1. Gavin Healy (postdoc Columbia University)

My paper presents a close reading of three films: *Fuwuyuan* 服务員 (1958), produced during the Great Leap Forward, *Manyi bu manyi* 滿意不滿意 (1963), produced just after the Great Leap, and *Duan panzi de guniang* 端盘子的姑娘 (1981), produced not long after the implementation of market reforms. This paper shows how these three films addressed attitudes toward service labor and situated service workers within society and the economy at distinct historical moments, paralleling the themes discussed in worker study groups and other ideological education campaigns targeted at service workers (*fuwuyuan*) during those periods.

The fictional narratives of these *fuwuyuan* characters contain many of the same issues reflected in narratives documenting the experiences of model *fuwuyuan* from the 1950s to the late 1970s. At a time when industrial and agricultural production was paramount, *fuwuyuan* often perceived themselves to be marginalized. These cinematic narratives, like texts read in *fuwuyuan* study groups and the speeches of model service industry workers, were an integral part of the official discourse on the destigmatization of servicelabor. Examining these three films in turn, this paper seeks to chart the evolution of cinematic and other public discourse on the value of service work and its place in the economy and society of socialist and early post-socialist China.

1. **安劭凡 (**中央民族大学历史文化学院)

**The Making of Evil Landlords: A Microhistory of Class Division in Suburban Beijing’s Land Reform**

*Shaofan An*

*Minzu University of China*

As one of the most crucial stages in CCP’s Land Reform Campaign, class division not only determines the economic benefits of obtaining how many lands, but also determines the reorganization of power structures and the reshaping of political culture brought about by the new differentiation of social classes. Existing research on the class division in land reform has greatly enriched our understanding of the movement to various extents. However, they ignore many historical details on how the concept of class struggle is concretely and microscopically embedded in the everyday life of rural society. In fact, class division as the state presence that the suburban villagers of Beijing had always to face in their everyday life in the rising Maoist China.

This paper will point out that the embedment of the class concept in the rural society began with the struggle against the so-called “evil landlord” (*eba dizhu*恶霸地主). By collecting stigmatized materials of the existing ruling class from the most dissatisfied villagers (as well as equating the landlord as a class concept with the evil tyrants as a moral concept), the class discourse was enabled to infiltrate in the post-1949 rural political culture. Thereafter, the “fighting tyrants” (*douba*鬥霸) movement immediately turned into class division. Tempered through “speaking bitterness” and *fanshen*, the peasants no longer had the ideological ties with the old social order. In effect, the peasants could devote great enthusiasm to the construction of the new social order based on class differentiation.

1. Yu Liang (Ph.D. candidate, Binghamton University)

Constructing a Socialist Society in a Disaster Zone:

The 1954 Yangzi River Flood and the Creation of New Relief Mechanism in Communist China

**Abstract**

The 1954 Yangzi River flood was the first major natural disaster that occurred after the establishment of the People’s Republic of China. From June to August, the flood devastated much of the plain area in Central China and influenced the livelihood of more than thirty million people. It quickly became a test of the new government’s ability to handle disasters and consolidate political legitimacy. This article uses the case of Hubei province - the worst-hit area at the time - to examine the process of shaping a socialist society in the aftermath of a disaster. Instead of using a state-centered perspective, this article investigates a spectrum of social responses and relief strategies that involved the negotiation and compromise of the central government, local cadres, community leaders, and peasants. They created a complex and flexible relief mechanism to solve the emerging problems in local society, such as resettlement, material supply, production recovery, and product selling. In the process, the identity of “flood victim” (*hongshui zaimin*) was redefined; and there developed diverse types of relief network in disaster areas. The on-going construction of mutual-aid teams and elementary cooperatives took various forms without strict limitation on the duration time, number of participants, and production industry. Private relief network built upon blood ties, marriage, natives association, and colleague relations also played a prominent role in shaping the everyday life of local population. I argue that the experience of dealing with the 1954 flood in Hubei province contributed to the formation of socialist disaster politics and management in Communist China.

1. Robert Culp (Bard)

**Mobilizing Youth in Mao Era China: Self-Making and Socialist Construction**

Young peasants and workers, along with students and young intellectuals, were major contributors to the Chinese communist revolution. After the People’s Republic was established in 1949, the Chinese Communist Party consequently made youth mobilization a central focus of its state-building project. Through a close reading of Shanghai’s youth league publications from early 1950s political campaigns, this paper explores the formation of youth (*qingnian*) as a category of social and political actor dedicated to socialist construction and national defense during the Mao era.

This group of youth league publications was profoundly multi-vocal, with young people writing countless reflections, memoirs, and testimonials about their own processes of transformation and commitment to state service. Because young activists contributed to these publications, they helped to formulate the category of socialist youth and shape its content. Youth narratives of self-transformation emphasized separation from the family for integration in the collective bodies of the youth league and the masses as well as commitment to state service in ways that echoed both New Culture critiques of the patriarchal family and older Confucian patterns of public service. As a result, youth accounts of early Mao-era political mobilization expressed liberation from the family and contributed to self-making, as young people sought to cast themselves as independent, empowered, and actualized members of the new socio-political order.

1. **History Education in Shanghai’s Secondary Schools in the 1950s**

Guanhua Tan, *University of Massachusetts Amherst*

**Abstract:** This article focuses on history education in Shanghai’s secondary schools during the 1950s. One major problem with existing scholarship is its almost exclusive reliance on the analysis of textbooks. This article, by contrast, problematizes history textbooks in Mao’s China as an analyzable category by historicizing them and illustrating their varied uses and interpretations by rank-and-file history teachers. By investigating the regulation of history education in Shanghai’s secondary schools from 1950 to 1961, this article finds that before the Great Leap Forward (GLF, 1958-1960), history teachers subscribed to the CCP’s education policies, recognizing the authority of compulsory textbooks as a means of instilling a revolutionary national identity. However, the emphasis on textbooks gave way to new policies of encouraging teachers to launch radical reforms during the GLF years. Such policies included publishing revised editions of textbooks and inviting laypeople (workers and peasants) to participate in classroom instruction, essentially diminishing the authority of compulsory textbooks. These radical reforms, however, failed to win the whole-hearted support of some local cadres, who continued to call for retaining the authority of textbooks. Hence, I argue that the textbook was by no means a stable entity that embodied a CCP historiography and reflected the Party line, but a contested zone for the local government, CCP cadres, and history teachers to (re)interpret the past. Contextualized in this way, textbooks become a far more valuable resource for historians to study the volatile political realities of Mao’s era.

1. Eva Shan Chou

paper proposal

The Historical Society for Twentieth Century China, August mini-conference

“**Building a Socialist Society**"

"Ballet is Adoped by Socialist China"

Ballet was established as a systematically taught dance form in China when Beijing Dance School was founded in 1954 with a division in ballet. Ballet, like Chinese classical dance and ethnic and folk dances, was to a piece in the construction of socialist China. How a Tsarist performance genre came to be a prized form on Chinese socialist soil is a story with many parts. Its context is the Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship, Alliance, and Mutual Assistance signed 1950, which included provisions for Soviet experts to be assigned to aid in China's national construction. The experts requested and sent by the two Ministries of Culture included distinguished ballet figures from the Bolshoi and Kirov companies whose hands-on approach proved invaluable to laying the foundations of both dance and ballet.

The paper begins by briefly tracing the earlier, similar phenomenon on the Soviet side: how after the Soviet revolution, Tsarist ballets that were costumed in tights, tutus, and pointe shoes and featured princesses etc., came to be valued as part of Soviet culture. The main part of the paper focuses on the growth of the view that ballet was a necessary building block, and it analyzes the successive actions taken to ease this visually alien genre past its opponents. The 1958 production of a full-length *Swan Lake* only four years after the school's founding capped these efforts and served to concentrate national pride.

Figures mentioned are Ouyang Yujian (1889-1962), Dai Ailian (1916-2006), Zhou Enlai (1898-1976), and on the Soviet side, Nikolai Nikilaevich Serebrennikov (1918-1996), a specialist in partnering, and the distinguished ballet master Pyotr Gusev (1904-1987).

1. Panel Title: **Socialist Cultural Production: Propaganda in the 1950s**

**Staging Afro-Asianism in Maoist China**

Yucong Hao, University of Michigan ([yucongh@umich.edu](mailto:yucongh@umich.edu))

The Bandung ideal of Afro-Asian cooperation has often been perceived as an ephemeral and unrealized moment in the political history of the global Cold War. This paper, joining the recent scholarly turn in valorizing non-state agents and translocal cultural practices beyond the high politics of Afro-Asianism, explores how the idea of Afro-Asian solidarity was materialized and embodied across artistic mediums of painting, performing arts, and poetry in Maoist China. These practices disseminated widely the ideology and garnered heterogeneous responses from the domestic audience.

Specifically, this paper identifies three strategies that were commonly deployed in propagating Afro-Asianism in China’s socialist cultural production: visual imitation, linguistic hybridization, and formal appropriation of Afro-Asian cultural conventions. The cultural techniques effectively rendered stories of foreign cultures and societies accessible to the domestic audience and helped to engender a vernacular form of Afro-Asianism. Moreover, the paper probes into the popular reception of such cultural production, and examines practices of mass participation and amateur cloning, which allowed the Bandung ideal to be experienced at the grassroots level.

**Documenting Legitimacy: Contesting Narratives of the 1949 Divide in an Anti-Rightist Film, 1957**

Yidi Wu, Elon University (ywu3@elon.edu)

As part of the Anti-Rightist Campaign in 1957, the China Central Newsreel and Documentary Studio made a documentary entitled *Struggle against Rightists* (Xiang youpai douzheng). Produced by the only state-owned studio that has been producing documentary films since 1953, this particular propaganda film provides a rare glimpse, including images and sounds of criticism sessions, of how the Anti-Rightist Campaign was carried out among university faculty, students, and democratic party members. More unexpectedly, the film features Shanghai dockworkers, peasants in outskirts Beijing, and residents in inner-city Beijing, discussing their life changes after 1949. I argue that the seemingly irrelevant non-rightists are core to the Party justification of the Anti-Rightist Campaign. The Communist authorities attempted to legitimize its control through post-1949 achievements, as exemplified by ordinary people, while those who found parallels between the Nationalists and the Communists were punished for bringing legitimacy into debate.

**The Machine of Enchantment: Various Narratives of the Labor-and-Technology Spectacles of the Great Leap Forward**

Yujie Li, University of Chicago (yjl15@uchicago.edu)

Shisanling Reservoir was one of the most high-profile Great Leap Forward infrastructure projects. Built in the early months of the GLF campaign, the project’s propagandic value outweighs its hydraulic importance and made it a showpiece of GLF. As a major site for the Beijing elites to experience voluntary labor, it served as an important stage for artistic productions that propagate voluntarism and collectivism. This paper examines how the various narratives of the Reservoir’s construction--newspaper articles, official reports, films, and oral histories--transposed the fantastic into the real and vice versa. A political framework of “technological revolution” was established, encouraging all kinds of trial and error to improve productivity. Experiments heedless of physical and mechanical limits of the labored body and machine became a political obligation. In the artistic representations of the Shisanling’s construction, these technological adventures were linked to a rapid realization of communism. The reservoir’s purported success--or rather, the success of its stories--fueled the optimism that accelerated the Great Leap Forward.

1. Emily Wilcox (William and Mary)

From Tashkent to Beijing: Qemberxanim and the Making of Uyghur Dance in Socialist China

Qemberxanim is the most famous and influential Uyghur dancer in twentieth-century China. Also known as 康巴尔汗·艾买提, Kangba'erhan, Qambarkhan, and Kemberhan Emet, Qemberxanim was born in Kashgar around 1914 (the exact date is disputed) and began her dance career in 1930s Tashkent, the capital of today's Uzbekistan, where she studied at the school of famous dancer Tamara Khanum. Around 1939, Qemberxanim was recruited to study in Moscow, where she performed at the Kremlin. Qemberxanim returned to Xinjiang in 1942, where she worked for much of the remainder of her life, until her death in 1994. As China's first nationally famous Uyghur dance performer and the main architect of the Uyghur dance curriculum taught at the Xinjiang Arts Institute, the Beijing Dance Academy, and other leading dance conservatories across China, Qemberxanim was instrumental in defining and institutionalizing Uyghur dance as a subfield of "Chinese dance" in the People's Republic of China. Through her training of Han dancers and dance teachers in Uyghur dance, Qemberxanim also played a central role in initiating and legitimating the still common practice of cross-ethnic performance as an accepted practice of dance culture in China. This essay uses a range of historical sources on Qemberxanim's life--including her published memoirs in Uyghur and Chinese, Chinese-language national and local press coverage dating to the 1940s, fieldwork at the Xinjiang Arts Institute in Urumqi, and extant films and photographs--to reconstruct the life and legacy of this important female Uyghur dancer. The paper argues that Qemberxanim is one of the most important artists in modern Chinese dance history and that her story complicates common understandings of the historical construction of Chinese ethnic minority dance in socialist China.

1. Mian Chen (Ph.D. candidate, Northwestern)

**“Give them Instructions and Give them Money”:**

**Guangdong and the trans-border making of Communist propaganda institutions in Hong Kong (1949-1965)**

Mian Chen, mianchen2023@u.northwestern.edu

Department of History, Northwestern University

[abstract]

Drawing on previously untapped archival and biographical sources, this paper examines the connections between the Guangdong Provincial Committee of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and Communist propaganda institutions in Hong Kong from 1949 to 1965. While existing scholarship focuses on the control of the CCP Center over Hong Kong underground Communists, this paper argues that the Guangdong Provincial Committee played an active role in guiding, regulating, and financing Communist propaganda in Hong Kong. By early 1949, the CCP had established a massive political body in Hong Kong to avoid the Kuomingtang’s political persecutions in Guangdong and coordinate revolutionary activities in Southern China. After 1949, many Communists stayed in Hong Kong to carry out propaganda, while others relocated to Guangdong to establish several institutions to control propaganda activities in Hong Kong, including providing specific propaganda guidelines, giving financial supports, meeting propaganda workers from Hong Kong regularly, and offering educational opportunities to their children. This study shows how domestic political agenda and Cold War contexts influenced the CCP’s trans-border maneuvers in colonial Hong Kong. It further contributes to current debates about the continuity and rupture after 1949 by showing how pre-1949 Communist organizations laid the foundation for post-1949 Party apparatuses in mainland China and foreign-controlled areas and their border-crossing connections. It also reveals that officials in Guangdong were often skeptical of non-Party members within propaganda organizations in Hong Kong, challenging popular historical narratives that the Party always maintained a harmonious united front in Hong Kong. (243 words)

1. Linh D. Vu, Arizona State University

**China, 1925: Work Comrades and Labor Martyrs**

This paper examines the vision of a new China as articulated by the narratives of the 1925 Shanghai and Guangzhou labor strikes. When a guard at a Japanese-owned textile factory in Shanghai fired at some Chinese workers who broke into the factory, demonstrators against foreigners filled the streets. On May 30, 1925, British policemen fired into the crowd of protesters, killing four and wounding many others. The incident spurred a surge of uprisings across China. One took place in Shaji, Guangzhou on June 23, 1925, which resulted in over 200 casualties due to gunfire by British, French, and Portuguese forces.

Newspaper reports, government documents, and testimony accounts about the two strikes in the immediate aftermath show that 1925 was a revolutionary moment of a socialist China, unlike the governments which were created in 1927 and 1949. Some of the materials for this paper included theGuangzhou Shaji Massacre Investigation Committee’s July 1925 publication of photographs of victims and testimonies of eyewitnesses. In August, the Shaji Martyrs’ State Funeral Planning Committee published a series of sketches to commemorate the labor strike and honor the workers, students, and soldiers who died as martyrs. The second half of the paper focuses on re-interpretation of the strikes by the Nationalist Party and the Communist Party in the 1930s and 1940s. Both attempted to fit the labor movements of the 1920s within their own revolutionary genealogies, effectively transforming labor martyrs into national martyrs.

From Food Substitutes to Women's Illnesses:  Icons of Starvation for a

Socialist Society "Without Famine"

*Kathryn Edgerton-Tarpley*

*Department of History, San Diego State University*

This paper examines the Chinese Communist Party’s construction, during the Great Leap Famine of 1958-62, of a new vocabulary of disaster fitting for a socialist society in which famine could not exist.  Because famines played an important role in China’s long history, conquering hunger became a key legitimizing principle for the Chinese Communists, who came to power in 1949 promising that “not one person would starve to death” under their rule.  Given this context, when famine conditions began to spread across China in 1959 due to policies connected to the Great Leap Forward, it became increasingly dangerous for observers on any level to admit that a major famine was in fact occurring.  Instead, jettisoning both time-honored famine relief strategies and traditional icons of starvation, the Party developed a new lexicon that sought to end the massive famine without ever acknowledging its existence. This paper explores the use of four key phrases -- “produce to relieve disaster” (生产救灾), “food substitutes” (代食品), “swelling disease” (浮肿病) and “women’s illnesses” (妇女病) -- that are ubiquitous in archival documents from the Great Leap Famine. The first two phrases, I argue, introduced new “relief” strategies that aimed to increase the amount of food available in rural China without reducing high grain quotas, while the last two demonstrate how cadres medicalized starvation to explain soaring death rates and plummeting birth rates without acknowledging famine conditions.

1. Jeremy Tai

Assistant Professor

Department of History and Classical Studies

McGill University

Racial Capitalism and Socialist Ethnicity in the People’s Republic of China

This paper considers the distinction between race (zhongzu) and ethnicity (minzu) in the People’s

Republic of China. China scholars have long discussed the translation and discussion of these

concepts in the late Qing and Republican eras, including the ways in which they were articulated

in relation to Social Darwinism, eugenics, and nationalism. Some circles delineated ethnicity and

race according to cultural and phenotypical differences, but the definitions of these terms

continued to be debated until the early PRC. Drawing on Mao-era intellectuals, including

international law scholar Chen Tiqiang and historian Huang Yuanqi, this paper aims to bring

together the literature on racial capitalism outside of the China field as well as previous

scholarship on ethnopolitics and internationalism within it. This distinction, often understood as

domestic and foreign modes of social differentiation, must be considered an effect of Cold War

knowledge production that pitted racial capitalism against socialist ethnicity and solidarity. In

dialogue with the Black radical tradition, Mao-era intellectuals reconsidered the orthodox

periodization of racism as precapitalist and pointed to indigenous and racialized dispossession as

central to primitive accumulation, racial divisions that obstructed class-based organizing, and

legal systems that reinforced social inequality and thus facilitated capital accumulation. Some

argued race could not be considered a domestic issue, particularly given the continuities between

racism in capitalist countries and their colonies and following the UN Declaration of Human

Rights. Yet, it is clear that ethnicity became one as a category of territorial governance despite its

intersections with race in discourse and practice.

1. **The Interior Revolution: The Making of Socialist Home and Mind in Mao’s China**

Zixian Liu (Ph.D. candidate, University of Toronto)

**Abstract:** The domestic space of the Mao era has long been depicted as a place with all depressing characters of state socialism, such as poverty and surveillance. The typical narrative places blame on the totalitarian state’s penetration into “private” space and life. This article reveals a more complicated image of the revolution on the “interior” of both Chinese homes and Chinese people. It argues that domestic aesthetics and production designs were integral to the formation of subjectivities, work ethics, and gender relations in the Mao era. The paper first examines a puzzling phenomenon of socialist realism in China: the unusual prevalence of patterns of flowers and plants in home décor and product design. My research suggests that the prevalence resulted from the dilemma of searching for a unique Maoist identity for China’s socialist realism in the contexts of Sino-Soviet and Sino-American cultural rivalries. Then, this paper turns to see how the state and ordinary people engaged with each other in the grand project of fulfilling the promise of modernist product design as a vehicle for social engineering. With ground-level research, my research points out that the state encouraged Chinese people to purchase state-sponsored household goods, such as posters, radios, and sewing machines, for their homes. Although these objects became channels for domesticating various social engineering projects, such as women’s liberation and subjectivity formation, ordinary people perceived and used these consumer items in ways not intended by the state in many cases.

Late submissions – Lei Duan’s arrived at 1:38 am, so it might have the best case for being accepted.

1. Gun Control in Socialist China:

Disarming the Masses and “Enemies of the New State” in the 1950s

Lei Duan

Assistant Professor, Sam Houston State University

**Abstract**

This paper examines how the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) dealt with armed individuals in the 1950s to strengthen its social control and establish its political legitimacy. In wartime China, the CCP saw the masses with guns as a power to be reckoned within its revolutionary. When the revolution entered the consolidation phase after 1949, the Communist government took the opposite stand, seeking to assert its monopoly on the use of guns. In the early 1950s, mass campaigns that were aimed to disarm the local populace could occur in almost any regions where gun ownership was prevalent during the turbulent Republican period. The implementation of the gun policies was tied to its overall mobilization tactics, adopting varied stances toward gun owners in terms of their class division and social status. In southern provinces, the tactics of mass mobilization developed in the revolutionary bases before 1949 had remained crucial in the movement of collecting civilians’ guns. The CCP designed mass campaigns and upheld the class struggle by mobilizing the masses to confiscate arms. The situation, however, was different in Tibet, an already-militarized local society with a minimal Communist presence. Unlike the practices in other inland provinces, the policies in Tibet were also designed in part to arm the masses, as they did routinely by recruiting loyal peasants into the army or Communist-affiliated militia forces. Drawing from the case studies in inland China and Tibet, this paper suggests that the CCP’s control over the armed civilians appeared as a contingent and dynamic process, which was determined by social and political situations.

1. Identifying and Dispelling “Disinformation:” The Politics of Rumormongering in the First Decade of Socialist China

Hongyi Yu

Department of East Asian Languages and Cultures, Columbia University

Soon after the founding of the People’s Republic of China (PRC), the Communist Party-state encountered a surge of rumor (*yaoyan*) amongst a series of political campaigns and state initiatives it launched for power consolidation and social transformation. While the journalists of the state-run Xinhua News Agency identified and collected numerous rumors for the leadership’s reference, the state Propaganda apparatus played a key role in dispelling widespread rumor popular among the masses. As this essay argues, the action of identifying and then dispelling rumor in fact showed how the Party-state stigmatized the term “rumor” and recast its meaning. In the context of early socialist China, the term “rumor” simply meant harmful disinformation that was intentionally created and circulated to sabotage the newly founded regime. Examined closely, most rumors collected by Xinhua journalists actually denoted a diverse body of common people’s statements and popular moods, which were anything but groundless disinformation. As the Party-state continued labeling people’s statements and moods “rumor” with inconsistent and sometimes contradictory criteria, the term “rumor” became the state’s discursive weapon to mark and suppress any alternative understanding of the reality departing from the state-prescribed narrative. Dispelling rumor therefore was not the endeavor to waging a war on disinformation but to reconfigure and realign ordinary Chinese people’s thoughts and sometimes feelings with the state-prescribed narrative.

1. Walls and Chimneys: Building a City of Production in Early Socialist Beijing

Yingchuan Yang

Ph.D. candidate in History-East Asia Program, Columbia University

Two opposite visions on the future of Beijing were proposed in 1951. The American-trained architect Liang Sicheng advocated for the preservation of the old city and city walls, while Mao Zedong demanded to turn Beijing into “a city full of chimneys.” Unlike extant scholarly literature and popular writings that blame Mao and his cadres for their ignorance of old Beijing’s “cultural heritages,” this essay takes seriously the socialist urban planners’ vision of building a new Beijing as an integral part of China’s urbanization enterprise in the 1950s. Based on previously untapped archival sources, it contends that Liang’s proposal was doomed to fail because it was fundamentally at odds with the Communist Party’s plan of transforming Beijing into a city of production. Under the new layout, Beijing was reconstructed into the socialist capital that underpinned the development of not only industry but also mobilizational politics. As city walls were torn down, new physical space facilitated transportation and the building of factories. In doing so, Beijing’s novel cityscape came to be associated with the emancipation of proletarians, whose new life could be best found at the refurbished drainage Longxugou, an eponymous stage play of which tells how the proletarians would actively participate in the socialist revolution. Joining a recent cohort of historians who offer more positive evaluations of the state capacity of the early People’s Republic, I demonstrate that 1950s Beijing captured the Party’s grand ambitions and adroit tactics of reconfiguring urban China, a setting that was unfamiliar to it before 1949.