public transcript*.

Serenity's *hidden* and *public transcripts* have distinct differences. At a speech contest in Fuzhou, Serenity, in her speech about Chinese development says "[the] magnitude of change contrasts with the isolation of the Qing dynasty. President Xi makes China poised to move forward in the global economic race... Trade partners [in the] Belt and Road Initiative [can] strengthen trade links and China's developmental model with unbelievable results..." Serenity's speech endorses Xi Jinping's signature global investment initiative, compared to China's Century of Humiliation.

However, Serenity's private remarks were remarkably different, exemplifying Scott's (1990) *hidden transcript*. When asked if she could any opinion on any issue, she said:

"No, because no matter what kind of views should be published... it [should] not [violate] social and legal permissions. Everyone has the right to freedom of speech,

but not their own speech [that is] problem[atic] to the society and [puts] other people in danger and harm. For sensitive topics, we can publish them anonymously and avoid unnecessary trouble” (Serenity 2017).

Serenity, citing permissiveness of speech, suggests that she seeks state moral cues to determine her willingness to speak. She demonstrates a desire for safety within her community, but demonstrates explicit connections between consent to state domination and a sense of freedom relational to safety that limit speech. She demonstrates *subversive scholarship* by surgically pinpointing areas in which critique is safe and radical, showing that identity development external to the state preserves both the positive and negative claims of class consciousness by showing the limitations of rights. Serenity concurs with Harvey (2005) insofar as, in prioritizing economic outcomes, yields a pedagogies of subtly minimizing resistance. Serenity’s different public and private views further dispel notions of “brainwashing” (Osnos, 2014 34, 102) by consciously operating differently in public and private. In the latter of which, the line is less clear.

Anson does not believe he is free to express even private opinions, saying that expressing his views publicly invites two scenarios: “publicly, academically...that’s okay because no one can understand except us... but, if you want to publicize your knowledge because you want to transfer this kind of argument into Weibo or newspaper... its too sensitive, it’s unfavorable for China’s government.” Anson argues critical academic discourse is illegible and enclosed in the academy, but does not suppress its creation. Anson problematizes the Chinese public’s lack of critical capacities, alluding to the success of the PEC in affirming systemic disciplinary silos (Kulynych 1998). However, his critique of academia reveals nuances.

Anson asserts that academic elitism reproduces specialized knowledge and *dilettantism*, which conserves state domination of knowledge. This, in turn, creates two smiles: academics with knowledge trapped in their mode of discourse, and a public captured in state-approved identities. He asserts that the Chinese public is unable to comprehend academic discourse because they are “not the same people.” This discontinuity, he asserts, between the insiders and outsiders is the absence of a means to transcend this dichotomy, thus the radicalism of *subversive scholarship*.

He adds that “many Chinese people know how to avoid the censorship. ...the younger a Chinese person is, the more likely s/he will have independent learning or thinking, suggesting that ‘*information networks*’ persist beyond state surveillance (Chase-Dun et al. 2017). However, discussing private opinions, Anson argues that normalized self-censorship persists in private thought. He said “even in private spheres, I don’t think so. Because... they do not have the ability of having any thought regarding any problem... I don’t think many Chinese people are capable of independent thinking. I confess that many Chinese people just follow authority.” Anson shows that creating organic identity and transmitting *subversive scholarship* downward is achieved by students and normalizes dialogical critique in Chinese higher education, whilst retaining its a subtly. The quietude of *subversive scholarship*, lacking the urgency of a crisis, exposes giving citizens choice in food but not thought, shifts perceptions towards dissidence and scholarship as accessible. This section shows that consciousness of scholarship as a banal and dissident information network can begin to erode the PEC’s sociopolitical identity development in the classroom. Thus, maintaining critical capacities disseminates consciousness to radicalism within the *hidden transcript*. Next, I show that *subversive scholarship* further counteracts concepts of revolution as a counter-*spectacle* by expanding Chinese radicalism to include tactics beyond political *melodrama* (Anker 2014).

These processes in a university setting necessitate inclusive tactics of protest by seeking to redefine the parameters of what counts as radical or revolutionary, such that public practices of vitriolic martyrdom are no the only tactics of resistance. Respondents show that critical consciousness needs to be transmitted subtly, rather than as a counter-*spectacle* of violence. I next show the perceived danger in outward resistance, and the illogic of repressing such movements.

### Subtlety and Quietude:

I have attempted to show that China's official curriculum and state domination of higher education yields students with tempered critical capacities, and a rudimentary awareness of their place in society, and the risks associated with resisting their role, or the state. In this section, I show respondents' answers to the question "what would you change about China?" and students' resistance methodologies show the radical potential of *subversive scholarship* as identity development and critical discourse within university spaces, diversifying what constitutes radicalism. In conjunction with the question "how do you think you can change China?" respondents' apparent *fatigue* (Han 2017) becomes clear when their answers call for changes to education and greater socioeconomic and environmental justice, indicating an active *moral economy* and understood boundary between justice and injustice.

Many respondents sought change to China's education system. Jamie of HNWC, for one, said that she wanted "the way of education" to change to create a "strong China," suggesting that current curriculum satisfies state political aims and creates openings for students to seek independent knowledge. Jay concurs that China should change limitations on freedom of expression because "we young people need a free atmosphere to [explore] our society." Jamie and Jay's responses echo nationalistic undertones implying that the state is the sole change-maker, and the need to change official curriculum. Respondents differentiate between change and resistance and derive fortified notions of justice from the latter's dissident *moral economy* that rejects the state domination of social change, empowering diverse notions of radicalism (Yang 2016).

However, a dichotomous framing of state and resistance, create a *counter-hegemon* that, I argue, is equally problematic because it forces dissidents to acquiesce to a singular mode of radicalism or resistance. The students who asserted that freedom of speech should be expanded spoke carefully about what in China should change. Clarissa, for one, said "as a foreign language learner, I want to do something related to my major. I want to change the current situation of foreign information collection. Everyone... in our country has the right to know what has happened in the whole world... If you don't know the world, you cannot evaluate yourself objectively." Both in context of her aspiration for a fuller education and her desire for heterogenous information, Clarissa shows resistance can be informed by understanding tactical and ideological precedents, creating a more nuanced understanding of dissent by dissecting neoliberalism into compartmentalized domination (Giroux 2002). Furthermore, she acknowledges complacency toward nationalist messaging in China, citing the public's lack of objective self-evaluation pointing to limited space for identity development.

Clarissa's observation is contentious, other respondents argue. Mary of FNU, a CCP Party Member, said that China needs more "positive energy," and that "even though there are many unharmonious opinions in society... [I want] to teach the new generation to have the ability to identify what is good." Mary equates resistance and radicalism as an abstract concept with anti-nationalism by describing it as unharmonious. Doing so allows the binary of state and dissident to crystallize by cultivating public consciousness that sees dissidence as immoral and evil actors. In so doing she shows the hollowness of PRC revolutionary hyperbole (Yang 2016). Mary supports Osnos' (2014) contention that the CPC "no longer promises an end to toil... only prosperity, pride, and strength" (Osnos 2014: 13), but only as abstracts because, as Fernando of FNU says, "many nations don't respect us." Students' responses show that a *counter-spectacle* may be incompatible with Chinese radicalism, but not dissidence or radicalism itself.

Revolution as an outward mode of protest is further offset by discrimination against minorities and LGBT people in service to preserving a Chinese superstructural cultural identity. Queerness especially, becomes coded 'un-Chinese,' because it disrupts Confucian moral morality (Osnos 2008) and power relations replicated all over Chinese society. Andrea, Terry, and Anson

acknowledge that “discrimination is a very serious [problem]” and is framed as a defense of Chinese values because the PRC’s legitimacy grounded in a homogenous China (Chuang 2017). Thus, resisting the PRC is multidisciplinary, because reconciling disciplines rejects a singular notion of radicalism. Andrea further asserts China’s cultural (中華), and political (中國) pluralism, while Terry and Anson say that their ideal China guarantees the “equal rights of the LGBT community.” Terry suggests Chinese xenophobia contains homophobic undertones (Zhao 1998: 290), alluding to the ways in which perceived western ideas might be portrayed in Chinese education. Anson frames the queer community’s rights in China as human rights, saying that “I really hope Chinese people can tolerate different ideologies and different preference[s] on social issues such as homosexuality, sexual behavior before marriage, [and] freedom of sex.” These assertions suggest the simplistic politicization and denial of human rights constitutes part of the intense pressure to conform within the Chinese universities. Anson and Terry further counteract arguments that people only advocate for political rights after achieving subsistence, but sexual orientation and gender identity are framed uneconomically as preferences and human rights, instead of being seen as an extension of market freedoms (Harvey 2005: 121).

To sustain economic progress, development is loosely applied to justify authoritarian and discriminatory state behavior in higher learning evidencing discontinuities between state rhetoric and actions. Exposing these discontinuities positively as excesses of state violence shows the political agency of these Chinese students, even if they see their own capacities as insignificant, or futures not worth risking. Further, while students object to China’s moral or ideological crises and contradictions, they feel helpless without a breadth of resistance tactics available to them. Terry seeks equal rights for China’s queer community, and says that he can change China “through my words and thinking... you can teach the young generation when you are a teacher.” He implies dissidence should focus on percolating critical consciousness to the next generation rather than immediate change.

Some respondents showed greater consciousness to the elite status they held and showed more intellectual cautiousness which explains why many relied on existing pathways of power and knowledge for legitimacy. For example, Serenity answers “if I’m good enough I can [act] on behalf of... a majority of people... or have enough power... [to be] the best [I] can be.” Serenity implies only those with establishment pedigree can impact China. She further implies that without establishment pedigree, she has an unstable claim to knowledge, suggesting students’ uncertainty about the resistance’s durability. Mary, a party member, even acknowledges “it is impossible to change... China just by [our]selves. Now our responsibility is to work hard to improve ourselves.” Her cautious response acknowledges that individual agency is severely limited by desires for stability. Thus, student radicalism faces pressures from family, academy, and party, but also internally questioning dissidence’s longevity.

The necessity of *subversive scholarship*, therefore, is counteracting seeing the status quo as a change-agent. Clarissa says that “China has [become] more prosperous, and stronger... I really want do something for my homeland and witness it's growth. Although I am not powerful enough, I can do something... helpful.” Lacking foreign knowledge, consequently demands methods and knowledge on how to use it. Fernando answers “it’s the politicians’ work.” Students acknowledge, therefore, the difficulty of turning intellectual confidence into action against China’s crises.

Many felt that collective dissent was more impactful. Bella said that “the youngest generation [has] the power to change the country by teamwork,” and Alex of FNU says his generation is China’s “future... so what we do now would decide the situation of [China].” Both suggest the need for bigger movements to assume a collective agency, but a big movement is not necessarily another Tiananmen. Respondents’ consciousness to the PRC’s inattention to non-

celebrity resistance, positions PEC curriculum as a deterrent apparatus, thus dissident identities and *subversive scholarship*, remains effective seditious, yet invisible, radicalism.

Other respondents present paradoxical answers. Anson says, “I always censor myself... But I’m not afraid [of] China’s government. I know how to escape their censorship but I am very afraid of being attacked and being misunderstood by ordinary Chinese people,” who he called “barbarians.” Anson’s comment showed the fatigue (Han 2014: 14-15) in sustained resistance and the difficulties of resistance in a sociopolitical climate that prevented seeing the contradictions of his argument. The PEC, Anson shows, created conditions in which student internalized helplessness, despite consciousness to crises in Chinese society. Counteracting such helplessness therefore requires reclaiming revolutionary subjects’ political agency without inviting danger via outward protest modes. Respondents show persistent desire to overcome the systemic demonization of radicalism and see potential in resistance. Next, I use James as a case study for the operational potential of *subversive scholarship* within queer rights advocacy at Beida.

### James and Beida Queer Activism

Thus far, I have shown the incompatibility of *outward protest modes* with Chinese universities. I have done so by exemplifying how student political consciousness is tempered by nationalistic curriculum and China’s focus on tangible economic progress. Students’ perception that China developed because of material surplus has created an academic environment in which nationalist education conserves the state. As a result, students might appear to be captured in a developmental spectacle. However, answers from many respondents show a nuanced picture of *subversive scholarship* where critical consciousness complicates students’ navigation of their paradoxical roles as elites and revolutionary subjects. James’ narrative builds upon Anson and Terry’s to show queer-centric spaces in Chinese universities as sites of *subversive scholarship*, and how James and his classmates redraw the boundaries of what is considered a campus radicalism.

James is a graduate student at Beida and a member of an informal queer student group on campus that communicates by word of mouth only and lacks faculty or university support. He described his club in relation to faculty, who will infrequently and privately entertain sensitive intellectual inquiry in settings like office hours. One example was organizing a film screening:

“I was part of an LGBT club, it wasn’t formally recognized, ... we were trying to do... film screenings and we invited [a professor] to give an introduction. We were trying to do..., Wedding Banquet, by An Li..., and we were like ‘professor, we know you work in the field of gender studies, would you mind giving an introduction?’ She goes ‘I can’t publicly talk about this. I can’t have my name on record speaking about these topics because it’s too sensitive, it threatens my position. But, I really want you guys to succeed and am willing to advise off the record informally,’ and in that capacity, the way she would explain to me is that she was trying to preserve her work in her own field pushing women’s rights while trying to support marginalized but not sanctioned causes if you will. ...I think it was her way of saying ‘I want to be a resource to you in an official capacity as a professor at this university, but I also want you to be able to do other things, but I can’t do that, I can’t support you on the record officially’” (James 2017).

James’ statement acknowledges the limitations of outward modes of political protest in the university setting by saying that authority figures, even if sympathetic to a cause, face institutional pressure to maintain the illusion of a uniform *public transcript*. However, maintaining face allows critical faculty to discretely assist subversive groups, while remaining state actors. Appealing to faculty for support maintains the university as a site of radicalism by exploiting their liminal status between professor and dissident scholar, whilst also creating internal pressure on institutions to better support marginalized people. James further states that this model helps to redraw the boundaries of radicalism:

“radicalism, I think its very subtle.. It’s intentionally off the radar. One thing I’ve learned here is that demonstrations don’t work in the way they work in the states. I

think in the States to fight for something or show care about a cause is protest, mass demonstrations, to bring people out and to have a... public display of anger, grief. In my experience... you don't petition, public demonstrations will be met with immediate disapproval rather than trying to figure out how to do it. For me, radicalism here exists in working below the surface to promote a particular cause and to get people to come but not necessarily drawing attention to yourself in a public setting. There are a lot of informal LGBT groups in Beida. The way that they do their activism is not to have public demonstrations or protests or marches, it is to organize discussions or film screenings in select classrooms... and promote through WeChat in unofficial ways and get people to come. And I think that is really radical because it gets a message out in a way that is not traditionally... known, and they're still getting people to come to these discussions and provide safe spaces for people to talk about themselves and others and the causes they're passionate about without necessarily drawing attention of the authorities who will immediately shut them down" (James 2017).

For James, reframing radicalism around subtlety demonstrates uniquely Chinese dissident practices, and the need for their own model of resistance. As a result, Chinese radicalism must be reframed in order to include what western universities might not consider radical public practice, but that a movement can succeed when it is a journey of identity discovery and hanging out with like-minded people.

Rachel, too, concurs with Clover (2016) that outward protest modes invite *surplus danger*, saying that "revolution in the context of Chinese history means death and tanks and at best it's the Xinhai revolution..., and at worst it would be associated with June 4th, and then the PLA soldiers would be rolling their tanks across the [Hong Kong] border and crushing the students...." James and Rachel explain that Western concepts of and assumptions about resistance must be tailored to China and reframing radicalism to include subtle resistance is precisely what makes it effective, despite alluring revolutionary mythologies, *melodramatic* spectacles. James implies that even coded language in online discourse is too overt. When the state sees disciplinary literature, for example, entire disciplines become too sensitive such as queer theory, and become radical in and of themselves by adopting disciplinary assumptions or conventions contrary to official ideology. Those with access to *subversive scholarship* counter Heller's (2016) rational apologists of the status quo and therefore, can be radical by using university space to gather and "hang out" because it has fashioned the education apparatus into a site of resistance.

James asserts that perceiving something as a crisis, rather than an opportunity to insert critical narrative, produces irrational responses, or a counter-*spectacle* (DuBord 1966) which invite unnecessary state violence. *Outward protest's* flamboyance, while instinctual recourse in America, is its weakness, James suggests. *Subversive scholarship*, however, is more disciplined because it lacks the *melodramatic* (Anker 2014) hysteria and maintains discreet sanctuaries and intentional spaces of critical thought and identity development resist state-sanctioned equivalents. Simultaneous mistrust and evasion of the state, James shows, takes the urgency out of a crisis. Without urgency, a deliberate revolution can be built without the distraction of a specific policy allowing resistance to take on a more general characteristic.

As a result, resistance remains a collective effort, but also normalizes students' identity independent of the state. Therefore, students' identities can be derived from farther reaching information networks and radical scholarship. Movements that begin from these clubs, James shows, counter pressures to produce with intangible consciousness as a medium that protects the movement's interpersonal and diffuse nature. Updating Scott's (1979) *moral economies* or 'intellectual uplands' (Scott 2009), James' radicalism centers around, "experience[s] that affirm who [students]... think they want to be." Such resistance is radical precisely because knowledge is the medium to create community and spread consciousness. Despite the difficulties of organizing, clubs like James' establish precedent for flexible campus radicalism and social media to do what James

calls as the most radical component of their resistance: “to come, ...let their guards down, and hang out.”

To let one’s guard down is a particular privilege within Chinese society. Framing James’ statement not just as the deprivation of rights, but rather read as a surplus of emotion, utilizing Clover (2016)<sup>4</sup>, we see *gémìng dàodǐ* (革命到底), or lifetime commitment to revolution. In this case, disseminating critique produces curiosity amidst what might resemble abridged rights, allowing academics to resist beyond melodramatic performances of civil disobedience like coded netizen language. Public performances, like social media, seek external approval to survive. However, identity development in James’ case precisely exemplifies Clover’s (2016) and Agamben’s (1993) un-representable creative disorder. Unlike some activism that effectively abdicates its own efficacy because of its stated goals, *subversive scholarship* preempts state violence through daily but thankless dissent. Extending Clover’s metaphor: students must seize “social content” (Clover 2016: 93-94) with quiet thievery, rather than brash looting. Those like James who practice such subtle radicalism retain the element of surprise, remaining paradoxically threatening and harmless by screening films without any further explanation, making “hanging out” so radical.

Chase-Dunn’s (2017) information networks already exceeded state capacity for surveillance, exemplified by an immunity to relational repression and censorship, despite crackdowns. Beyond looking deeper into the depths of social content, *subversive scholarship* itself reclaims the means of producing knowledge, empowering disparate and diffuse movements to establish spaces for people to commune with their identities. This approach’s lack of *spectacle* affords China’s students more precise and deep engagement in restricted social content; letting the tanks to roll over, with these students now behind enemy lines. We must see deprivation as a distraction from the material or emotional surpluses that China produces beneath the surface of the Firewall or WeChat pressurizing conscious anger contained by superficial acts of subversion. The paradoxical opportunity in crisis, as a result, radicalizes “hanging out.” I have shown in this section, using James’ narrative, the radically subversive potential of identity development in “hanging out” as *subversive scholarship*. This thankless mode of protest seeks to build on both the potential of the academy as a site for critique and radicalism, as well as forwarding a more inclusive public practice of resistance.

I have shown that the *Gaokao* contributes to an academic culture dominated by state curriculum producing students crushed by productive pressures. In subverting this power relationship, respondents exhibit consciousness to contradictions in PEC curriculum. While students submit to intense state pressure upon their learning, they differentiate between public ‘onstage’ and private ‘backstage’ settings in which their conditions of freedom change. As a result, their perceptions of radicalism are apprehensive of outward (‘onstage’) modes protest. Respondents further showed that using discreet *subversive scholarship* in dissidence evades state repression and surveillance. Based on respondents’ narrative, “hanging out” as *subversive scholarship* subtly radically appropriates Chinese universities into sites for radicalism because *subversive scholarship* counters conventional dangers of protest *spectacles*. *Subversive scholarship’s* focus on identity

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<sup>4</sup> Clover (2016) writes that a fundamental flaw of understanding riots and upheaval is not their irrationality, but their logic. He writes that “The first relation between riot and crisis is that of surplus. This seems already a paradox, as both crisis and riot are commonly understood to arise from dearth, shortfall, deprivation. At the same time, riot is itself the experience of surplus. Surplus danger, surplus information, surplus military gear. Surplus emotion. Indeed, riots were once known as “emotions,” a history still visible in the French word: *émeute*. The crucial surplus in the moment of riot is simply that of participants, of population. The moment when the partisans of riot exceed the police capacity for management, when the cops make their first retreat, is the moment when the riot becomes fully itself, slides loose from the grim continuity of daily life. The ceaseless social regulation that had seemed ideological and ambient and abstract is in this moment of surplus disclosed as a practical matter, open to social contest.” (Clover 2016: 21)



development is radically devoid of state logic and morality is therefore “utterly irrelevant” (Agamben 1993: 2-3) to the state. I now conclude with three lessons for American student radicalism.

### Conclusion:

In this paper, I have shown that understated *subversive scholarship* that disseminate critical scholarly methodologies rather than discontent with stated aims diffuses and de-materializes Chinese campus dissidence. I originally sought to critique Chinese activists for not resisting outwardly, assuming that activism only resembled people standing before tanks. My respondents knew the danger in risking their degrees and status in outward protest. Their *subversive scholarship* is harder to repress, affording it a longevity in China. Today’s scholar-activists, I have shown, are conscious of their paradoxical status as China’s moral compass and anti-state agitators, and whose film screenings and informal hangouts are sites of radicalism and identity development contra *spectacles* that expose them to China’s irascible admonishment. Instead, they use their education and status to resist their own ideological indoctrination with *subversive scholarship* while calculatingly disseminating critique.

Using *subversive scholarship* and counter-curricular anti-methods, students discreetly spread critical consciousness whilst remaining within China’s elite. China’s educational apparatus continues to reproduce a conservative neoliberal state and control revolutionary myth. Students’ resistance defends uncensored education, not administrators nor institutions, but access to knowledge and wisdom resulting from unmasking state domination and terror. *Subversive scholarship* is not a technical skill, but a reclaimed ethos of identity development, contrary to state official narrative.

I conclude with three cautions from my Chinese respondents for American higher education. First, subtle dissidence is radical, and vice versa; making protest a conscious praxis and a systemic pedagogy. The second charges universities to frame identity as more than a means to political division, grounding student activism in individualized needs. The third pushes students to radically seek space to develop identities that subvert their felt social pressures, and diversify methodologies of radicalism. American campus activism can learn discipline from these Chinese students’ resistance not erupting into irascible vitriol, or hysterical martyrdom. My respondents showed that the American academy must re-imagine “hanging out” as a systematic, public, and daily, albeit thankless, practice of radicalism.

While picket lines or walkouts characterize American student protests, many respondents said the acts of resistance they can safely commit begin with *subversive scholarship*, “hanging out,” film screenings, faculty collaboration, and affinity groups as sites of radicalism and transmitting critical consciousness. “Hanging out” interpersonally is a conduit to public reckoning, grief, and healing through retooling discrete gatherings as an interpersonal transmission of radicalism and critical consciousness. Straying from strictly emotional methodologies minimizes individual dissonance between *dilettantism* and justice. By diversifying the toolbox of radical confrontations with systemic social or economic injustice, we fortify democratic engagement. Therefore, we must bring people in to activism’s thanklessness and alleviate pressure on ourselves to resemble Joshua Wong.

The lesson contained within the Chinese students’ experiences with dissent and resistance requires reframing public practices of reckoning and grief (Clover 2016). As deeply logical praxes of will and reason, subtle dissidence more durably supports reorienting higher education towards a public good (Agamben 1993: 3). Students’ film screenings, affinity groups, and literature discussions as sites of public dissidence, serve to cultivate solidarity within marginalized groups, spread consciousness and deepen students’ exploration of identities and needs. The explicit lesson is that protests as emotional outbursts expose movements to targeted slander, self-aggrandizement,

and egotism: a *spectacle* of morality. The American academy therefore must draw inspiration from our own revolutionary mythology in order to snap out of framing dissidence as needless self sacrifice, extension of privilege, or means to stardom.

The implicit lesson causes us to look inward. American universities must empower diverse protest methodologies in order to reach more marginalized students and educators, nuancing our democratic practices. What educators and students must learn from these narratives is that, by continuing to only empower outward protest modes, we lose inclusiveness within public practices of dissent while diverse modes of recourse remain accessible to us. To forward inclusive advocacy of democratic intention and radical inclusion, we must take a lesson from China and see the radicalism in “hanging out.” Rather than seeing dissent as standing in front of the tank, we can let it roll over us, putting us behind enemy lines, armed with critical consciousness and intellectual dignity for the long fight ahead.

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